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Global Campus International Conference: 3-4 June 2015, Bangkok, Thailand



A two-day international conference organised by the Asia Pacific programme in cooperation with EIUC and the other GC partners took place on 3rd and 4th June 2015 in Bangkok, Thailand. The objective of this gathering was two-fold: to exchange research findings and thinking around democratisation, and to engage in an interdisciplinary dialogue on process/actor-oriented, conceptual, and methodological issues in the context of the Asia Pacific as well in other regions of the Global Campus. The event was attended by professors, Alumni and experts of the Asia-Pacific Master's Programme, by professors from the Master

Programme of South East Europe (ERMA), the Master in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAT.MA) and the African programme (LLM), and by representatives from the Bangkok offices of different German political foundations operating in all regions of the world.

The **first day** opened with a welcome address by **Nicola Piper**, Director of the Asia-Pacific Master's Programme in Human Rights and Democratisation. Following, the first keynote speech on the *Challenges and Opportunities for Democratisation in South Asia* was delivered by **Professor Lok Raj Baral**, from the [Nepal Centre for Contemporary Studies](#). Professor Baral's central point was that democracy is not only about rules but also about its mode of implementation. In fact, he said, some of the fundamental rules for democracy such as free elections and a constitution are not automatic guarantees for stable democracies. Politicians, once they receive their mandate through the elections, often do not live up to the expectations and promises made during their political campaigning. Strong grassroots movements can offer a way to counteract this tendency and to hold governments more accountable.



Professor Baral described that among the main challenges for democracies today is the rising demand for inclusiveness and participation as well as the need for reconciling capitalism with social justice. Yet the reality of life in South Asia evidences a huge disparity gap between the elites and the rest of the population, perpetuated, in the case of India and in Sri Lanka, though the caste system. Despite this, democracy remains, above all, a system to protect and fulfill human rights and to deliver basic needs to the population such as education and health. Among the opportunities it offers, he listed the advantages of a decentralised federal system such as the one existing in India, which has proven particularly suitable to react to crises whenever they occur in the country. Also, the multi-party system that has been re-established in Nepal has led different forces to find common ground necessary for cooperation. Moreover, Professor Baral said the media can be seen to constitute another means to put pressure on government by creating an '*information revolution*'.

The **second day** of the event, after a welcome and a brief introduction to the main joint activities of the GC implemented during this year, continued with the second keynote address on the *Main challenges and opportunities for democratisation in the context of South East Asia* by Dr Sriprapha Petcharamesree, from Mahidol University in Thailand. **Dr Petcharamesree** signaled that in South East Asia there are unfortunately more challenges than prospects, with different authoritarian regimes and backlashes impeding any steps towards increasing democracy in the region. Democracies in South East Asia are characterised by three competing values: development, participation and security, and the political hierarchy and 'personalism', namely the importance of a specific individual and of his/her charisma rather than the actual policies within the political sphere. Dr Petcharamesree described that a '*democratic deficit*' exists not only within single countries but also at the regional level of the [Association of Southeast Asian Nations](#) (ASEAN). ASEAN is a body that aims to protect regional peace and stability, and create

opportunities for economic growth and social progress as well as for member countries to resolve differences peacefully. In spite of its mission and goals, ASEAN has not intervened in countries' political affairs nor has undertaken action against undemocratic situations. Other perspectives from South Asia/South East Asia and from other regions were brought into the discussion through four discussion panels.

The interventions of the first panel on the *Consolidation of democracy* in a context of transition highlighted the similarities in three post-conflict countries, Indonesia, Sri Lanka and Nepal. Commonalities included a lack of political culture embedded in the society and the abuse of the elections to legitimize the government. In the following panel, Global democracy and its regional and local implications, **Professor Florian Bieber** from the Master's Programme in South East Europe (ERMA), indicated that the countries of this region have emerged from authoritarian regimes and that as a result of the democratisation process in 1990, some have become stable democracies while others can be considered as '*hybrid regimes*' or '*semi-democracies*'. What characterizes the latter is the predominance of the executive over the parliamentary and judiciary power, the restriction of the media freedom and the strong clientelism used in politics as a key mechanism for government to hold on to power.



Dr Kwadwo Appiagyei-Atua, from the African programme, drew attention to the importance among the freedoms on which a stable democracy should be based, including academic freedom. The undermining of freedom of expression of professors especially in a context of unstable democracies, can have broader implications for democratisation. **Dr Lucas Gonzales**, from LAT.MA programme, illustrated the theory of Guillermo O'Donnell, one of Latin America's most prominent political scientists, about the emergence of delegative democracies, a new type of democracy. The basic premise of a delegative democracy is that once a highly individualistic, paternalistic figure is elected president he/she is considered as the embodiment of the nation and thereby entitled to govern as he or she sees fit. Power falls into the hands of a single person, but, unlike authoritarianism, the leader is still held accountable at the ballot box by the electorate. This theory has been used to describe accurately variants of democracies in countries such as Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Ecuador, and Peru. The causes for the emergence of delegative democracies can be traced to the deep social and economic crises that most of these countries inherited from their authoritarian predecessors, which reinforced certain practices and conceptions about the proper exercise of political authority, leading in the direction of delegative, not representative democracy.

The conference was closed with a roundtable discussion, where participants concluded that stable democracies must be embodied in important standards and as well as in a strongly political culture strongly embedded in the society. The implementation of democracy might vary on the basis of the interplay among the state, civil society actors and the market. Important guarantees for stable democracies are the

presence of strong social movements and political institutions in a system of checks and balances. Representatives of the German political foundations present at the meeting, such as the [Friedrich-Ebert Foundation](#), the [Konrad-Adenauer Foundation](#), and the [Friedrich Nauman Foundation](#), then described their programmes and initiatives being implemented to support the consolidation of democracy in the region.