



Tagungsbericht

---

## PEACEptions

*(International conference)*

Berlin, 9. – 11. October 2024

von Prof. Dr. Sabine Kurtenbach

---

FB2-TG-08

### **Report on the international conference PEACEptions (Berlin October 9-11, 2024)**

The PEACEptions project, a collaboration between the GIGA, the FES Department for Global and European Policy based in Berlin, the FES country offices, and selected partners in Colombia, Venezuela, Cameroon, the Philippines, Tunisia, and South Sudan, started in 2019. The aim was to analyse a variety of contexts of violence across conflict topics and manifestations of violence (from open war to state repression) under a peacebuilding perspective. The case studies were selected following four criteria:

- Variation in the manifestations of violence (armed conflict, state repression, organized crime, etc.) to introduce a peacebuilding perspective to contexts that are usually discussed under a mere security perspective. We included three postaccord societies (Colombia, the Philippines, South Sudan), a country with an ongoing war (Cameroon), and two countries (Tunisia and Venezuela) without organized armed conflict but state repression and/or organized crime.
- Diversity of regional contexts (cross area) to include societies with various historical and cultural backgrounds in Latin America, Sud-Saharan Africa, Middle East and North Africa, and Asia.
- Countries with different political regimes (from defective, electoral democracy to closed autocracy) because these differences are theoretically relevant for choices in peacebuilding strategies.
- The willingness of local FES offices and their partners in academia and policy to participate in the project and to work with the shared methodology. In all six countries the participative research process analysed the challenges and opportunities for peacebuilding.

The project is based on a shared methodological and conceptual frame which enables the comparison within subnational cases and across countries. The starting point was an analysis of conflicts prevailing at different scales (national, local). The studies then compiled quantitative and qualitative data based on a concept of peace as a process developed for the project along three core functions of social orders (pillars of peace) whose meaning crosses historical and cultural boundaries: (i) security, i.e. physical integrity; (ii) participation, based on individual and collective human rights; and (iii) informal and formal institutions for constructive conflict transformation. A third and highly innovative methodological element were national surveys on what people think peace is and should be. These surveys (and the focus groups discussions and interviews in different places) provided evidence and insights on what peace means for the people living in these societies.<sup>1</sup>

Between 2021 and 2024 the entire PEACEptions team met virtually eight times to jointly discuss the methodology and the specific case study findings. The conference in October 2024 provided the first opportunity to discuss findings, compare the results and analyse the relevance of the lessons learnt in person.

---

<sup>1</sup> See the short versions of the country studies [Peaceptions](#).

On the first day (09 October 2024) we focussed on the communalities and specifics of the country cases<sup>2</sup> along the following topics:

- Forms and variations of violence at the national and subnational levels: This was our main variable for country selection (see table 1 below).
- Opportunities and limitations for peacebuilding shaped by the political context, i.e. political regime, state-society relations, approaches of internal and external actors.
- Common features and variation in the perceptions of peace.
- Lessons learned for international peacebuilding strategies.

	Colombia	Cameroon	Philippines	South Sudan	Tunisia	Venezuela
Incompatibility.	Government	Government Secession	Government Secession	Government Secession	Government	Government
Status of violence / peace	Post-accord	War	War Partial peace agreement	Post-accord	State repression	State repression
Regime	defective democracy	authoritarian	defective democracy	n.a.	authoritarian	authoritarian
Sources: Incompatibility: UCDP; Status of violence/peace: Country studies; Regime: V-Dem						

After some introductory remarks by the project coordinators Sabine Kurtenbach (GIGA) and Johann Ivanow (FES) the results of the country studies were presented. The **Colombia** team (Luis Trejos and Saruy Tolosa) highlighted the fact that the study took place in a very special moment (2019-2020). The Comprehensive Peace Accord was signed in 2016 but in 2018 a government was elected that was against the peace agreement. While it could not dismiss the accord it slowed down implementation significantly. The empirical results of the study highlighted that the distinct and diverse experiences with and visions of peace, hinge on the different conditions in territories affected by armed conflict showing that peacebuilding needs to be contextualized across countries and subnational territories. Three contexts stand out: (i) conflicts associated with territorial control; (ii) territories where conflict is associated with economic interests (illegal economies); and (iii) conflicts associated with social change. After its election in 2022, the new left-wing government of Gustavo Petro focused on negotiations with other non-state armed actors but did not emphasize the implementation of the peace agreement. The Colombian experience provides three lessons of general importance: First a

<sup>2</sup> Unfortunately, the team of the South Sudan study was not able to join due to the change in the directorship of the South Sudan office and other commitments. However, two of the participants Peter Schuhmann and Marina Peter, both with broad expertise in South Sudan provided important insights.

government that puts peace on the national public agenda is important; second the government needs to have a strategy; and third border regions (here to Venezuela) need special attention.

In some regards (partial peace agreement but ongoing violence) the **Philippines** are similar to the case of Colombia, regarding other topics differences stand out. The team emphasized the fact that while the Philippines do not share land borders with other countries the islands play an important role in the geopolitical contestation between the United States and China which contests maritime borders in the “South China Sea”. The rise of Islamists is another geopolitical factor but also related to a lack of changing context conditions in the countries. Here, the study also provides evidence that peace processes and peacebuilding need a viable political institutional framework. The third post-accord case study is **South Sudan**, and again the main message is that (armed) conflict is the normal, here due to infighting in the government along ethnic lines, the postponement of elections and the lack of implementation of the peace accord and a rather problematic role of external actors.

**Cameroon** is a country in an ongoing war (secession of the Anglophone region) and other armed conflicts (in the Northwest, and Boko Haram) in an authoritarian regime. The team highlighted the need to restrict arms circulation and open spaces for civil society actors. As five years of National Dialogue did not yield any significant results, the inclusion of civil society, traditional rulers and women could make a difference. Although **Tunisia** does not face war or other non-state armed violence, a rise in Islamist terror could be observed between 2016 and 2020 and might have been related to geopolitical developments. According to the team the increase of Salafist groups is related to the lack of social progress despite increased civil liberties in the democratization process. The authoritarian backlash since 2021 and the securitization of migration is highly problematic, most of all for youth. **Venezuela** is another unusual case for a study on peacebuilding even though it is one of the most violent countries in the region due to state repression and organized crime. The country team outlined increasing tensions with neighbouring countries, most of all Colombia, in relation to the high level of emigration due to the political crisis caused by the autocratization and the humanitarian crisis.

Hence although the selection of cases reflected a spectrum of manifold manifestations of violence including but also beyond war and armed conflict, all participants agreed that the peacebuilding perspective was very fruitful. Additionally a series of **cross-cutting issues** are important: the use of conflict resources, migration and displacement as a consequence of war and violence, political regimes and power relations. **Conflict resources** (legal and illegal) are an important tool of financing for non-state actors and open opportunities for enrichment for political, economic, and criminal actors. Drugs for example in Colombia are a case in point. Extortion of the local population in territories controlled by non-state armed actors is another one. Across cases the control of legal resources (oil, land, cattle, minerals) is an important driver of violence. The lack of economic opportunities (e.g. for youth) and the struggle over resources are closely related to **migration and forced displacement**. Three of the countries – Colombia, Venezuela, South Sudan – belong internationally to the group of countries with the

highest population of (forced) migration and internal displacement. In Tunisia a significant part of the population wants to leave the country.

According to the Bertelsmann Transformation Index 2024 ([Transformation Atlas 2024](#)), the **political regimes** in our case studies resemble a mix of defective (Colombia, Tunisia) and highly defective democracies (Philippines) and hard-line autocracies (Cameroon, South Sudan, Venezuela). This is not just an academic distinction as the political regime shapes the possibilities of political actors and civil society to advocate for transformation and change. The respect for human rights and the rule of law – to different degrees deficient in all cases – is also a function of the political regime and its responsibility to operate transparent and accountable.

Overall, the results show that, regardless of the differences in the specific conflict contexts, it is important to understand the interplay between local-level conflicts and conflicts at national level as well as the transnational dynamics in border regions. Across the three aforementioned key elements in society, there are various possibilities for dedicated action aimed at containing violent conflict and developing peacebuilding strategies. A good example of this is a group of mothers in Caracas, Venezuela, who succeeded in brokering what was essentially a successful ceasefire between different gangs. However these local initiatives are also in danger of being swept away by escalation violence from state and non-state actors.

A common problem in all of the countries studied is the deteriorating situation regarding freedom of the press, an issue that restricts the ability to provide independent reporting on violent conflict. This is tied to a question that will arise sooner or later, irrespective of the context, namely the question of how to identify and compensate victims and prosecute the perpetrators. The formal registration of the victims of armed conflict introduced in Colombia underlines the role played by such measures in helping to bring an end to ongoing conflict. In fact, the Colombian peace process is the first in the world to see victims given the opportunity to voice their positions as part of the peace negotiations.

The second day of the conference (organized and financed by the FES) provided a series of possibilities to exchange with representatives of the Federal Foreign Office and the Federal Ministry of Economic Cooperation and Development on the topic of international engagement in and with countries in conflict. In the afternoon the PEACEption project was presented in a public panel discussion on “Wars, Violence Conflicts: How to Build Just Peace in challenging Times?”.

The third day of the conference allowed for a deeper discussion of some cross-cutting topics. **Pau Palop** from DeZiM (Deutsches Zentrum für Migration), who was part of the PEACEption team during the Colombian case study and responsible for drafting the survey questions, presented an evaluation of the surveys regarding the migration aspirations of the respondents. At the core of his presentation stood the question if and how specific perceptions of peace (as personal safety, tranquility, access to rights, or participation and inclusion) influence migration. Based on the surveys in Colombia, Venezuela, and Tunisia. Statistical results are rather inconclusive and context dependent. The only variables influencing

migration across the cases is having children (negative), being under 35 years old (positive), and having been a victim (positive).

GIGA researcher **Julia Köbrich** introduced the topic of the role of religious organisations and peacebuilding. In the country surveys (except for South Sudan where religious actors were deliberately kept out) religious organizations (across different religions) were named as one of the few trustworthy actors working for peace. Based on her research in Sub-Saharan Africa she presented the relation between religious norms, motivations, and costs leading to peace activism. Motivations seem to be the most important part of the equation.

At the end of the topical session, GIGA researcher **Maxin Rubin** provided an input to a topic relevant across all cases – the importance of justice and victim’s rights. After presenting the various mechanisms of transitional justice and transformative justice she presented the paradigmatic case of the Truth Commission in South Africa. While this example set important standards, it also left “unfinished business” such as the lack of reparations and prosecutions. Based on the experiences of the PEACEption project Colombia might be a more promising case and is internationally praised for its transitional justice mechanism combining truth telling, prosecution, and victim’s reparation. But the related mechanisms are very slow, and their success will depend on the implementation of the results. However, the process itself has proven highly important for the victims.

In countries where the International Criminal Court is active, such as Venezuela and the Philippines, there is a lack of willingness on the part of the relevant governments and judicial systems to seek justice for these crimes, since doing so might lead to the prosecution of former members of the government. The recent detention of ex-president Duterte is rather surprising and might be a result of internal political conflicts between the current president Marcos jr. and his vice-president, Durtertes daughter.

In the **concluding session** all participants were very positive on the projects framework and the extremely interesting and innovative results the case studies provided. All teams agreed that they will continue to publish the results and their implications for peacebuilding in their respective countries. Depending on time and resources the idea of an edited volume including cases and cross cutting developments will be advanced. The project website is online and provides open access to the national reports – all following the same structure thus facilitating a comparative evaluation ([six studies](#)). The books on Colombia and Venezuela are also online. During the next weeks infographics and interactive charts based on the surveys will be provided on the GIGA website.

### **How can we translate the findings into peacebuilding strategies?**

Regardless of the given conflict situation, it has proven fruitful to view peacebuilding and peace as an ongoing process. Civil society organisations such as religious communities, which are afforded a comparatively high level of trust in surveys, make a particularly important contribution here. Women play a key role in peacebuilding in various societies. Greater representation of women in peace processes have proven instrumental in building a peace that is more enduring. In some of the contexts studied (e.g. Cameroon), women’s organisations

have played a positive role, be it through the deep impact they have had on armed conflict or by drawing international attention to conflicts in their countries.

The concept of peace as a process has proven useful across all the different contexts of violence and shows that it is not a question of carrying out peace processes in a specific order – first ending the war, then facilitating participation, then transformation. In fact, it is more expedient to find starting points for peacebuilding efforts that are geared towards the circumstances on the ground and factor in the perceptions of all those affected.

The project's **visibility** has been ensured through its online presence via the PEACEptions website, where all six studies have been published and downloaded by various stakeholders. In the months following the conference, there has been significant interest in the project from both academia and policymaking. Experts from diverse fields have reached out to FES and GIGA to inquire about PEACEptions' findings.

The project's **continuation** is planned at the local level, including in the Philippines, with results being shared with decision-makers and policymakers across various regions. The goal is to apply insights on successful conflict transformation to protracted conflicts. In other regions, such as Colombia, PEACEptions has inspired further academic research in conflict transformation. Additionally, project experts have conducted interviews and contributed articles to local newspapers, presenting key findings to a wider audience.



Programme  
PEACEptions Incoming  
8-12 October, 2024

Venue: **Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung Haus 2**, 6th Floor, Hiroshimastraße 28, 10785 Berlin  
Hotel: **Hotel Motel One Berlin-Tiergarten**, An der Urania 12/14, 10787 Berlin

**Day 1 – October 8, 2024**

All day      Arrival of the international participants in Berlin and transfer to the hotel Motel One Berlin-Tiergarten

**Day 2 – October 9, 2024**

09:00am      Arrival at FES, registration and coffee- Room 6.09, 6<sup>th</sup> floor  
09:30am      Presentation and discussion of the cases Colombia, the Philippines, South Sudan  
11:00am      Coffee break  
11:15am      Presentation and discussion of the cases Cameroon, Tunisia, Venezuela  
12:30pm      Lunch break and leisure time – Foyer 6<sup>th</sup> floor  
02:00pm      Discussion focusing on common features and variation in the perceptions of peace and lessons learned for international peacebuilding strategies  
Input: Prof. Sabine Kurtenbach on „Political Regimes, War Economies and Power Relations“  
05:00pm      End of Day and dinner at restaurant “Ristorante Tra Di Noi”

**Day 3 – October 10, 2024**

09:00am      Arrival at FES, registration and coffee - Room 6.09, 6<sup>th</sup> floor  
09:30am      Meeting and discussion with representatives of the German Federal Ministry of Foreign Affairs (AA) and presentation of case studies, common features and lessons learned

- Ms. Anka Feldhusen, Director for Civilian Crisis Prevention and Stabilization at AA



- 11:00am Coffee break
- 11:30am Meeting and discussion with representative of the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) and presentation of case studies, common features and lessons learned
  - Mr. Peter Wolfrum, Deputy Head of Division “Peace and Security” at BMZ
- 01:00pm Lunch break and leisure time – Room 1.01, 1<sup>st</sup> floor
- 03:00pm PEACEptions Conference at FES (separate program) – Room K2, ground floor
- 05:30pm End of Day and dinner at FES (with conference guests) – Foyer K2, ground floor

#### **Day 4 – October 11, 2024**

- 09:00am Arrival at FES, registration and coffee - Room 6.09, 6<sup>th</sup> floor
- 09:30am Input and discussion: *“Perceptions of Peace and Migration - A comparative view on perceptions of peace and violence, human rights, institutions”*
  - Mr. Pau Palop-Garcia, DeZIM, Berlin
- 10:45am Coffee break
- 11:00am Input and discussion: *“Patterns of Dialogue and Negotiations”*
  - Ms. Julia Köbrich, GIGA on religious organizations and churches, Hamburg/Utrecht.
- 12:30pm Lunch break and leisure time- Room 1.01, 1<sup>st</sup> floor
- 02:00pm Input and discussion: *“The Importance of Justice and Victim’s Rights”*
  - Ms. Maxine Rubin, GIGA
- 03.30pm Closing session, reflection and way forward
- 05.00pm End of Day

#### **Day 5 – October 12, 2024**

- All day Transfer to the airport and departure of the international participants

## **FES Contacts**

### **Johann Ivanov**

Policy Advisor – Peace and Security

Mobile: +49 162 7835502

[johann.ivanov@fes.de](mailto:johann.ivanov@fes.de)

### **Tiziana Talocci**

Communication and Organization Coordinator

Mobile: + 49 173 7533092

[tiziana.talocci@fes.de](mailto:tiziana.talocci@fes.de)