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Abstract

Zivilgesellschaft in Südkorea: Besonderheiten und Herausforderungen

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South Korea's civil society developed in a long struggle for a just society and democracy. During this process distinctive perceptions and expectations of civil society were formed, such as high moral standards, an emphasis on the common good and an aversion to special interests. The role and political impact of civil society have increased considerably since democratisation in 1987. Against this background, conservative newspapers in particular have nurtured a bitter debate on the political role of civil society organisations, claiming they ought to maintain political neutrality. Naturally, their real aim is to de-politicise progressive movements in civil society. Hence, this struggle is about political hegemony. In fact, the conservative and the progressive camps find themselves in a clearly antagonistic situation, with almost no institutionalised intermediation. This antagonism is largely an inheritance from the authoritarian regimes of the past, which showed no mercy towards opposition movements, and it hinders the development of one prerequisite of democracy, namely tolerance and acceptance of the Other. Overcoming this antagonism is the greatest challenge that Korean politics and civil society now face.

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