

Political Party Internationals as Guardians of Democracy – Their Untapped Potential

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The gains of the world wave of democratization in the 1990s are yet to be consolidated. Some democracies are not being seen to deliver according to voters' expectations. Anti-democratic ideas and autocrats have made a comeback in some countries. The meaning and means of democracy promotion have become controversial. Even so, the tremendous gains in political freedom across the world over the past two decades are real. The proliferation of freely formed political parties is a key feature. Now political parties need to make the effort – and be given the chance and time – to build effective, lasting democratic governance.

It is in the nature of any political party to reassert the particularity of its mission, character, and leadership ambitions. But leaving aside the details of daily politicking, political parties across the world show remarkable similarities. They follow comparable logics and share sources of inspiration in terms of identity, organization, policies, and communication techniques. Successful parties have always been role models. The Party Internationals are channels for such broad convergence. Instant and universal access to political news adds force to this. With economic and cultural globalization a common stage has been created (some say, imposed) for politics and policies – although this also brings with it the threat of nationalism and »anti-globalization.«

The five existing party-based world organizations represent this global landscape of convergence into political families. At the same time, there are many political forces in the new multifaceted world that do not fit in. Moreover, the meaning of party names can vary considerably.

The mainstream parties of the right and the center-right are divided between the International Democrat Union (IDU) and the Centrist Democrat International (CDI). IDU is a »working association of over 80 Conservative, Christian Democrat and like-minded parties« founded in 1983. Only 32 of these are full member parties; 20 are European, five Latin American, and three Asian, with the major parties of the Right in Australia, Canada, New Zealand, and the United States completing the picture;

Table 1:
Membership of Political Party Internationals

<i>Type of membership</i>	<i>IDU</i>	<i>CDI</i>	<i>Liberal</i>	<i>Socialist</i>	<i>Green</i>
Full members	32	86	57	102	75
Observer/associate/consultative members	16	13	20	44	6
Total	48	99	77	146	81
Other indirectly associated parties	48	–	7	–	–
<i>Member parties per region</i>					
Europe	25	51	44	59	41
The Americas	13	30	10	36	11
Africa	4	13	17	31	15
Asia and the Pacific	6	5	6	20	14
North Africa and the Middle East ¹	–	3	5	13	1

16 parties are observers or associates (five European, six Caribbean and Latin American, four African and DP/Mongolia), making a total of 48 members. Another 48 political parties are more loosely associated with the Conservative Democrat family through inclusion in Regional Unions: 20 are European, 10 Latin American, six Caribbean, 10 African, and there are two more from Fiji and Nepal.

Unlike in other Internationals, Asia-Pacific has a leading role, with Australia's long-serving – now former – Prime Minister and Liberal Party leader John Howard as President, and Kuomintang/Republic of China,² GNP/South Korea, and UNP/Sri Lanka providing Vice Chairmen. Others posts are held by the key parties in Norway (host to the secretariat), Germany (both CDU and CSU), Spain, Czech Republic, Colombia, and Canada, as well as by leaders in developing regions (Renamo/Mozambique, PU/Guatemala).

IDU is thus a fairly coherent grouping around the strong center-right parties in the West. Association with ruling or leading opposition parties

1. Also included in numbers for Africa and Asia.

2. Country name as used by Kuomintang (IDU) and DPP (LI) respectively.

in developing regions is largely missing or in some cases – DP and FDC in Uganda and Jamaica Labour Party – vague.

Formed in 1961, the Centrist Democrat International (CDI) dropped »Christian Democratic« from its name in 2001 to broaden its appeal. Its principal acquisition in terms of non-Christian parties is Istiqlal, the largest and oldest party in Morocco.

CDI has a wide membership, including numerous small parties, with 86 full members and 13 observers: 51 members are European, 30 are Latin American or Caribbean, 13 African, and the rest come from Cambodia, Indonesia, Philippines, South Korea, and Lebanon. CDI is presided over by Pier Ferdinando Casini of UDC/Italy, with former Mexican President Vicente Fox of PAN as Co-President. Casini is also President of the Inter-Parliamentary Union and a former Parliamentary Speaker.

In contrast with the two Co-Presidents, the European Vice Presidents are also members of IDU (with the exception of PSD/Portugal and SDKÚ/Slovakia). They represent FIDESZ/Hungary, CDU/Germany (CSU is not in CDI), PP/Spain, and HDZ/Croatia. Other leaders with overlapping allegiances are PC/Colombia and Renamo/Mozambique. Member parties found only in CDI are D25 (ex-PFL) and PSDB (both Brazilian), PDC/Chile, and Christian Democrats from the Benelux countries and Scandinavia. Two rather particular ruling member parties are the Peronist PJ/Argentina and PDP/Nigeria. In Belgium, the Netherlands, and Luxembourg Christian Democrats dominate the center-right and IDU has no member parties.

CDI has its secretariat in Brussels together with the European People's Party (EPP), and the EPP President is an ex officio CDI Vice President. EPP constitutes the largest group in the European Parliament and includes almost all mainstream right-of-center parties in the European Union (EU). But IDU conservatives still maintain their own European Democrat Union.

These complex relations on the Right reflect a protracted tension between seeking political strength in unity (at national or international level) and real political differences. Christian Democratic traditions of communitarian or social conservatism do not blend easily with the right-liberal economic and social policies of many parties dominating the modern Right.

Liberal membership is delineated more clearly. Since 1947 the Liberal International (LI) has gathered parties standing for classical political, economic, and cultural liberalism around the political center. Only a few, such

as LP/Canada, Venstre/Denmark, and Framsókn/Iceland, have become big players in their countries. Others, such as FDP/Germany, Lib-Dems/UK, and some Belgian and Dutch parties, have had to negotiate in order to attain power.

There exists a professed internal tension between a »Right« (Venstre,³ vvd/Netherlands, Germany, Sweden, most of Central Europe) and a social liberal »Left« (Canada, UK, Belgium). In Denmark and the Netherlands this debate has long been expressed in terms of competing liberal parties, all LI members. Traditional liberal identity *and* the debates about it have been diluted by the admission of parties from developing regions, as well as Nordic rural-based Center parties.⁴ The former often identify themselves as forefront democrats rather than classical liberals.

LI has 57 parties as full members and 20 as observers, the great majority being small parties: 44 from Europe, 10 from Latin America and Canada, 17 from Africa, and six from Asia and Israel. The cooperating organizations in Africa and Asia include four and three additional parties respectively.

The President is Lord John Alderdice, Northern Ireland peace negotiator and former Speaker of the Assembly from the Alliance Party. The secretariat is located in the historic building of the National Liberal Club in London. The leadership further consists of vvd, FDP, LibDems, PLA/Andorra, LI/Catalonia, Yabloko/Russia, MP/Morocco and DPP/Taiwan.

Though not numerous, parties from new democracies have added a new dimension. Various Asian democrats and African RDR/Cote d'Ivoire, UDF/Malawi, PDS/Senegal, SNP/Seychelles, DA/South Africa, and CUF/Tanzania (Zanzibar) are prominent among these forces.

The Socialist International (SI), dating back to 1864, reflects the internationalist ideas of the socialist labour movement since its beginnings. With a history of splits with the Far Left and shutdown during the World Wars, today's SI was established in 1951. A concerted effort to reach beyond Western Europe came during the presidency of former German Federal Chancellor Willy Brandt from 1976 to 1992. It gained further momentum during the waves of democratization in Latin America and then after the end of the Cold War in 1989.

3. A historic name meaning »Left« in Danish.

4. From Finland and Sweden, both partners in center-right governments, but not Norway's Center Party, part of a ruling center-left coalition.

SI today has 102 full member parties and 44 consultative or observer members. More than half are either in government («close to 60») or leading the opposition; 59 parties come from Europe, 36 from the Americas, 31 from Africa, and 20 from Asia-Pacific. SI consists of classical social democratic, socialist, and labour parties and has lately welcomed national liberation and democracy movements, as well as some reformed successors to communist or post-colonial parties running one-party states.

SI therefore spans all shades of the Center-Left that aspire to govern. The diverse range – from the UK's New Labour to the Sandinista Front, from SWAPO of Namibia to the German SPD, from Israel's Labour Party and Iraq's ruling PUK to the Philippines' Akbayan and other struggling democracy activists – reflects the fact that many have been attracted and invited in times of progressive aspirations and hope, both domestically and abroad. Hardly any have subsequently left, even if some are diverging from the social democratic mainstream. All Internationals are clubs that are »hard to enter, even harder to leave.« This is most evident in SI as the most numerous and global, and the broadest family.

The SI President is George Papandreou, former Prime Minister of Greece and leader of PASOK. There are 15 Vice Presidents from Europe, five each from Latin America and Africa, and one each from Israel and Asia-Pacific (shared by Japan and New Zealand). The secretariat is in London. The wide membership is therefore held together by a common denominator established by their strong and mostly old sister parties in Europe.

The new kids on the block are the Global Greens (GG). Usually seen as a distinct alternative on the Center-Left and claiming to bring a new dimension to politics, this family of parties is probably the most like-minded in terms of identity and political priorities. But in line with a strong anti-hierarchical culture, the Green parties were able to come together only in 2001. They have a 12-member steering committee – three from each continent and supposedly operating by consensus, even for website postings – coupled with a Global Green Network representing Federations or Networks in each region. There are 75 member parties, with an additional six parties in Europe as observers: 41 from Europe, 11 from the Americas, 15 from Africa, and 14 from Asia-Pacific. All Green parties are relatively small, though this does not exclude influence: five have government ministers, in the Czech Republic, Finland, Ireland, Italy, and Latvia.

The fact that right-wing nationalists and others advocating cultural exclusivity do not cooperate easily or openly might be inherent in their

nature. It is more surprising that communists and others on the radical Left cannot do so either, despite often claiming to be internationalists. The Communist International (Comintern) was finally dissolved by Stalin in 1943, allegedly for security reasons in time of war.

Parties and movements to the left of mainstream socialists have formed a variety of alliances, but none long-lasting enough to give them a global platform. The Radical Left is permanently handicapped by an inability to distance itself from certain dictatorships and armed violence, both in the past and in the present. Cuba is a notorious example: the regime basks in the romantic light of its »brave resistance« to US dominance and enjoys wide sympathy, particularly in Latin America. Still, parties of the Left who suggest that Cuban policies might be applied in their own country usually find themselves marginalized in public opinion. In many countries the Far Left have resorted to their own versions of nationalism.

Where They Are and Where They Are Not

Worldwide, 437 political parties are members of Party Internationals, 13 with double membership of IDU and CDI, and one – the Democratic Party of Serbia – of IDU and SI. An additional 55 parties are linked through the regional branches of IDU (48) and LI (7). In spite of this impressive total, reach differs greatly among world regions.

Europe is the home ground. All party-based world organizations originated in Western Europe, where their ideologies were first defined. After the crumbling of the communist states, the »normal« Western European political landscape has quickly been replicated in most of Central Europe. But going further east and to countries with poorer prospects of EU accession the party setup becomes less »European.« Still, almost all important (and some less so) parties in Europe are among the 209 members of the Internationals.

The party federations related to groups in the European Parliament (EP) are important in this process. These pan-European parties, at least by name, bring together national parties in »their« EP Group, which largely follow the membership of a related Party International. Some parties join a group for institutional reasons, but then make other political alliances. European Parties are relatively well-endowed, getting part of their money from the EU. Party Internationals have no access to direct public funding and rely on their European members for money.

European Parties are therefore partly partners and partly competitors for attention and resources from member parties and their leaders. Relations vary, from close in the case of CDI and EPP, to merely formal between SI and the Party of European Socialists (PES). European Parties are a new, daring experiment in the shaping of transnational democratic structures. Their impact on the politics of the EU and its popular standing is yet to be seen. The testing ground will be the five-yearly EP elections, next time in 2009.

The party pattern of Western Europe also extends to most of Latin America, the Caribbean, and Canada. There are 95 members of Party Internationals, and older parties are particularly likely to share these ideological identities: 12 are in IDU and 30 in CDI, with two having joined both. LI and GG have 10 members each and SI brings in 35 parties.

Quite a few established parties on the Right and Center-Right have not found a home in a Party International. The same is true for most of the new radical Left, including all political groups based on indigenous movements. (New groups across the political spectrum often reject the name »party,« as the notion has come into disrepute.) Most conspicuously absent among major parties are Brazil's ruling PT and the old, large PMDB.

In 1990, PT, itself new, initiated the Sao Paulo Forum (FSP), gathering a broad church of the Left (mostly to the left of SI), with both moderate and radical socialists, as well as communist parties and revolutionary groups. Recently, the Forum has found inspiration in the wave of election victories for the Left in the region, though admittedly these governments have different characters and policies. FSP's leading forces are PT and Venezuela's ruling MVR, together with opposition leaders FMLN/El Salvador and PRD/Mexico (an SI member). In line with its open approach, PT hosted the most recent SI congress in 2003, without joining it.

Enjoying a surge in democracy and electoral support, the Latin American Left has tended to put national politics before alignment, as was the tendency among European socialist governments when dominating the EU in the late 1990s.

Another important innovation originating from the Brazilian Left is the World Social Forum, first held in Porto Alegre in 2001. This »movement of movements« has been a source of inspiration around the globe, but keeps its distance from parties and thus electoral politics. Now it is struggling to establish its sustainability while remaining fresh, free, and newsworthy.

The political parties in the United States have always been both a reference for others *and* exceptions. Their character of galaxies of candidates rather than cohesive parties is not much copied, but their policy debates and campaign innovations are followed the world over. The Republican National Committee is a member of IDU, though it has not occupied a leading office. Contact is facilitated by the International Republican Institute. The Democratic Party is an even broader church and even less committed. It maintains observer relations with CDI, LI, and SI through its National Democratic Institute, while also having other forums for exchange with like-minded politicians. SI and the Global Greens have small member groups in the US.

In Africa, affiliation with Internationals is even sparser. IDU has four associated members, with Ghana's ruling NPP and Renamo/Mozambique (also in CDI) in the lead, while CDI and LI have adopted a more inclusive strategy, with 13 and 17 members respectively. GG gathers 15 parties. Even with SI including 31 parties, several of them leading in their country and on the continent, the combined total of 79 affiliates leaves the great majority of African political parties outside any international family. Nor are there substituting African party networks, apart from traditional links between some liberation movements. For ruling parties, government relations have taken precedence at the expense of party links.

African multiparty democracy is still young. As party systems consolidate it would be natural to forge more active party relations on the continent and beyond. But African parties are poor, unless benefiting from state resources – legitimately or not – and communications are more expensive and time-consuming than elsewhere. Africa's leaders and the wider international community have endorsed, promoted, and even prescribed multiparty democracy without securing resources for its functioning. Foreign assistance gives priority to holding elections and largely neglects political parties' capacity to perform their duties.

African political parties are queuing up for recognition, exchange, and resources from Party Internationals, that can offer open doors, an identity, and occasional meetings, which can be crucial at a formative stage. But engagement of the kind seen in Central Europe has not come about. This probably explains why political dialogue between Africa and the West shows signs of strain, not least over human rights and governance. Expectations of deeper commitment on both sides have been disappointed. In Africa and elsewhere many question the relevance of ideologies and political identities originally shaped in Europe. Open networks for

political dialogue and issue-based alliances between parties and other political forces might be more relevant for the foreseeable future.

If political parties are growing much freer in sub-Saharan Africa, this is not the case in North Africa and the Middle East. Even where opposition parties exist, they are often repressed or so much under state control that they are unable to challenge the status quo. Party Internationals have responded in different ways. IDU stays away altogether. LI has admitted five opposition groups, three of them in Morocco where there also is a Green party. CDI has three members, including Istiqlal, heading Morocco's government under the King.⁵

In contrast, SI has 13 members, including Morocco, Israel, Palestine, Iraq, and Yemen. This engagement strategy has been instrumental in promoting a stumbling peace process between Israel and its neighbours, as well as Kurdish rights, such as autonomy in northern Iraq. A price has been paid, however, in terms of granting recognition to parties not upholding democratic principles. The ruling parties in Egypt and Tunisia are cases in point, admitted in June 1989 after showing signs of reform. Even if they have felt unwanted at times, the usual standards have not been applied. Attempts at outreach of this kind have been characterized by sharp dilemmas, seeking to avoid jeopardizing support for peace processes and also failing in terms of equal application to the Israeli member party responsible for 40 years of occupation. Nor is the Palestinian member party Fatah an example of democratic conduct. In this region, engagement has often meant setting human rights and democracy aside for the sake of peace, all too often with little result.

Non-engagement is not a solution. But instead of choosing sides in genuine conflicts, foreigners need to put international law and universal human rights first. Persistent, frank political dialogue with and beyond ruling circles deter people from trying to hide real dilemmas under the carpet. By respecting all genuine interests in a fair manner, one can both invest in building trust in real peace talks and keep high the political price of violence, disrespecting the rule of law, or hindering the growth of inclusive democracy.

Asia-Pacific is perhaps the most decisive battleground for democracy, being home to half of humankind and an engine of world economic growth. Party Internationals have a weak presence, however, with only

5. Numbers of affiliates in North Africa are also included in totals for Africa and others in the Middle East are included in totals for Asia-Pacific.

51 affiliates: six with IDU, five CDI, six LI, 20 SI, and 14 Greens. Only a few are strong nationally, with a certain edge for IDU (see above). In Asia, SI parties are big only in Mongolia, Nepal, and Pakistan, all troubled countries in one way or another. SI parties now also govern in both Australia and New Zealand. A nominally liberal party rules in (exceptional) Taiwan.

A first reason for this relative weakness is that multiparty democracy has not yet won out in Asia. Unlike in other continents, dictators and authoritarian regimes are not under much pressure from neighbours, regional bodies, or even the world community to conform to democratic norms and allow political freedom. Impressive economic progress and trading power have done much to fend off such demands. The rise of China and other Asian Tigers devoid of political freedom is challenging the idea of democracy and its utility for rapid development. India, surging forward at last, not least in global knowledge-based industries, can give democrats new inspiration, however. Freedom of thought should yet again prove best at securing economic success in the long run.

A second reason for low affiliation is that few Asian parties identify with the Western Right–Left spectrum. Some affiliations are better explained by tactical and personal coincidences than ideological commitment. Just as African national liberation movements have joined the socialist family because of early support for their cause, Asian democrats now tend to bond with the liberal family thanks to principled stands and the work of its dynamic Council of Asian Liberals and Democrats (CALD).

Party Internationals that want to stay relevant at global level therefore face a double challenge: (i) they will acquire recognition if they advocate and apply distinctive, universal values and principles; but (ii) they must be flexible enough to be relevant for national political parties with very different identities, perceptions, and structures.

Still, history should be on the side of those Internationals – existing or yet to be formed – that take on these challenges. Political parties everywhere are under increasing pressure to provide answers to globalization, seizing its opportunities and softening its sharp edges.

Ideological convergence is not certain. Internationally, ideologies are often more sharply distinguished than is usual nationally and within the framework of electoral realities. The classic Right–Left divide in relation to political and economic power, social protection, and economic incentives for capital and labour remains in a world in which inequality in terms

of income and wealth persists, even if economic growth is bringing more people than ever out of absolute poverty.

The diverging views on global warming exemplify a more recent ecological dimension. IDU leaders have rejected and undermined the Kyoto agreement on controlling CO₂ emissions, while leading SI members secured its adoption and implementation. This battle of political will and vision will probably continue.

What They Could and Should Do

Party Internationals find themselves in a new world in which there are many political opportunities, while resources for international party collaboration remain very limited. By proving their value Internationals could start to expand their activities, first on the basis of member parties pulling their weight. Public and private actors could then see that Internationals can offer effective and cost-efficient channels for bringing new qualities to democratization and international politics.

Party Internationals should set themselves the goal of becoming the prime guardians of worldwide democratization. Being multilateral, they have more legitimacy than national actors whose interests are always questionable. So far, attempts to build international coalitions or communities of democrats have been based on governments or non-party NGOs. Partisan and electoral as they are, only political parties can give life to political choices and connect the concerns of voters, interest groups, and issue-based non-governmental organizations to a credible program for governing.

Despite a number of setbacks, democrats still have the upper hand in world politics. Non-democrats may find excuses for »maintaining stability,« but have no inspiring alternative. Not even the Chinese model is exportable; the contradictions of communist-run capitalism are too great. That China – and increasingly Russia – protect some dictators for business and geopolitical reasons is not the main argument because some western powers do that too.

The five Party Internationals would all emerge stronger if they acted together to consolidate and expand multiparty democracy. Their different views about the ambitions, role, and practices of democratic politics would add value and novelty, reinforcing the fact that democracy is best promoted by offering more than one model.

The Internationals should launch a common platform to strengthen and clarify today's universal instruments for political and other human rights, and other relevant declarations and democracy charters issued by the United Nations and regional organizations. Particular attention to the role and responsibilities of political parties as indispensable democratic institutions would be natural and urgent. Broadly agreed standards could serve to restore the reputation of parties, democratic politics, and public service. This certainly does not mean that all parties have to be shaped in the same mould.

Campaign conduct, electoral administration and dispute resolution, political funding, internal democracy and accountability, inclusiveness in relation to youth, women, and minorities, and the rights and responsibilities of party members and political allies are topics to consider, as well as issues that are not directly party-related but important for the functioning of democracy. Internationals could agree to disagree on certain matters. General norms at world level can be translated into specific standards at national level. This can be more effective than party regulations, often superficially imposed.

Each International has to maintain responsibility for its internal codes of democratic conduct. Clearly written rules, membership criteria, control mechanisms, and corrective procedures facilitate direct messages when in dialogue with existing and potential members. Ideally, party members should be encouraged to take preventive action before a party leadership goes astray. The relative cohesion of IDU is a result of high entry hurdles, as well as the instructive example of terminating relations with a party in Guatemala that supported a military coup. In 2005, LI bravely excluded its ruling member party in Nicaragua due to blatant corruption and political deals to obstruct justice. SI has installed an ethics committee to deal with questions about members and applicants.

The value of sister parties being able to trust each other is likely to grow in the future. News about misconduct travels fast and an injury to one is an injury to all. Not keeping order in the family will be politically dangerous.

Particularly with modern communication methods, the holding of meetings will not be enough. When getting together parties must make real policies and politics: talking shops replicating the most boring aspects of diplomacy are a waste of time and money. It is necessary to break with the idea that party representatives know it all, and need only a grand setting for statesmanlike »foreign affairs« statements.

The reality is that few listen to traditional international conference speeches, either in the hall itself or elsewhere. Today, exchanges between parties should be based on the insight that there is no such thing as »foreign affairs,« nor are any policies purely domestic. In all fields, policies need to relate to and manage interdependence between societies. With this modern reality, learning early lessons from others is more important than praise for past achievements, soon to be obsolete.

New meeting formats and policy dialogue will benefit from linking up with think tanks, academia, interest groups, artists, civil society organizations, and the media, all of which will take new shapes. Political action groups will tend to be more targeted and specialized, based on individual initiatives in cyberspace, cutting across traditional structures, group thinking, and national borders.

Politics will sometimes still be a matter of negotiations between elected representatives, but such exclusive arenas will tend to be the exception. Successful political parties will instead use the freedom of new technologies and meeting places to create many unexpected, newsworthy meetings of minds. The policy process will be integrated with the task of communicating with ever better informed citizens, winning their confidence and votes. Parties pioneering this progress might stand to gain.

With patience for conventional meetings vanishing, participants will require a defined purpose: are we here to recognize and analyse a problem, identify and chose policy options, decide tactics for negotiation and implementation, or to review results critically? Information technology helps in the making of preparations and follow-up, but can never substitute for bringing people together.

LI has made considerable progress in creating new working methods at its general congresses, held every 18 months. Plenary sessions are largely kept for decision-making and summaries by the LI President. National leaders and delegates have to contribute in working groups and panels on predefined topics, at which wide-ranging presentations make little sense. A congress is a »trade fair« connecting ideas rather than a series of disconnected speeches. Given the appropriate format, party delegates are in a position to offer something to sister parties rather than just asking what the International can do for them.

One way of focusing a Party International's agenda effectively is to provide party caucuses in inter-governmental and inter-parliamentary forums at global and regional level. SI has attempted this at UN meetings, at least to some extent. Progressive Governance is a gathering of like-

mindful social democratic and liberal governments. European parties, too, are meeting in advance of EU summits and some ministerial meetings. Elected representatives are often caught up in all too predictable diplomacy. Successful politicians make change possible and alternative input and alliances provide opportunities. Also, opposition parties can find a role.⁶

The next task is to understand and shape the trans-nationalization of society. There are people's movements for old and new causes and ideals, represented by a growing galaxy of social movements, pressure groups, and philanthropic organizations, often taking up a single issue. Some reject organizing along traditional political lines. Parties and Party Internationals must engage with this chaotic reality to stay relevant and respected.

If party representatives broadened their range of contacts it would help to counter the trend against party politics. Reactions to the failures of party politics are understandable, yet represent a withdrawal from democracy. And whatever distance NGOs might take from political parties, they are unlikely to refuse an offer enabling them to exert influence. A broader range of invitations to talk about critical issues could lead to new, refreshing political alliances of a more strategic kind.

Party Internationals are generally not mentioned in reports by the World Economic Forum or the World Social Forum. But surely they should be at the forefront. Party Internationals should be first in line to provide for global democratic dialogue. Socialists have made some attempt at this with their Global Progressive Forum. Furthermore, prominent insiders could do more to invite and give a voice to outsiders. That would achieve more than many closed commissions.

Party Internationals have untapped potential in terms of developing the technical capacity of member parties. The crucial role of political parties is increasingly being recognized in international efforts to assist democratic development. More donor agencies and democracy-promoting institutes are taking note and increasing their party-aid budgets.⁷

6. Christoph Zöpel suggests a detailed action plan along these lines in his paper »Die Sozialistische Internationale und globale Demokratie,« FES Internationale Politik-analyse, 2005.

7. The best account is by Thomas Carothers in: *Confronting the Weakest Link – Aiding Political Parties in New Democracies*, Carnegie Endowment, 2006.

Traditional party-related assistance is offered bilaterally. Early assistance for democracy was pioneered by German political foundations. Now they are being joined by institutes from most – but not all – important development donor countries. Together they greatly facilitate the development of democratic politics, but Party Internationals have not yet been invited to play a direct role.

A notable exception is the close cooperation of LI and CALD with the Friedrich Naumann Foundation (FNS). There is also some coordination of efforts in developing regions. The Africa Liberal Network is supported by the Westminster Foundation for Democracy through the British Liberal Democrats, and the Konrad Adenauer Foundation (KAS) is doing some groundwork with CDI. Spanish and Swedish conservatives are active in Latin America. On the Left, efforts in Central and Eastern Europe have been coordinated by the European Forum for Democracy and Solidarity.

In contrast, trade union internationals are directing support to and advising members. Party aid donors and providers are spending too much time on a rather superficial debate about the relative merits of sister-party or cross-party approaches. This complex and under-resourced field would be better served by a variety of approaches: bilateral *and* multilateral, system-wide *and* responding to the needs of individual parties.

Party Internationals and regional party networks could assume responsibility for identifying needs and targets for aid. That would build recipient ownership of aid programs, transfer knowledge within and between developing regions, and make the peer review of results possible. Bilateral and multilateral donors should invite Party Internationals, perhaps within a framework of donor coordination. Democracy initiatives on the part of Internationals should be eligible for funding by the UN Democracy Fund.

An Urgent Task

The abovementioned tasks are more or less permanent. Democracy has to be reinvented constantly, particularly as its traditional focus on nation states is proving inadequate. At present, ameliorating the climate of suspicion and confrontation in world politics is another pressing task.

The claims of the current US administration that it is promoting universal values of liberty, democracy, and the open society through unilateral

action are greeted by many with scepticism. Authoritarian regimes are always able to find excuses and some popular backing in making similar claims, particularly in terms of national sovereignty. A more benign international climate prevailed during the 1990s, and even during the first year after September 11, 2001, important agreements were reached in the UN and the world trade and finance institutions.

The goodwill ended when President Bush decided not only to contain Iraq's dictator, but to invade without global support. This has had serious repercussions, not least for the promotion of democracy. Even so, international agreement about the basic rules of cohabitation in the »global village« can be regained. There is broad agreement that only extremists stand to win if we do not address the challenges of humankind together.

Party Internationals – except the Global Greens – all have some association with the leading participants in the Iraq war and their own internal tensions. Instead of being handicapped by this, the shared experience can provide a platform for constructive dialogue. Giving more active support to the Iraqi people in terms of democratization, reconciliation, and reconstruction might be a first task. Such goodwill initiatives should take place in each political family in relation to counterparts in Iraq, among the Kurds, and in the region as a whole. The wider aim should be to restore international legality and legitimacy for all processes towards peace and democratization in the so-called Greater Middle East.

To counter a revival of ideologies of segregation and confrontation, it is important to have not one uniform but a variety of democratic alternatives. Left, Right, and others offering a real choice of models for development will bring hope and renew aspirations everywhere. The extent to which the different recipes come from Africa, the Americas, Asia, or Europe will be relatively unimportant. Crossover cooking might prove to be the tastiest.

Links and Sources

International Democrat Union: www.idu.org;

Centrist Democrat International: www.cdi-idc.org/index.php;

Liberal International: www.liberal-international.org;

Socialist International: www.socialistinternational.org;

Global Greens: www.globalgreens.info