

Civil Society Dialogue Network

Policy Meeting

Global Peace Index 2014: Peace, Institutions and Assessing Conflict Risk

Monday, 23 June 2014

Meeting Report

The meeting, which took place in the framework of the Civil Society Dialogue Network (CSDN), discussed the findings of the 2014 Global Peace Index (GPI) Report and their relevance for those working on peace and conflict.

The presentation of the [GPI Report](#) by Steve Killelea, Executive Chairman of the Institute for Economics & Peace, was followed by comments from Heino Van Houwelingen, Division for Conflict Prevention, Peacebuilding and Mediation Instruments, EEAS and from Sonya Reines-Djivanides, Director Brussels Headquarters, Search for Common Ground. After the comments, the floor opened for discussion with all participants.

GPI methodology

The GPI defines peace as absence of violence and the absence of fear of violence; it measures both the internal and external peacefulness of countries. It ranks 62 countries using 22 indicators which measure domestic and international conflict, societal safety and security and militarization and are weighted on a 1-5 scale.

Main findings of 2014 GPI

1. Slight deterioration in the global level of peace for the seventh year in a row

The deterioration is primarily driven by increases in terrorist activity, the number of internal and external conflicts taking place, deaths from internal conflicts and number of refugees and displaced people. Counteracting these falls were improvements regarding political terror, reduction in the number of armed service personnel and number of homicides.

2. Country rankings

Syria displaces Afghanistan as the world's least peaceful nation; Iceland maintains its status as the most peaceful. Georgia shows the largest improvement; South Sudan has the largest deterioration. Peace within Europe has improved and it remains the most peaceful region in the world; South Asia is again the least peaceful region.

3. Economic cost of violence

The cost is estimated to be US\$9.8 trillion or 11.3% of Gross World Product in 2013 which is a 3.8% increase from 2012. It is measured by adding the costs of thirteen dimensions of violence including violent crime, GDP loss from conflict, terrorism, UN Peacekeeping and deaths from internal and external conflict.

4. Seven year trends in peace (since 2007)

Overall, 53 countries improved their ranking and 103 declined. The greatest deterioration took place in the MENA and Sub-Saharan African regions. The major reason for deterioration of levels of peace is a decline in the safety and security indicators (5.3% decline). In addition, the indicators for domestic and international conflict declined (4.7% decline), whereas the militarisation indicators did not change.

Pillars of Peace

This framework has been developed to conceptualise the key societal structures that are prevalent in the most peaceful countries in the world. They are not meant to describe causality but rather the different elements that act as a socio-system and that reinforce each other and determine the resilience of a country to violence and conflict. The medium term momentum of the system is important as this determines the trajectory of a society. The Pillars of Peace were derived from the statistical analysis of over 3,700 different datasets.

Resilience describes the attitudes, institutions and structures that a society needs to adjust and recover from external shocks. Countries that are included in the GPI can be at risk of increased levels of violence for some time, their level of resilience determines the ability to cope with external pressures.

The pillars are well-functioning government, equitable distribution of resources, free flow of information, sound business environment, high level of human capital, acceptance of the rights of others, low levels of corruption and good relations with neighbours.

Risk tool

The risk tool uses a risk and opportunity approach to assess country risk. It defines opportunity as improved positive peace which may result in a likelihood of higher long term rates of GDP growth and improved human satisfaction. The tool defines risk as increased violence which may result in higher likelihood of drops in GDP and decreasing human satisfaction.

This is based on the evidence that the distribution of GDP per capita growth since 1996 is much higher in those countries that have also improved positive peace. In addition, it was found that the most peaceful countries consistently tended to have lower variability in inflation.

By assessing levels of violence and understanding and measuring the elements that contribute to positive peace, the risk tool can identify what constitutes either risk or opportunity for the country concerned. The analysis aimed at determining the risk of small to medium drops in peace rather than predicting large scale conflicts. The outcome may have been different if it had tried to predict large-scale decreases in peace.

As a result of risk tool analysis 2014, the following countries are most at risk of small to medium deteriorations in peace: Zambia, Haiti, Argentina, Chad, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Nepal, Burundi, Georgia, Liberia and Qatar.

Comments and questions on the GPI and risk tool

There are several striking findings of the GPI including the fact that Georgia and Burundi are countries that experienced the largest improvements in their level of peacefulness and at the same time they are among the countries most likely to witness a deterioration of peace. This demonstrates the need for a long-term perception and analysis of specific country contexts.

The assessment of what constitutes positive peace was mentioned as specifically useful as it allows policy makers and peacebuilders to assess their priorities and support activities accordingly. In addition, the value of measuring levels of peace by country and region over a longer period of time was highlighted several times as explanations for dynamics and evolutions of conflict can often be found at the regional level.

The challenges of supporting positive peace point to the need to reinforce different actors, including the responses of governments, private sector and civil society. The questions of who has the capacity to address which of the different pillars for peace was raised as well as the need for long-term support to contribute to the strengthening of the different elements.

It was noted that the report also demonstrates possible discrepancies between levels of peacefulness at home and the exportation of violence via arms transfers, with USA, Russia, Germany, China and France as the biggest weapon exporters.

For the compilation of this year's report, there was a certain cut-off date earlier in the year so the most recent developments, for instance in the Ukraine – Russia conflict, are not accounted for.

Indicators and methodology

The GPI is based only on quantitative indicators so there is a need to complement the findings with additional qualitative data. For instance, quantitative work can support the understanding of the political economy of violence and assess who may be benefitting but will always need to be supported with qualitative work for a more detailed assessment.

The issue of interpretation of indicators (for instance the number of armed service personnel) was raised. The set of 22 indicators provide a framework to explore the abstract concept of positive peace. Individual indicators are not meant to provide an interpretation or value judgment, but rather aim to demonstrate that certain countries are able to function with a lesser number of armed service personnel or jails.

Gender is accounted for in the index but it would be desirable to include a measurement for domestic violence which is difficult to find. At this stage there is nothing that could be used as a reliable indicator of levels of domestic violence.

On the basis of the risk tool, full democracies and authoritarian regimes are most stable while hybrid regimes and flawed democracies are the most prone to conflict. However, authoritarian regimes cling to power, which often results in increased levels of violence when their existence is threatened.

Terrorism

The definition of terrorism and the need to critically assess this definition as well as current responses to terrorism were repeatedly raised. Related to this, the need to address state-sponsored terrorism and to consider other people's perception of terrorism was highlighted.

The GPI uses the definition of the National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (START) at the University of Maryland which does not provide a clear delineation of what constitutes terrorism opposed to e.g. insurgency. There was a general agreement that there is a need to better understand the factors that drive terrorism. In many cases they are based on grievances that need to be addressed. In relation to this, it was mentioned that apart from the definition of terrorism, the problem lies with the automatic counter-terrorism responses which leave no room for a closer analysis of the factors that motivate people to join specific groups.

In terms of accounting for terrorist attacks, the GPI records them according to where they take place rather than the context from which a particular group originates. Only battlefield deaths (i.e. deaths of national armed personnel) are accounted for in the country of origin.

Translating analysis into action

The GPI is a very valuable resource for policy-makers. In the case of the EU, this includes EU officials dealing with foreign and security policy, CSDP missions, development or trade policy. The focus on opportunities for supporting peace is particularly useful as it enables external actors to assess which initiative should be prioritised and supported.

There are a number of factors that demonstrate the impact of the GPI. The most important one is that policy-makers and civil society representatives are aware of the concept of positive peace and comfortable using the term. The fact that positive peace goes beyond stopping a conflict is understood.

The GPI does not attempt to identify what could be considered trigger points for policy action to address conflict risks. Countries that are listed in the risk tool analysis have the potential for their peacefulness to decline but whether this will happen and when external action should take place is not included in the analysis.

European Neighbourhood Policy is arguably similar to the eight pillars of peace as it is a systematic approach to building institutions and supporting societies. This approach has been criticised by some who would rather conduct more ad-hoc diplomatic relations.

The EU is currently in the final stages of developing an early warning mechanism that should close the gap between analysis and action. It takes an upstream approach and looks at ten categories that make countries resilient to conflict or that may constitute weakness for the capacity of dealing with conflict similar to the pillars of peace. The early warning mechanism seeks to address the following questions:

- Where is the current risk of conflict high?
- Where is the risk either reducing or increasing?
- What could happen where the risk is reducing or increasing, are there specific opportunities for promoting prevention of conflict or avoiding further deterioration?
- What could the EU do to address the risks identified and support opportunities for conflict prevention?

To answer the first two questions, a risk scan has been developed which includes a number of indicators that are assessed based on analysis available and internal and external resources. The second two questions require an in-depth assessment which will be carried out for a limited number of countries selected on the basis of the outcome of the risk scan. In this respect, the EU's approach is similar to that of the Institute for Economics & Peace in that it identifies the risks, prioritises specific situation which are then analysed in more detail to develop appropriate responses.