

Conference Report

Dresden Forum for International Politics 2024

sef:

Inclusive Peace Processes? Options and Opportunities of State and Civil Society Actors

Rafael Bohlen

At the Dresden Forum for International Politics 2024, experts from politics, academia, and civil society discussed a subject as timely and pertinent as ever: inclusive peace processes. While the focus centered on options and opportunities of both governmental and civil society actors, one overarching finding emerged from the discussions: Only inclusive peace can be enduring peace. The notion of inclusivity, particularly the inclusion of civil society, must no longer be regarded as a mere add-on to traditional state diplomacy but rather as an indispensable component of peace processes.

Professor Thomas Popp, State Secretary for Digital Administration and Modernisation of Administration in Saxony, welcomed the participants to Dresden. He underscored the importance of international and development cooperation for the State and the longstanding tradition of the Dresden Forum, which has firmly established itself in Saxony. Viola Klein, Deputy Chairperson of the Development and Peace Foundation (sef:), emphasized in her welcome speech the central challenge of an increasing loss of trust - within civil society, between states, and in peace agreements. Formats such as the Dresden Forum, she noted, play a pivotal role in fostering and preserving trust.



Conference kick-off by our two keynote speakers: Dr Gerrit Kurtz (SWP) and Prof Dr Jana Krause (University of Oslo)

Perspectives on Peace Processes: Diplomacy & Civil Society

Dr Gerrit Kurtz, researcher at the German Institute for International and Security Affairs (SWP), focused his keynote presentation on the specific challenges of diplomacy. Kurtz discussed the transformation of civil wars from violent to non-violent conflicts. While peace treaties remain the primary tool for ending wars, Kurtz noted that in regions like the Horn of Africa, peace agreements lacking thorough diplomatic preparation and inclusivity often prove counterproductive, sometimes even leading to increasing conflicts. Conclusively, he emphasized the importance of a reflective and adap-

tive diplomatic approach. Diplomacy must continuously adapt to new circumstances and learn from past mistakes to enhance its effectiveness. Kurtz stressed the need for better diplomatic support for local peace efforts, advocating for the integration of peace processes at both local and national levels. In this context, Kurtz also underscored the importance of neutrality and engagement with various conflicting parties, including those resorting to violence. Finally, addressing how to engage with these groups without compromising the peace process remains one of the most challenging tasks.

During the second keynote of the day, Professor Dr Jana Krause, University of Oslo, emphasized the meaningful inclusion of women as integral part of the peace process. Women must be included not only as participants but as leaders and influencers. She stressed that women's involvement in peace processes tends to lead to more comprehensive, higher-quality, and enduring peace agreements, and is therefore not merely a welcomed addition, but an urgent necessity. Agreements achieved with meaningful participation of women are usually characterized by more detailed provisions and higher rates of implementation. Moreover, women's participation expands the spectrum of knowledge, political agendas, and societal perspectives at the negotiation table. The engagement of women in peace processes should be multi-faceted, encompassing the full range of actors, from activists to government delegations, to ensure that peace negotiations reflect a broad spectrum of societal needs. Continuous engagement and support are crucial to enable and sustain the momentum, sustainability, and effectiveness of women's contributions to peace processes. Ultimately, Krause argued, the participation of women must be adequately supported through international funding.

States as Peace Brokers - Between Geopolitical Tensions and the Claim to Neutrality

The first panel of the day, titled „States as Peace Brokers – Between Geopolitical Tensions and the Claim to Neutrality,“ examined the various roles that states can play as peace mediators and the changing nature of these roles. The panel further discussed means and strategies for negotiations, building trust, and for creating reliable security guarantees. In his opening statement, H.E. Viktor Yengibaryan, the Armenian Ambassador to Germany, focused on ongoing negotiations between Armenia and Azerbaijan, and introduced Armenia's „Crossroads for Peace“ initiative, a project to foster regional connectivity and cooperation to promote peace in the region. In the peace process between Armenia and Azerbaijan, the EU has historically supported Armenia, for example through an observation mission. He added that

despite persisting disagreements regarding border delineation and the establishment of demilitarized zones, Armenia remains confident that a peace agreement will be signed soon.

Barney Afako, Commissioner at the United Nations Commission on Human Rights in South Sudan, underscored the increasing complexity of geopolitical transformations and the evolving nature of conflicts,



Hager Ali holding her opening statement for Panel 1

which often involve cross-border aspects. He emphasized that alongside traditional peace mediation actors, middle powers such as South Africa, Kenya, and Tanzania are increasingly assuming a leading role in regional peace processes. These new actors bring their own interests and visions to the process, enriching and complicating peace efforts. Moreover, additional challenges, including the practice of offering financial incentives for signing agreements, hinder the pursuit of long-term solutions. Afako further emphasized the need for impartial mediation to foster trust.

Hager Ali, Research Fellow at the Leibniz Institute for Global and Regional Studies (GIGA), highlighted that authoritarian regimes often exhibit reluctance towards commitments and transparent decision-making, further complicating negotiations. However, long-term peace agreements should include a path to democratization, necessitating the involvement and empowerment of civil society. Thus, there is a need to gain more insight into decision-making within authoritarian regimes. A deeper understanding can help keep authoritarian regimes at the negotiation table for longer periods and also help to avoid diplomatic missteps.

H. E. Fatima Kyari Mohammed, Permanent Observer of the African Union to the United Nations, emphasized the interconnectedness of the global community and multilateral cooperation as core success factors for peace processes. She stressed the need for nuanced and context-specific approaches, highlighting ownership and leadership as crucial factors.



Panel 1: Chair Prof Dr Dominik Steiger (TU Dresden), H.E. Viktor Yengibaryan (Ambassador of the Republic of Armenia), H.E. Fatima Kyari Mohammed (online, Head of the Permanent Observer Mission of the African Union to the United Nations), Barney Afako (Commissioner, UN Commission on Human Rights in South Sudan and former UN DPPA Senior Mediation Advisor), Hager Ali (Research Fellow, GIGA Hamburg) (f.l.t.r.)

Meaningful participation of all parties can only be achieved through these two elements, and the credibility of the mediator is paramount for the success of the mediation process. H.E. Fatima Kyari Mohammed also emphasized shuttle diplomacy, financial autonomy, and rational media engagement as key components of successful peace processes.

In the second part of the panel, a lively discussion ensued among the panelists and the audience. The panel underscored the necessity of better understanding economic interests and their implications for peace processes. Furthermore, regional actors, such as the African Union, should be more effectively and precisely engaged. Often, it is the regional organizations, particularly due to their institutional structure, power, and local expertise, that play a central role in coordinating states or peace agreements.

Civil Society Participation as a Prerequisite for the Success of Peace Negotiations

The second panel of the day focused on the involvement of civil society organizations in peace processes, a factor that has increasingly been promoted by the international community over the past decade. The aim of these efforts is to bring not only state actors but also representatives of various civil society groups to the negotiating table. Of particular emphasis is the necessity of including women, youth, religious communities, indigenous peoples, and sexual identity minorities. The underlying belief is that for peace to be long-lasting and sustainable, it must be inclusive. However, the pursuit of inclusivity also brings challenges and dilemmas. A group of distinguished experts discussed methods for developing, maintaining, and implementing inclusive peace processes, exploring how civil society organizations contribute to peace processes and how collaboration with governments, international organizations, and other stakeholders can be shaped moving forward.

At the outset of the panel, Shamil Idriss, Chief Executive Officer of the world's largest peace-building organization, Search for Common Ground, reiterated the importance of civil society participation. Referring to Jana Krause's remarks, he emphasized that this inclusion is not an add-on but a genuine necessity. In societies, power is distributed among those with authority and those with influence – including media,



Panel 2, from the left: Shamil Idriss (CEO, Search for Common Ground) together with Martin Dexborg (Gender Advisor, OSCE)

women, tribal leaders, youth, etc. Only through the involvement of these civil society groups can state actors and international organizations gain access and the necessary legitimacy in peace processes. Idriss stated that a healthy and therefore peaceful society is

characterized by intercommunal trust, institutional legitimacy, low levels of violence, agency, and proper resource allocation. Civil society is central to fulfilling these five characteristics. However, it is also critical to note that democratic systems are not necessarily more effective than autocratic ones in addressing these challenges.

With contributions from her own civil society practice, Sandrine Diribe, a member of the National Women's Convention for Peace in Cameroon, underscored Shamil Idriss's remarks. The National

Women's Convention for Peace in Cameroon advocates for a peaceful resolution of violent conflicts in Cameroon. The strength of the Women's Convention lies particularly in ensuring that women from all walks of society are represented in their conferences, thereby pooling individual efforts, which forms the basis for their legitimacy and influence - „if you have a constituency, people have to listen to you.“ As a collective of women, Sandrine Diribe emphasized, they must fight for spaces. The Convention has gained access to government negotiations, for example, by using borrowed conference passes.

Evening Event in Dresden's Frauenkirche (Church of Our Lady)

During the public evening event at the Frauenkirche, titled „Between Fake News and Informing - Social Media in War Reporting,“ intensive discussions took place regarding the role and challenges that social media pose for reporting and news coverage. Panelist and keynote speaker Prof Dr Natascha Zowislo-Grünewald (Universität der Bundeswehr) emphasized that particularly Generation Z increasingly relies on fast-paced platforms like TikTok for gathering information, which extremists know to adeptly exploit. Especially in the context of the Russian war against Ukraine, following Zowislo-Grünewald, it becomes apparent that often the most persuasive narrative, rather than the objective truth, garners the most attention. Democratic parties, as well as public service broadcasters, thus must adapt their information strategies and actively engage in compelling storytelling on social media platforms to reach the audience. Nico Lange, Senior Fellow at the Munich Security Conference (MSC), widely disagreed with these remarks, emphasizing instead the necessity of communicating objective truths, such as the undisputed fact of Russia's war against Ukraine. Michael Beyerunge, studio head in Tel Aviv for the German broadcaster ZDF, reminded of the individual responsibility of each citizen to stay informed. He also pointed out that the quality journalism in public service reporting, often combined with rigorous fact-checking, cannot always be seamlessly transferred to fast-paced social media platforms. Oliver Schenk, Chief of the State Chancellery and State Minister, also highlighted the susceptibility of social media to algorithms that can filter content differently based on regional factors and its influence on e.g., elections.



left to right.: Chair Alexandra Gerlach, Nico Lange (Senior Fellow, MSC), State Minister Oliver Schenk, Prof Dr Zowislo-Grünewald (Universität der Bundeswehr), Michael Beyerunge (Studio Head Tel Aviv, ZDF)

Dr Tetiana Kalenychenko, Director of the European Center for Strategic Analytics and an expert on the role of religion in peace and conflict contexts, collaborates extensively with religious leaders in Ukraine, both as a researcher and a practitioner. She highlights that religious leaders serve as both trusted individuals and bridges to communities. Through her work, she endeavors to leverage this intermediary role, fostering networking and exchange between religious and secular leaders. Kalenychenko further emphasizes the importance of international organizations leveraging existing resources and expertise in Ukraine.

Martin Dexborg, Gender Advisor at the OSCE, expanded on the previous speakers' remarks by discussing the specific initiatives and challenges of the OSCE in international mediation and peacebuilding. Regarding the involvement of religious leaders, Dexborg noted that while the OSCE collaborates with religious leaders in Southeast Europe, it has yet to do so in Ukraine. He acknowledged that cooperation with religious leaders is often hindered by their skepticism towards gender equality. Since 1992, the OSC has actively sought to engage with civil society, highlighted by the regular inclusion of over 100 civil society organizations as observers at annual meetings of the Ministerial Council since 2010. These organizations have the opportunity to meet directly with high-level OSCE decision-makers immediately after conferences, promoting direct exchange of ideas and needs.



Nora Witt (sef:) in conversation with Martin Kobler (Former Head of the United Nation Support Mission in Libya, Iraq and DR Congo, Former German Ambassador to Iraq, Egypt and Pakistan)

However, barriers for smaller NGOs remain high, as they often face funding issues that prevent their participation in international meetings. Dexborg hinted that the OSCE is taking measures to address

these challenges. He further stressed the importance of not only bringing civil society to the table but also actively training them to effectively navigate negotiation situations.

Conversation with Martin Kobler

In the interview, Martin Kobler, reflecting on an impressive four-decade career in diplomatic service, made the practice of peace negotiations tangible for the audience. Drawing from his own biography, Kobler elucidated how various roles and mandates, ranging from national diplomatic commitments to international mediation tasks, shaped his perspective on and approach to peace processes. He highlighted the challenge of navigating the complexity of processes and the multiplicity of actors and their roles.



Summary of the conference by Carolin Wonka (GIZ) and Dr Marcus Kaplan

In this context, he emphasized the importance of maintaining communication channels, enabling dialogues to continue even in difficult times, with the UN playing a key role. Kobler also discussed the crucial role of trust and interpersonal relationships in peace processes – both develop over the course of negotiations but are essential for their success. Informal encounters, such as coffee breaks or shared lunches, are often as important as formal discussions. Ultimately, a mediator may sometimes need to consciously escalate certain negotiation situations to achieve progress – indispensably requiring the trust of the parties involved in the mediator.

Lessons learnt for Germany's Development Cooperation

Carolin Wonka, Sector Programme Peace and Security at Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ), emphasized in her summary the irreplaceable role of civil society in peace processes. She highlighted the work of the Civil Peace Service, particularly in conflict mediation and dealing with traumatized individuals, as a vivid illustration

of how civil society engagement makes concrete contributions to peace. Echoing the earlier keynotes and panels, she pointed to the central importance of women in peace processes, whose participation significantly enhances the quality and sustainability of peace solutions. Regarding the implementation of peace agreements, she underscored that GIZ advocates for a long-term approach. This includes addressing structural causes of conflict as well as preventive actions to counter future conflicts and to shape peace processes in a long-term and sustainable manner.



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The event is partially funded from tax revenue within the budgetary framework approved by the Members of the Saxon State Parliament.

The Development and Peace Foundation (sef) was founded in 1986 on the initiative of Willy Brandt. As a cross-party and non-profit-making organisation, the sef: provides an international high-level forum for shared thinking on urgent peace and development issues.

The reports on the conferences and events of the Development and Peace Foundation (sef:) provide information about the discussions and results in a compact form.

Published by
Development and Peace Foundation (sef:)/
Stiftung Entwicklung und Frieden (sef:)
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Editor
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Basic Design Concept
Pitch Black Graphic Design
Berlin/Rotterdam

Layout
Rafael Bohlen

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