



LINKS 2006/7
Annual Review



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About LINKS

LINKS is a British non-governmental organisation working for the peaceful resolution of conflicts and in support of democracy and sustainable development in societies in transition, through dialogue and innovative initiatives. LINKS supports the idea of an expanded and inclusive European Union, and engages with countries with aspiration for membership. LINKS promotes dialogue between Europe and the Islamic world based on mutual respect.

LINKS aims to contribute to thinking and analysis on contemporary issues in its area of work through research, dissemination of information and action oriented projects.

Since its establishment in 1997 LINKS has worked in partnership with a wide range of partners including governments, parliaments, civil society organisations, the business community and the media through projects funded by the UK Government Global Conflict Prevention Pool, UK Government Global Opportunities Fund, the Department for International Development, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Switzerland, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ireland, the European Commission, the UK Community Fund, and the Governments of Sweden and The Netherlands.

The Council of LINKS

Craig Allardice, Marie Bennigsen, Dr Laurence Broers*, Julian Broxup, Bruce Clark, Professor John Darby, Dame Audrey Glover DBE CMG (Chairperson), Duncan Hamilton, Zviad Mukbaniani, Angus Robertson MP, Dennis Sammut* (Executive Director), John Shields, George Simonishvili*, Baroness Smith of Gilmorehill, Catherine Smith, Andrew Wilson. * Also Board Member

Finlay MacDonald, Deputy Director (Administration and Outreach)

Company Secretary: Michael Harbottle

Accountants and Auditors: Buzzacott, London

Communications Consultant: Native Agency, Edinburgh

The LINKS web page www.links-london.org is updated regularly. Visit our web page for updates about our work.

LINKS 2006/7 Annual Review

This review covers LINKS' work over the year up to August 2007. This was a successful year for LINKS, which also concluded a decade of very wide-ranging activities in states and regions experiencing unprecedented political and social change, against a backdrop of newly emergent opportunities and perceived threats.

The political context

Contemporary global politics are dominated by increasing desperation with the conflict in Iraq, unfinished business in Afghanistan, the potential for spillover from these theatres of conflict into neighbouring states and regions, and overall, the ill-defined yet seemingly ubiquitous struggle between the 'West' and its allies and political Islam. Terrorist attacks ranging from Kabul to Edinburgh, Madrid to Islamabad, bear witness to this ongoing struggle, making engagement with the Arab and Muslim worlds one of the greatest challenges in global politics today.

The unipolar world that appeared to emerge from the end of the Cold War is undergoing crisis, as the United States' capacity to retain and project its strength as a global superpower is interrogated in multiple foreign policy arenas. Other powers, particularly Russia, China and India, are poised to assert themselves as global players in political, economic and military spheres. In a globalised world, their disparate agendas are significant for us all and demand careful engagement.

In the Eurasia region where LINKS is most active, other events of equally significant importance are taking place. As LINKS celebrates its tenth anniversary many of the certainties of the last decade need to be revisited and re-evaluated.

Russia

Just as twenty years ago few predicted the collapse of the Soviet Union, ten years later few predicted the swift re-emergence of Russia as a global power. Whilst many attribute Russia's new-found strength to increased revenues from energy resources, this is only a partial explanation. History and geography have made Russia prioritise differently, laying greater emphasis on the strength of the state over the social contract between rulers and ruled. Furthermore, one should not under-estimate the sense of humiliation and exploitation felt by many in Russia at the country's history over the past two decades. We should therefore not be surprised if over the next decade Russia continues to focus on modernising and expanding its currently depleted armed forces, reasserting its influence over the former Soviet republics (widely referred in Russia as the country's 'near abroad'), and deploying its considerable energy resources to gain leverage in foreign policy. These developments have the most immediate and direct implications for neighbouring countries and particularly the post-Soviet republics of Eastern Europe, the South Caucasus and Central Asia. Internally, however, Russian

democracy remains extremely weak, as both elites and large swathes of the population appear ever more inclined towards a model of 'managed democracy'. Yet for Russia it remains a challenge to develop positive forces of attraction as a source of international influence, as opposed to more coercive, and ultimately counterproductive, methods.

The European Union

The European Union (EU) remains an exciting and ambitious political project. In the last year the Union celebrated its fiftieth anniversary, although the six-member European Economic Community and the 27-member EU are very different structures. The EU still remains dizzy with success from the process of enlargement that has seen 12 mainly Central and Eastern European countries join the Union. Despite all the justified scepticism, the European Union works, and is an important and essential mechanism for the nations of Europe to face the challenges that the globalised world presents them with. The European Union is instinctively a force for peace in the world, preferring to project soft power rather than military force. This is by no means always an easy choice, yet failures such as Iraq show the virtue of such an approach.

The major countries of the European Union have over the last year chosen new leaders, who despite the difference in their political roots are fast emerging as pragmatic visionaries. They will define the politics of the next decade.

Turkey

The election of a president from the Islamic tradition is a defining moment in Turkish history that few could have predicted a decade ago. Contemporary Turkey, secular but more at peace with its Islamic roots, has demonstrated its capacity to manage political conflict within the framework of the rule of law, manage a prosperous economy and play a greater international role. The events of the last year in Turkey, including the process of electing the new president and the parliamentary elections, have made this a tense period, but Turkey has emerged from the process stronger than ever before. It is now important that Turkey consolidates the ambitious and successful reform programme that it has embarked upon.

Turkey has all the potential to become a successful and leading member of the European Union. The accession negotiations must continue with both sides keeping an open mind on all the issues and with decisions made on facts and realities rather than the religious and nationalistic bigotry that has coloured some of the debate in both the EU and in Turkey so far. This will be one of the most important decisions of this coming decade.

The South Caucasus and other regions of the former Soviet Union

Political developments in the South Caucasus, the western states of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) and Central Asia have on the whole failed to meet the perhaps excessive expectations of the mid-1990s.

Gains seemingly made in the fields of democratisation and human rights have receded across the region. Election processes remain problematic in virtually all countries. No state has undergone a constitutional turnover of power at the ballot box, while some regimes in Central Asia appear increasingly oriented towards a 'president for life' model of political authority. Although impressive progress was achieved in the field of freedom of expression in the South Caucasus in the 1990s, the media in Armenia, Georgia and Azerbaijan is less pluralistic today than it was a decade ago. There is widespread disillusionment with the so-called 'colour revolutions' in Georgia, Ukraine and Kyrgyzstan. Where revolutions have not taken place, authoritarian regimes have learnt appropriate lessons from the colour revolutions to crack down on dissent, civil society and the media. Nonetheless, there is some hope that protracted crisis in Ukraine is symptomatic of a genuine process whereby political conflict is managed as opposed to the dispersal of an effective opposition in Georgia and a renewed monopoly on power in Kyrgyzstan.

Economic developments have been more favourable, with impressive economic growth especially in the states of the South Caucasus and some tangible progress in the struggle against corruption, particularly in Georgia. Nonetheless, significant economic growth has not necessarily resulted in improved conditions for the majority of the population.

Success has continued to elude efforts to find peaceful and durable solutions to the unresolved conflicts in the South Caucasus. Over the last decade conflict resolution has typically been subordinated to political survival by authorities across the region. The sense of ownership of and commitment to the region's peace processes among wider societies is correspondingly low, while leaderships appear to lack long-term, strategic visions predicated on peace in the region.

The international community, fostering a growing presence in the region as an economic player, has lacked the interest and will to engage with the issues at stake in the unresolved conflicts. Although international responses cannot 'fix' local conflicts, they can be better calibrated to deliver results by focussing additionally on processes beyond – yet necessary to – the achievement of peace agreements, namely shifts in societal attitudes towards conflict, peace and justice. The potential costs of living with the status quo are considerable. The situations in Abkhazia and South Ossetia continue to have a very detrimental effect on already problematic Russian-Georgian relations. Renewed hostilities between Armenians and Azeris over Nagorny Karabakh would certainly have region-wide effects. Furthermore, increased tensions between a more assertive Russia and the West could easily find expression in proxy conflicts in the unrecognized entities of the South Caucasus. Efforts to resolve these conflicts must therefore be increased and lent a sense of urgency.

The role of LINKS

The role that a small and independent organisation like LINKS can play in such a complicated regional and global scenario needs to be constantly under review.

Our current mission statement highlights four main objectives:

- Promoting the peaceful resolution of conflicts;
- Supporting democracy and sustainable development in societies undergoing significant political change;
- Supporting an expanded and inclusive European Union and engaging with countries with aspiration for membership;
- Promoting dialogue between Europe and the Islamic world based on mutual respect.

For LINKS and other organisations like it to be effective, they must be able to complement wider-ranging efforts by larger state and inter-governmental structures. They must be flexible in both their thinking and their implementation; demonstrate imagination and creativity in their ideas and work; be ready to challenge received wisdom and to look for opportunities to build coalitions on salient topics, tasks or issues. It is now increasingly important for organisations like LINKS to be able to communicate their message effectively. What we say, however valid, has to compete in a jungle of information from which even the most informed and discerning will have a problem selecting.

Organisations like LINKS depend on funding. These funders come in all shapes and forms. Many understand that the value of working in partnership with non-governmental organisations (NGOs) comes from the ability of the NGOs to operate freely and independently. NGOs that become sheer mercenaries risk losing their credibility and greatly reduce their ability to impact events.

Highlights of LINKS activities in the year 2006/7

This has been a busy year for LINKS. The organisation ran a number of projects and initiatives in support of its aims and objectives. We have done this sometimes alone and sometimes in partnership with other organisations.

The Consortium Initiative

From August 2003 to August 2007 LINKS worked with the British NGOs International Alert and Conciliation Resources to implement a project in short entitled the Consortium Initiative (www.consortium-initiative.org), aimed at underpinning the process for finding a peaceful solution to the territorial conflict between Armenians and Azerbaijanis over Nagorny Karabakh. LINKS led the political strand of the Consortium launching a number of initiatives such as the South Caucasus Parliamentary Initiative and the Baku Autumn Debates amongst others. LINKS wishes to acknowledge the role of International Alert as the lead partner of the project for ably managing this large four-year project on behalf of the Consortium, as well as the role of Conciliation Resources in ably chairing the Consortium to date.

We are pleased to report that after the successful end of the four-year project LINKS has agreed with International Alert and Conciliation Resources to maintain the structure of the Consortium as a loose consultative mechanism between the three organisations as they continue their separate activities in this area.

The Caucasus Caspian Commission

The Caucasus Caspian Commission (www.caucascom.org) emerged from discussions between a range of individuals and organisations involved over the preceding decade in the region's issues, ranging from the 2005 Slovenian Presidency of the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) to some of the NGOs that had been at the forefront of the region's global integration, including LINKS. The result was the idea of an independent civil society initiative in the form of a Commission that would seek to articulate a new vision for the region and its European dimension. The Commission, under the Chairmanship of the Foreign Minister of Slovenia, Dimitrij Rupel, was formally constituted in February 2007. It has already held two meetings, in Brussels and Ljubljana. The Commission is expected to present its report in November 2007. LINKS is playing an important role in the work of the Commission. Together with the Ljubljana-based Institute for Strategic Studies it provides both the Secretariat and the rapporteur of the Commission. As part of the process of informing the work of the Commission, LINKS has helped to organise meetings in Ankara, Baku, London, Tbilisi, Tehran, Yerevan and other locations.

The South Caucasus Parliamentary Initiative

The 6th Plenary Assembly of the South Caucasus Parliamentary Initiative (SCPI; www.southcaucasus.eu) took place in Dubai in December 2006. Over the last decade LINKS has put in a huge amount of effort, time and resources to sustain this unique parliamentary dialogue between the parliaments of Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia.

The 6th Plenary Assembly took an important step in approving a common document on 'Regional Interaction in the fields of Banking, Environment and Transport' that had

been prepared by a group of experts representing the three parliaments.

All the elements exist for the South Caucasus Parliamentary Initiative to be upgraded into a fully-fledged parliamentary assembly and to provide a regional forum for discussion on some of the problems of the region. It is now up to the participating parliaments to demonstrate the will to move forward in this direction.

Armenia-Azerbaijan-Georgia Is there a South Caucasus Region?

Debates in and around the South Caucasus Parliamentary Initiative are part of a larger debate concerning the way Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia relate to each other. A new, disturbing development over the last year has been the emergence of a view contending that the South Caucasus is in fact not a region, with the implication that somehow the three countries can avoid trilateral relations. This view, based on short-term political expediency, ignores hard realities on the ground, and is part of a new phase that sees the three states of the South Caucasus trying to redefine their relationships to each other and the outside world.

LINKS feels that this debate is of the utmost importance and has participated in it through a series of round table discussions in Baku, Tbilisi and Yerevan in the spring of 2007. LINKS is well placed to contribute to this debate and will continue to do so.

We continue to maintain a high level political dialogue with the governments in the three South Caucasus states.

In August 2006 in Azerbaijan we launched a new project with the Parliament of Azerbaijan. This capacity-building project supports the opening up of the legislative process through work with members of parliament and parliamentary staff, and activities directed at enabling civil society to engage better with the Parliament.

European Union enlargement

Many of the countries that LINKS works in aspire to European Union membership. Nowhere is the issue more important than in Turkey, where LINKS has worked with a number of partners to develop the debate and inform stakeholders.

Among the activities that we organised in the last year was the conference "Together: for Turkey in Europe", held in Izmir in April 2007. The conference was unusual in that it was jointly organised by the Committee on European Union Affairs of the Turkish Parliament, Dokuz Eylul University of Izmir, the Aegean Young Businessmen Organisation (EGIAD), the Metropolitan Municipality of Izmir and LINKS.

It provided an opportunity for a proper discussion on accession issues in a free and open environment and with the participation of different stakeholders.

In October 2006 LINKS facilitated a visit by Turkish parliamentarians to European Union institutions in Brussels. Over the last year, LINKS has worked with the Turkish Democracy Foundation and has also published the Turkish-language publication *Yeni Yildiz (New Star)*, aimed at informing Turkish decision-makers on the EU accession process.

LINKS is currently also engaged in assisting the process of integrating North Cyprus into the European family. Whilst the Republic of Cyprus joined the EU in 2004 the provisions of the Acquis Communautaire was suspended for North Cyprus due to the current impasse on the island. LINKS supports the peaceful reunification of Cyprus based on a durable solution acceptable to both the Greek and the Turkish Cypriot communities on the island, and believes that Cyprus EU membership provides an opportunity and framework for this to be achieved.

LINKS continues to engage with Ukraine, Moldova and the South Caucasus states on their EU membership aspirations.

The Ankara Forum on Energy and Energy Security

In May 2007 LINKS, in collaboration with the Turkish Institute TEPAV and TOBB ETU University, launched the Ankara Forum on Energy and Energy Security as a standing forum to discuss issues such as energy supplies, energy consumption and climate change. These issues are becoming increasingly important and impact directly the countries where LINKS is active. Several meetings of the Forum have already been successfully held and LINKS hopes to expand its work in this area in the future.

Dialogue between cultures and religious traditions

The challenges created by the current international environment require a more active civil society engagement with promoting dialogue between cultures and religious traditions. LINKS is currently engaged in a process of consultation with interested partners, with a view to defining how we can contribute to this dialogue in the future.

Organisational issues

Our programme of work for 2004/7 will shortly come to an end. We are pleased to report that we were able to implement most of the tasks we set out to do in that programme, whilst remaining flexible enough to respond to shifting realities.

LINKS remains a slim organisation that strives to balance its project work with the wider objectives of our mission statement.

Acknowledgements

As we celebrate our tenth anniversary we would like to acknowledge the many people who have contributed to our work over this decade. Foremost are those who have worked with us in the United Kingdom or in the field as volunteers, employees, Council members or Directors. Many have contributed to the work of the organisation way beyond the call of duty.

We would like to thank our partners in the United Kingdom and in other countries. They were instrumental in realising ambitious objectives under difficult circumstances.

We would also like to thank our funders who have enabled us to implement our ideas.

Finally we would like to thank those many people in the societies in which we have worked who have accepted us in their midst and engaged with us across a multitude of issues. From Grozny to Baku, from Sukhum/i to Yerevan, from Kyiv to Tbilisi, from Tskhinval/i to Ankara, the kindness and hospitality demonstrated to us under often very trying circumstances contributed enormously to the overcoming of many obstacles and problems.

As we prepare to launch our programme of work for 2008/11, we look forward to continuing our work to make the world a better place for all humanity and to contribute to peace and prosperity in the societies in which we operate.

The Board of Directors of LINKS, September 2007.

Remembering Paul Bergne

One of the founders of LINKS, Paul Bergne died earlier this year. He was a Council Member and later Director of LINKS from 1997-2003. Paul was an extraordinary person, a diplomat of the old school, as a national newspaper once described him, but in many ways also an incredibly modern person even in old age.

He was one of Britain's leading authorities on Central Asia. A linguist who could switch from Farsi to Arabic and then to Russian with incredible ease, he also had a distinguished career in the Foreign Service and served as the UK first Ambassador to Uzbekistan. He was called out of retirement to serve as the Prime Minister's Special Envoy on Afghanistan as the campaign against the Taliban unfolded in 2001/2.

His death was a loss not only to his family and friends but to all scholars and students of Central Asia.



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