Concept Note:
Think Tank Talk February 2020
Defending Democracies under Attack:
The Role of Think Tanks

DESCRIPTION

The Think Tank Talk is a 2-hours event where an expert on the topic covered is invited by the Think Tank Hub to present his or her field of expertise to a high-level group of participants. The idea is to generate a debate, to discuss different approaches and problem-solving techniques that can be applied to current matters we are facing. Hence, Think Tank Talks are moved by two goals: bringing serious and renowned experts to discuss current and pressing topics and, at the same time, allow participants to have a more active role and foster an exchange of ideas. Therefore, this talk is a unique opportunity for speakers and audience alike to learn from each other in an open and interactive atmosphere.

CONTENT

How could accountability of security institutions be supported and defended by think tanks in the context of democracies under attack?

Aim
This Think Tank Talk aims to understand how think tanks can assist with accountability of security governance. The talk starts from the assumption that there are lessons from developing democracies that are relevant for the developed world in relation to oversight of security institutions.

Context
Democracy is deteriorating globally and security narratives are being used as an excuse for shrinking democratic space and practices across the world. Security think tanks usually advise governments on how to move forward national security agendas or better position geo-strategically. They rarely examine the accountability of national security institutions (police, military, intelligence, customs...) from the perspective of citizens’ rights and democratic values.

Civil liberties organisations defend human rights in relation to domestic security actors, while humanitarian NGOs monitor and advocate protection of civilians in the context of armed conflicts. Both types of organisations usually do not know how to engage with security power-holders. Think tanks in the Global South, including Eastern Europe, had developed the oversight function to contribute to national democratization processes, while think tanks from Global North are more involved in exporting advice abroad.
What role do think tanks have in promoting and defending accountability of security institutions? How is it different from other civil society actors?

How can think tanks impact oversight of security institutions? What kind of evidence and policy engagement makes a difference?

What can think tanks do to challenge the narratives of fear and help de-securitise issues? How is public demand for accountability and democratic governance of the security sector institutions developed or maintained in the context of deepening polarisations?

What are the challenges of oversight in different contexts: democratization, state capture or the abuse of legal rules of the game for private gain and fear-based politics in developed democracies?

What would be the elements of a healthy ecosystem for democratic governance of the security sector that is resilient to different pressures from within and outside the country?

TARGET AUDIENCE

In this specific case, the audience will be constituted, first of the WISCH20 participants mainly think tankers, and second, from a broader public, notably Geneva based security related IO’s and NGO’s and academics.

DATE, TIME & PLACE

Friday, February 7th 2020.
1:00 pm - 2:30 pm
Salle de Mello, WMO, 2nd Floor, Avenue de la Paix 7bis, 1202 Genève.

MODERATION

A member from DCAF

SPEAKER

Sonja Stojanović Gajić is an experienced researcher and practitioner of security sector governance and conflict-transformation and an organizational consultant. Sonja holds a PhD in International Relations from the University of Belgrade and an MA in Politics, Security and Integration (with distinction) from University College London (UCL). From December 2006 to October 2019, she led the Belgrade Centre for Security Policy (BCSP) as its Director. Under her leadership, BCSP became the only Western Balkan think tank ranked among the most influential Security and International Affairs Think Tanks in the Global Think Tank ranking. Before BCSP, she has worked for the OSCE Mission to Serbia and Montenegro on police reform program. She has been teaching at the Faculty of Political Science in Belgrade and participated in international academic research on policing, peacebuilding, EU and gender. For her accomplishments in the civilian oversight of the security sector and inclusion of youth in security research, she received the award for The Person of the Year 2019 by the OSCE Mission to Serbia.