



Interview with

Dr. Babak Khalatbari

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2014 is the year when the international combat troops are scheduled to withdraw from Afghanistan. Many experts fear that a deterioration of the security situation will ensue. Do you think this is justified – and which are the repercussions that this is expected to have on civil society in Afghanistan?

Khalatbari: 2014 is very far in the future. I think it is far more important to speak about the present first. It is at the Afghanistan conference in Bonn that the future will be mapped out. The most important thing is for the Afghan government to demonstrate “ownership” at this conference for the first time and to manage the conference as well. I think that all the essential steps can be achieved by 2014 so that an orderly handover of responsibility can be performed – and we won’t see precisely what this will mean for Afghanistan until the months after the handover has happened.

At the beginning of December, 35 representatives of Afghan civil society, both men and women, will travel to Bonn to present their expectations to the Conference of Foreign Ministers there. What are you hoping that the Civil Society Forum will be able to achieve?

Khalatbari: The most important thing is for Afghan civil society to learn to speak united and with one voice; to try to jointly create a working document, with which recommendations can be communicated to the Afghan government efficiently and constructively – and then to be included in the subsequent implementation, of course. This means that civil society in Afghanistan is trying to find its role – and that is a good development.

Which then are the positive effects for the strengthening of civil society in Afghanistan that can also be expected for the long term from the whole process involving the Afghanistan activities and the Civil Society Forum?

Khalatbari: I think that it is very important that the two civil societies that exist in Afghanistan, namely the rural one on the one hand and the urban one on the other, are brought together. Regional integration is also still a key topic that can be driven forward. Particularly the exchange with Pakistani civil societies, with Central Asian civil societies should come to the fore here – besides solidarity with ones fellow countrymen. This means that once the country has found a national voice, it would no doubt be interesting to think about finding a regional voice. In other words, that the civil societies of the individual countries engage in closer mutual coordination, consultation as well as exchange.

Does the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung collaborate with civil society organisations?

Khalatbari: I think that all political foundations do that – and the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung of course does so too. We have been supporting civil society since 2002. We are very active in the exchange with the Pakistani “counterparts” and of course we have been trying to support civil society structures in Afghanistan by educating multipliers. We believe that civil society plays an important role especially in the party system, because there aren’t really any parties that have evolved from the grassroots. This means that the step from political activist to follower of an organised party will need to be taken many more times in Afghanistan so that a programmatic party system can become established in the country. Insofar, the civil society representatives play a very important role in this process.

Mr Khalatbari, you headed the Kabul office of the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung from 2005 to 2008. What is your best memory from your time there?

Khalatbari: I think the nicest memory from this time is the first Pakistani-Afghan parliamentary delegation, which set off for Berlin in 2008. You could say that that was the parliamentary breakthrough in the bilateral relations, because parliamentarians from the two countries came together once again for the first time in many years. This then developed into institutionalised cooperation. It is true to say that it has become more difficult after current developments and political decisions. But I believe that it was a good start – and it was interesting for the reason that KAS was involved in it very closely and very intimately.

Thank you very much for speaking to us, Mr Khalatbari.

