News Item, 22/01/2014, Bonn / Gütersloh: Revolts and citizen protests around the world will continue

The Bertelsmann Stiftung's Transformation Index (BTI) identifies democratic deficits and a lack of social reforms as the key causes of the ongoing civil protest around the globe

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The worldwide wave of civil protests and revolts from North Africa to Ukraine and Thailand will continue in the years ahead. This is the assessment of the German Bertelsmann Stiftung's latest Transformation Index (BTI), which monitors democratic and economic developments in 129 developing and transformation countries. The experts point to high levels of poverty and social exclusion that remain despite all the gains associated with growth. At the same time, a better-networked and more confident civil society is gaining traction in resistance to the persistent abuses of political power.

In many countries, economic and social exclusion has led to a fundamental questioning of the quality and legitimacy of the governing elites. To be sure, economic performance and average per-capita incomes have risen significantly in the last 10 years. However, many countries have not benefited from this development, and within most states, welfare gains have gone primarily to small, urban middle classes. Particularly in sub-Saharan Africa, mass poverty and social discrimination remain prevalent in virtually all countries.

Moreover, according to the BTI data, a continuing abuse of political power has been evident in many countries, an issue that is not limited solely to authoritarian states. In 59 of 75 surveyed democracies, setbacks have been observed in the last eight years with respect to democratic standards such as fair elections, press freedom, legal certainty and the separation of powers. In Europe, for example, this includes Albania, Bulgaria, Hungary and Romania.

A number of states have shown such substantial setbacks that they no longer meet basic democratic standards. For the first time, the BTI categorizes Russia as an autocracy.

A better-networked and more self-confident civil society is increasing its resistance to mismanagement, autocratic trends and corruption. An improvement in political and social integration is evident in 48 countries, and in a sixth of the countries examined, political parties have become more representative and interest groups have become more cooperative and more deeply interlinked. In India, for example, the number of NGOs has grown to three million.

However, intensifying political and social protest has also fostered instability in many political systems. This was especially evident in the countries of the Arab Spring, where opportunities for political participation have certainly increased, but stability, security and minority rights have at the same time been significantly restricted. Another destabilizing factor has been the increasing influence of religious dogmas on the legal order and state institutions. In the last eight years, the strength of this influence has increased in 25 of the 40 African countries examined in the BTI, above all in Egypt, Libya and Mali. Given the increasing levels of societal polarization, the ongoing deterioration of conflict management in many countries frustrates hopes of improved governance.

Drawing on the findings of the current report, the Bertelsmann Stiftung experts forecast a continuation of the global wave of protests. As long as democratization and inclusive growth are too thinly spread and decision-makers refuse to implement prudent reforms, enduring unrest against poor government leadership can be expected. The BTI also highlights positive examples around the world which, from Uruguay to Ghana, Poland and Taiwan, demonstrate how governments can respond with moderation to conflicts and social tensions as they deliberately promote processes of civil-society participation.

Bertelsmann Stiftung Chairman and CEO Aart De Geus therefore sees a great need for additional learning in designing policy successfully: "We need a new, better and more constructive dialog with protest movements. The tumultuous events of the last two years have taught us that the traditional democratic decision-making mechanisms alone are no longer enough to promote an enduring consensus on the goals of transformation and their concrete strategic design."

About the Transformation Index:
The Bertelsmann Stiftung's Transformation Index (BTI) analyses and evaluates the quality of democracy, a market economy and political management in 129 developing and transition countries. It measures successes and setbacks on the path toward a democracy based on the rule of law and a market economy anchored in principles of social justice. In-depth country reports provide the qualitative data used to assess these countries' development status and challenges, and to evaluate the ability of policymakers to carry out consistent and targeted reforms. The BTI is the first cross-national comparative index that uses self-collected data to measure the quality of governance and provide a comprehensive analysis of countries' policymaking success during processes of transformation.

Downloads

- BTI 2014 at a Glance (155 KB)
- BTI 2014 Global Findings (8.5 MB)

Links

- Transformation Index BTI 2014b
- Secrets of Transformation
- FutureChallenges

Projects

- Transformation Index BTI