

April 2, 2k19 | 10.00 / 18.00

# BOLOGNA PEACEBUILDING FORUM 2K19

## SHIFTING ROLES, CHANGING RULES.

Johns Hopkins

School of Advanced International Studies in Europe (SAIS Europe)

Bologna, Italy | Via Andreatta, 3

about  
ap



AP is a non-profit association whose mission is to promote conditions that can enable the resolution of conflict, reduce violence and contribute to a durable peace across Europe, its neighbourhood and the world. The overall vision of AP is of a world where conflicts can be transformed—through the research of solutions that are innovative, non-violent and sustainable—into opportunities to promote cooperation that is based on an open and honest confrontation.

## event report

### summary

On April 2nd, 2019, AP organized the first Bologna Peacebuilding Forum (BPF), which took place at the Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies in Bologna. The BPF gathered dozens of scholars and practitioners working in different sectors to discuss the changing relation between civil societies and political institutions in building peace. **The main issues discussed can be summed up as follows:**

■ There is currently a tendency on the part of international institutions to co-opt peacebuilding activities: peacebuilders must be also vigilant to maintain valuable connections with local practices and micro-level interactions, guarding against the risk that their work becomes hijacked by bureaucracy.

■ Scholars and practitioners risk overestimating the capacity of civil society organizations, while underestimating the need for support, and undervaluing the importance of local networks, which are critical to continued survival.

■ Evidences show that grassroots peacebuilding and reconciliation are critical to preventing radicalized and extremist groups (or their return), like Daesh.

■ Funding for women-led or -oriented peacebuilding is more available today, but remains difficult to obtain due to securitisation and risk-aversion on part of traditional donors. There is a need to find allies within key institutions and work closely with them to boost the voice of women in this field.

■ Two key factors contribute to determining European support for peacebuilding: choices from top political level and choices from the bureaucracy. These are nevertheless constrained by national and European systems of governance, which can have different priorities

ranging from conflict-related policy to development policy.

■ Official aid for peacebuilding grew by 79% from 2007 to 2016. However, despite rising interest in funding peacebuilding initiatives, more and more money is going to the public and private sector, to the detriment of NGOs and CSOs. This increasing marginalization of NGOs and CSOs seems to reflect a lack of a genuine political constituency for peacebuilding.

■ Local municipalities can play a leading role in acting as role models on a national scale in three main areas: cooperation and development around bottom-up initiatives, environmental policies, and addressing the lack of debate at the national, European and international level.

■ Peacebuilding still lags far behind as an Italian national priority, being seen as less important than migration, agriculture, health, education and other areas. This is also due to a limited understanding of the sector by policy-makers.

■ Refugees and other vulnerable groups, which peacebuilding often tries to support, have to be respected and helped, but never pitied: empowering them is the sole way of turning them into concrete assets. These groups can also play a pivotal role to promote peacebuilding in the aftermath of a conflict. ■

## about the bologna peacebuilding forum



On April 2nd, 2019, AP organized the first Bologna Peacebuilding Forum, which took place at the Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies in Bologna.

The Bologna Peacebuilding Forum (BPF) is a framework for dialogue and exchange between scholars and practitioners working on conflict resolution, peacebuilding and development. This year, the event explored the changing relation between civil societies and political institutions in building peace. It was a success in terms of participation, quality of the interventions, and networking opportunities. The BPF will be repeated annually.

This year, the event was divided into three sessions.

The first session, entitled “The role of CSOs in building peace – actors and rules revised”, assessed how the space for doing peacebuilding has changed in the last few years. Particular attention was dedicated to how civil society organizations (CSOs) are adjusting to changes.

The second panel, entitled “Political Institutions and CSOs: a proficuous axis for peace?”, analysed if CSOs and political institutions – from local authorities to regional organizations – can establish a proficuous axis for peace. The debate was kicked off by a presentation of the report “Supporting peacebuilding in a time of change”, by the European Centre for Development Policy Management, which focused on how official support to peacebuilding has evolved in different European countries.

Finally, the last session, “Peacebuilding in the Age of Identity Politics”, elaborated on how peacebuilding can benefit from the encounter of different cultures, and the participation of refugees in particular.

This report presents the main issues discussed at the Forum and is organized following the structure of the sessions.



## SESSION 1

# The role of CSOs in building peace

actors and rules revised



■ Guiding questions: Is the space for doing peacebuilding changing? If yes, how? And how are CSOs in particular adjusting to the changes?



At the beginning of the Forum, we launched an instant poll among the participants asking: Is the space for civil society organizations working for peace shrinking globally? 53% of the respondents said no, while 47% yes. The audience was therefore fairly evenly split and this trend confirmed the relevance of digging deeper on this topic.

**Francesco Strazzari** (Sant'Anna School of Advanced Studies) kicked off the first session facilitated by Bernardo Venturi (AP), describing how **"in the 1980's grassroots diplomacy was seen as a subversive practise, a dissident and a challenge to state agendas"**. In the 1990's, the end of the Cold War and the Agenda for Peace by then UN Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali paved the way to a variety of peacekeeping initiatives and new hope for peace operations. According to Strazzari, this period was also defined as the liberal era, characterised by democratic free market order with state-building as a model. This era was characterised by a "NGO-isation of society", with NGOs often acting as intermediaries between multilateral organisations and local ones.

Yet, since 2015 the pendulum has swung back the other way, towards populism and sovereignism on the part of states and governments. This has led to dual effects of stifling NGOs and of "NGOs that were once allies of the EU becoming increasingly adversarial". Currently, there is a tendency of international institutions to co-opt peacebuilding activities. Therefore, Strazzari thought that **peacebuilders must be also vigilant to maintain valuable "connections with local practices" and micro-level interactions, guarding against the risk that their work becomes "hijacked by bureaucracy"**. Furthermore, peacebuilders must be careful to distinguish between passing legislation or striking a deal – as in Colombia to end the conflict with the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) – and the actual implementation of these accords, which often does not follow.



**Oliver Richmond** (University of Manchester) described the transformation of civil society and how this accelerated in second half of the 20th century, spurred by the UN and the gradual resolution of the Cold War, and moving beyond its previous "analog" advocacy methods of letter writing and local activism. Richmond used three "lenses" of analysis: methodological liberalism, methodological nationalism, and methodological everyday. Policymakers aim to align these three types of methodological approaches to produce knowledge about peace, security and development in the international order.

Methodological liberalism is based on law and the regulation of power. This takes the form of both intervention and state governance reflected in the post-war frameworks that emerged with multilateralism. Richmond recalled the fact that in the 1990's there was a dense network of CSOs, but this was contrasted by the return of methodological nationalism. Methodological nationalism prioritised national interest and connected the production of knowledge and frameworks of intervention to maintain and stabilise a territorially sovereign order. In this framework, the states had significant power and were pushing back civil society networks, reforms and human rights. Consequently, CSOs lost momentum during the following decade. In the 2000's, indeed, digitalisation facilitated dissemination of CSO agendas across different countries, but at the cost of undermining, in some cases, funding agreements with local governments.

The third approach is the methodological everyday, which is characterised by the "context, set of conditions, strategies, tactics and agencies, which are politicised in the everyday context and which provide frameworks for thinking about civil society". A key element of this approach is "the power of the weak or subaltern", which is "not necessarily a 'good' form of power". Methodological everyday represents the capacity and



SESSION 1

The role  
of CSOs  
in building  
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actors  
and rules  
revised



limitations of CSOs to delineate the political space of an emerging state by pushing back external coercive power. Everyday state formation illustrates the internal tensions of contemporary state-building: without reconciliation across multiple scales – from local to global – the complex interactions of structural, governmental and subaltern power will tend to build societal fragility into emerging state structures. According to Dr Richmond, it is currently possible to observe “a pushback on peacebuilding and democracy, and a rise in authoritarian capitalism, with a less interventionist state, less interested in multilateral cooperation”.

Richmond also highlighted that civil society is “poorly matched with methodological nationalism” due to its power being “low-key and long-term”, which is misaligned with fickle donors. Additionally, he said, **“we overestimate capacity [of CSOs] and underestimate the need for support, as well as undervaluing the importance of local networks”**, which are critical to continued survival. Against this backdrop, perhaps we ask too much of methodological everyday subaltern power, which calls for an expansion of rights that states are not willing to grant.

**Martina Pignatti Morano** (Un Ponte Per...) started her presentation by discussing the work on peacebuilding implemented by her organization in Iraq. **“Grassroots peacebuilding and reconciliation are critical to preventing the (return of) groups like Daesh”**, she said, adding that, in fact, “the rumour mill is a big problem” that grassroots organisations are trying to counter on social media, to calm tensions. To show how CSOs can address this, she shared an example, where a partner organization to Un Ponte Per..., which was led by young Iraqi activists, were able to contrast false reports of a bomb attack in Mosul carried out by Daesh. This type of mis-information can happen a lot in Iraq, and be very detrimental to social cohesion and long-term peace, as it sows panic and distrust.

Pignatti Morano argued that over the years “the EU’s approach has shifted from being value-driven towards being guided by ‘principled pragmatism’”, as it hardens its stance on migration and is readier to channel weapons to favoured actors in ongoing conflicts. When it comes to the Italian context, she stated that pilot programmes of Italian “civil peace corps service” lack seriousness and structural political support: the first deployed groups, between 2017 and 2018, were in conflict areas, but new funding for the next group still pending, notwithstanding the fact that the funds were approved. Overall, work is still needed to grow peacebuilding in Italy, for instance by crafting early warning systems for emerging conflict, and working within a Do No Harm approach.



**Sanne Tielemans** (former Political Adviser to the EU Special Representative for Bosnia-Herzegovina) focused her reflections on the role of women in peace processes. Firstly, she highlighted how UN Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325 on women, peace and security, adopted in 2000, has been “a very important step and positive development”, but at the same time there has been continued male dominance in peacebuilding and multilateral bodies, from all-male panels to mediation processes. Tielemans said that there remains “limited discourse on inclusive peacebuilding” and an “unwillingness to look inward at our own practices”, as highlighted by the fact that feminist international relations are traditionally disregarded by most programmes, although this started to partially change in the last few years.

Challenges still abound, however. Funding for women-led or -oriented peacebuilding is more available today, although it remains difficult to obtain due to securitisation and risk-aversion on part of traditional donors. In fact, money is often earmarked for countering violent extremism activities and not for inclusionary measures. Also, there is still a tendency to treat women and women-led organizations as passive agents, which are in need of training, or education. Instead, Ms Tielemans noted, **“women should not be ‘educated’ on UNSCR 1325, but informed on how they can use it!”**.

Additionally, there is still a threat of violence around women in peacebuilding, whether physical or verbal or emotional, perpetrated by both individuals and organisations. Tielemans concluded that there is a need to “find allies within key institutions and work closely with them to boost the voice of women in this field”.

During the question time, Oliver Richmond discussed a question about American donors in Iraq. He explained that it is hard to imagine an uncontroversial relationship



SESSION 2

## Political Institutions and CSOs: a proficuous axis for peace?



between US donors and Iraqi grassroots efforts, but perhaps it could improve over time. This is also connected to donor dependence, an issue that is becoming more prominent: NGOs are at times reticent of engaging for fear of appearing partisan, but they also cannot survive without such funding. NGOs are also calling for more room to go beyond methodological liberalism and bring in conservative actors, but international organizations balk at potential illiberalism, leading to growing disagreements. Concerning the attitude of CSOs, he mentioned that in some contexts, long, slow, quiet work might be best, rather than the more confrontational, speedy and aggressive '90s approach. ■

This session, chaired by Valentina Bartolucci (AP), was kicked off by **Andrew Sherriff**, European Centre for Development Policy Management, who presented the research report "Supporting peacebuilding in a time of change" (2018).

Sherriff argued that two key factors contribute to determining European support for peacebuilding: choices from top political level and choices from the bureaucracy. Peacebuilding is defined as the establishment of viable political, socio-economic and cultural institutions potentially addressing the root causes of conflicts. However, it is evident that these factors, notwithstanding their importance, are part of a bigger structure. Both the choices from the bureaucracy and the top political levels are constrained by the national and European system of governance, which can have different priorities ranging from conflict-related policy to development policy. Two elements, in turn, influence the national and European governance level: the geopolitical era in which we live, and domestic political culture.

Sheriff underlined how official aid for peacebuilding grew by 79% from 2007 to 2016, with the US, the UK, Germany and the EU institutions being the main contributors. Another equally important trend, however, is related to the direction taken by the influxes of money. Despite rising interest in funding peacebuilding initiatives, more and more money is going to the public and private sector, to the detriment of NGOs and CSOs. As such, the practice of peacebuilding has increasingly become dependent on a limited number of countries, making it vulnerable to political shifts. Ultimately, the growing marginalization of NGOs and CSOs seems to reflect a lack of a genuine political constituency for peacebuilding.

**Marco Lombardo** (Municipality of Bologna) talked about the role of a city like Bologna in promoting peace. He presented the city of Bologna as perfectly suited for peacebuilding events and with a rich historical tradition, for instance with the oldest University in the Western world, and the Freedom from Slavery Act, the "Liber Paradisus", a law text promulgated in 1256 by the Municipality of Bologna which proclaimed the abolition of slavery and the release of "slaves" (servi della gleba).

He then moved to talk about the three main areas where local municipalities can play a leading role in acting as role models on a national scale:

- Cooperation and development on bottom-up initiatives, made possible by the smaller and more dialogue-prone nature of municipalities;
- Environmental policy areas, paramount to tackling climate change-led migratory movements, which will increasingly be a source of instability in the near future; and
- Addressing the lack of debate at the national, European and international level on pressing topics such as the Global Compact of Migration.

Lombardo highlighted that cities like Bologna and others in Italy have created a network aimed at welcoming migrants despite the recent refusal of the Italian government to sign the UN agreement on migrations, the so-called Migration Compact. Not only is there still room for municipalities in the promotion of peacebuilding, but their role is potentially essential – serving as antidotes to the state's isolation and apathy. This is why cooperation is so important: local networks may end up being more efficient than nation states in prioritizing peacebuilding and promoting the development of the constituency Sheriff spoke about.



SESSION 2

## Political Institutions and CSOs: a proficuous axis for peace?



**Mattia Grandi** (Sant'Anna School of Advanced Studies) focused his presentation on Italian international cooperation and peacebuilding. Recent figures reveal that funding for international cooperation has slightly increased in the last five years. Yet, a large part of these funds went to emergencies in Syria, Afghanistan and Libya.

Peacebuilding still lags far behind as an Italian national priority, being seen as less important than migration, agriculture, health, education and other areas.

Grandi wondered if the rise in violence over the last 15 years reflects the undeniable need for peacebuilding and what factors might explain the lack of its appeal in Italy. He firstly mentioned a lack of credibility of NGOs and CSOs, which are too often seen as representing foreign governments against local state interest, and therefore not trusted by the public opinion. Then, he underlined the greater efficiency of the practice of peacebuilding at the local as opposed to the national level, which makes it difficult to promote it as an investment at the national level, where considerations about health and education are consistently deemed more important.

Grandi concluded that is undeniable how roles have been shifting and rules have been changing, but gaining appeal should be prioritized if a CSOs constituency is to be strengthened. ■

SESSION 3

## Peacebuilding in the age of identity politics



■ **Guiding question: How does peacebuilding benefit from the encounter of different cultures, and from the work of people with a direct experience of conflict?**

The last session, chaired by Raffaella Del Sarto (Johns Hopkins University School for Advanced International Studies) gave space to the role of refugees in peace processes in the current time of identity politics.

**Ana de Vega** (UNHCR) described how the number of refugees and Internally Displaced People (IDPs) is growing globally. In 2017, there were 68.5 million worldwide, and 25.4 IDPs. More than half of those refugees (57%), contrary to what many people would expect, come from only three countries: South Sudan, Afghanistan and Syria.

Originally meant to be a temporary organization, UNHCR ended up being a permanent point of reference acting on a global scale up to this day. UNHCR takes specific steps to promote peacebuilding in the aftermath of a conflict:

- Support for basic safety and security;
- Support for political processes;
- Support for basic services;
- Support for restoring core government functions;
- Support for economic revitalization in countries of origin and asylum.

De Vega also highlighted that the average time a refugee spends in exile in a new country is seventeen years: planning for the present is as important as planning for the future, and should not be underestimated.

For UNHCR Italy, there are different levels of engagement with refugees: informing, connecting, involving, communicating and empowering. For successful integration, advocacy-related activities are critical, such as the "PartecipAzione" programme, developed as part of the partnership between UNHCR and a wide network of NGOs. The aim is ensuring reliable information is available to people, fighting the problem represented by fake news while encouraging greater participation and engagement by the part of local communities. The slogan is simple: think globally, act locally. A gradual but incremental process is paramount to ensuring the integration of refugees in the social fabric of the different cities.



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SESSION 3

# Peacebuilding in the age of identity politics



**Mervat Sayegh** (Cultural Mediator from Aleppo) focused her speech on the challenges she and her family encountered after having fled Aleppo, Syria, for Italy, where they now live. Working as a cultural mediator in educational contexts, Sayegh was particularly interested in stressing the difficulty of learning a new language and adapting to a radically different context.

Her life story is a success, but it can be hard for refugees to get rid of that label and be considered for what they are: ordinary people with ambitions, qualities, hopes, fears and dreams. Asked about the extent to which the war experience had and still has an impact on her, Sayegh was optimistic and emphasized how excessively passive dependence on assistance can do more harm than good to refugees.

Her experiences were tough, but ultimately contributed to making her a different, grown-up and better person. Refugees have to be respected and helped but never pitied: empowering them is the sole way of turning them into concrete assets. ■

AP is fully satisfied with the outcome of the first Bologna Peacebuilding Forum. The BPF 2019 was a clear success in terms of participations, of quality of the interventions and of networking opportunities. We look forward to developing the initiative at the 2020 edition of the BPF, so to keep creating ideas and networks for peace and cooperation.



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