

Report Roundtable IV

“Coalition and Caucus in support of Democracy in the UN and other Multilateral Fora”

Following the opening remarks from the Chair- Mr. Rudy Insanally, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Guyana, and presentation by the Moderator- Mr. Danilo Turk, UN Ass. Secretary General, the discussion centered on the following aspects:

- assessing the experience of the UN Democratic Caucus and identifying possibilities and impediments to its functioning within the United Nations and other multilateral fora,
- defining the future role of the Democratic Caucus,
- identifying particular areas of cooperation and possibilities of development of the Democratic Caucus,
- reviewing practical aspects of managing the functioning of the Democratic Caucus.

I. The experiences and challenges

It was stressed that the UN Democratic Caucus is becoming a tangible reality. Strong commitments in that regard were expressed in the Warsaw Declaration and Seoul Plan of Action. Several concrete actions and initiatives have been undertaken to materialize them. As a consequence, in September 2004 the Community of Democracies met at the ministerial level as IN Democratic Caucus. A democratic Caucus sui generis is currently effectively meeting in Geneva and in New York, coordinating and consulting the activities and initiatives relating to democracy and human rights. Notwithstanding all those positive developments there is a need to clearly define the purpose, the mandate and the future role of the Democratic Caucus, make all the members better accustomed to its very idea as well as to inscribe it harmoniously into existing network of groups and platforms operating within the United Nations.

While several participants referred to difficulty of finding a common denominator within the Community of Democracies Caucus at present as well as to its not always clear *raison d’etre*, most stressed the need to approach it with reasonable expectations. The Caucus is useful even if it produces no immediate results. It should be seen as a long-term process not as a ready-made instruments.

Some discussants mentioned the clear divergence of interests within the Community of Democracy as well as different hierarchy of priorities (development vis-à-vis democracy). Others pointed out that diverging interests should be seen as quite normal and would constitute a permanent feature of democracies. Likewise it would be a mistake to counterpoise different priorities.

II. Role of the Caucus

In general, the Caucus should be perceived as a platform for like-minded States based on shared values, shared perceptions of their implementation and shared vision of the role of the United Nations in advancing them. The participants stressed however that the process of creating the identity of the Democratic Caucus should be pursued in a broader context. Having in mind that the democracy remains still a novelty within the United Nations; they underlined the need for maximizing the possibilities for advancing these values within the UN. New opportunities are opened by the fact that there is a significant shift of defining terms within the UN after the Cold War as well as growing acceptance of the democratic procedures, processes, principles and values. At the same time, the traditional groups existing within the UN system are losing their importance, thus creating new opportunities for the non-conventional coalitions of like-minded states, such as the Democratic Caucus. The Caucus could also provide an important link in ensuring the accountability of accepted commitments.

Several speakers underlined the need for developing the identity of the Caucus as a cooperative endeavor, based on generating positive incentives rather than accusatory tones. The Community of Democracies should avoid creating an impression that it is a self-sufficient circle. It must open itself up to other states and pursue a policy of transparency.

The majority of participants stressed that the Democratic Caucus should have mainly an advisory character. It shall not create divisions within the UN but be an effort to strengthen the entire UN system. Some participants stressed the need that the Community of Democracies should in the first place send a strong message of inclusion. The important feature of the UN – its universality and inclusiveness should not be compromised. The Democratic Caucus should not be intended to supplant long-standing regional groups, but rather to provide an added mechanism for like-minded democratic nations to cooperate. The participants stressed also that the Caucus could serve as a supplementary network that countries could use to cooperate on resolutions and initiatives. For some, the Democratic Caucus could become another instrument for sorting out differences of opinion and building common approaches- one should be not discouraged if its members do not come immediately to agreement on common actions. The Caucus could also serve as a think tank on democracy within the UN. While some participants insisted that the Caucus should have, instead of focusing on drafting and sponsoring resolutions, focus on assessing their implementation, others highlighted a possible role for the Caucus in norm-setting and even convention-making.

Some participants noted that the current formula for the Community of Democracies makes it difficult to develop a clearer identity for the Caucus. As a possible alternative it was suggested that the emerging democracies should strengthen cooperation among themselves. Their group could serve in particular as a replacement to the current framework of the G-77.

Several discussants were of the view that the process of developing of identity for the Caucus should receive a new injection of energy. Some pointed out that without concrete, successful projects the Caucus would not be able to prove its *raison d'être*.

III. Main tasks and areas of activities.

Most participants were of the view that a new important role for the Caucus, some even called it a window of opportunity, is provided by the current discussion on the UN reform. The caucus should bring an important asset to the current reform of the UN system responding to the reform concept proposed by the UN Secretary General in his Rapport: *In Larger Freedom*. The Caucus should be effective in refocusing the efforts of the UN system to follow more closely its underpinning values and principles, such as human rights and democracy. The Democratic Caucus should in particular concentrate on the specific UN SG proposals and try to build compromises around them.

Such practical project could include among others:

- **Building support for the UN Democratic Fund** as an opportunity for the Community of Democracies to contribute to its further development as well as to help define the rules and priorities of support and assistance. The need for a more effective coordination with existing mechanisms and instruments has also been stressed,
- **Developing the formula for the Human Rights Council.** Some participants stressed in that context that building the consensus within the Caucus around the support for HRC would be the real litmus test for the *resoin d'être* of the Caucus. Others believed that one should not expect the Caucus to produce a consensus view on the HRC but the Caucus should serve as another platform for discussion.

Other possible UN reform subjects, which could become concrete projects for the Caucus might include:

- **Building support for the Responsibility to Protect concept,**
- **Advancing the Millenium Development Goals** and contributing effectively to the discussion on their implementation in the framework of the High Level Event in September 2005,
- **Developing the concept of the Peacebuilding Commission.**

The Caucus could also serve a useful role in:

- **Strengthening the assistance and capacity building for the emerging democracies,**
- **Finding platforms of cooperation** with the non-governmental organizations and organizations of civil-society.

IV. Managing the activities of Caucus.

A large number of the participants supported the need to consider practical improvements to the modus operandi of the Caucus. Among the suggestions made one could mention:

- Extending activities of the Caucus beyond the session of the UN General Assembly or UN Commission on Human Rights,
- Convening more regular meeting and thematic debates,
- Elaborating clear criteria of participation,
- Creating procedures and standards of behavior in order to ensure the democratic character of the Caucus,
- Expanding the composition of the Convening Group,
- Creating a permanent secretariat to support the presidency of the Convening Group, institutionalizing the formula of the Troika,
- Developing mechanisms of cooperation with the group of New or Restored Democracies.

Finally, it should be stressed that the discussion was conducted in a candid and constructive spirit with substantive contributions provided both by government representatives and the NGO community participating in the roundtable.

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