Launch of Peace Monitoring Report 2

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An International Perspective

Speaking notes

by

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German Peace Report

Dear Ladies and Gentlemen,

Collegues and Friends,

Thank you very much for inviting me a second time on this occasion, the launch of the NI Peace Monitoring Report No. 2. Honestly, I was not so sure about a German giving an international perspective here again – for many reasons...

But then of course, I did not want to disappoint the invitors – Paul Nolan and Tony McCusker of the CRC – and I am very glad now to be here to convey my most heartfelt congratulations to this indeed, second edition of a remarkable project!

I could browse through the main body of the Report only superficially, since I received it just last night – read a bit more carefully though through the Ten Key Points.

There will be others in the room, much more qualified and eligible, to comment on the Report itself. „That's not your job" said Paul at the point of invitation – and then he attributed me a different task which I will come to in a second.

One short pre-remark may be allowed: Compared to Report Number One I find this years' key points providing an even more indepth, and perhaps more critical insight into the underlying factors which still drive the ambiguities of the NI peace process. One crucial question mentioned there: How do we know whether the analysed positive or negative trends are *stronger* is a question of both, statistical measurement *and* of political judgement. This is not trivial. Since both, quantitative and qualitative assessments tend to develop a life of their own if not integrated by an adequate normative guidance. But the Report has it.

This leads me to my actual task here.

To make things easier for me (?), Paul gave me three, actually five, questions (and about ten minutes):

1) How is the NI peace process now being seen in Europe? Did the flags protest get much coverage?

2) How does its trajectory fit with peace processes elsewhere? Now that GFA is 15 years on, has NI passed a longevity test?

3) The measurement of peace processes. How does this project fit with developments elsewhere?

(1) Perception of NI pp and flag protest

I mean not to disenchant you, but most of the time you would literally hear or read little or nothing anymore about NI, at least in the major German speaking media (as opposed to 15, 10 or even 5 years ago, and that is probably true for many other European media) – which could be taken as „no news is good news", but there is a „but": among peace and conflict researchers the lack of success stories being told must, selfcritically also be seen as a result of too little academic analysis into positive trends in peacemaking – as opposed to the reverse, negative trends and bad developments. I guess, it's partly that catastrophical hype, alarmism or what you may call it, embracing us all.

In accordance, yes, *the flag protest* did make it to the news, and received comparatively (and more as the Short Strand events in 2011) broad coverage for a few days early this year– always being linked with the anxious question: Will NI go back to wider scale violence again? In the better informed and scholarly fed media like the left-liberal weekly Die ZEIT, they tried and reached for some deeper explanation, such as about the alienation present in parts of the loyalist communities. They would even call it „working-class loyalism" and mention a lack of political leadership, although social division as a trigger for conflict while not being addressed by politicians is normally not a very highly appreciated topic – no matter be it NI, the make-up of the EU or German societal structures themselves. Conclusions on how the events in NI should

be regarded where kind of in between: „Diese Politik der Symbole ist gewiss besser als Gewalt und offener Bürgerkrieg, aber auch sie birgt Risiken." (ZEIT of 8.1.2013). A few days later, the flags were out of the news again.

Does this imply anything for a project like the Monitoring Report?
Three recommendations I would like to drop for later discussion:

A) Why not flag the positive trends, the achievements in NI more confidently, take them not for granted, and explain why they are happening – that is important domestically, and abroad, to make lessons visible.

B) Try and provide an even more profound criticism and understanding of why things go wrong, – even if it hurts.

How to combine A) and B) is probably the *art of smart, and not necessarily always dispassionate monitoring,* since they may often appear as two sides of the same coin: for instance, praising a positive role of the NI institutions set up after the GFA, should not go without describing the lack of a workable experience on the grounds; or the ambiguous role of symbols: more often expressing negative aspects, I would say, by carrying outdated perceptions, they can, however, exceptionally be used for mind opening breakthroughs...

C) Something very practical: Improve links to foreign media, radio stations in particular; make the Report findings available for interview contacts etc. internationally. Not only German journalists are greedy – feed them. Your own website – I think I said this last year already – almost indispensable!

(2) How does NI experience fit elsewhere – did you pass the longevity test after 15 years?

That's a difficult one. Let me start with the second half of the question.

There is no such thing as a longevity test for peace processes, I am afraid.
Following the early-2000s studies of Paul Collier and others about the socalled „conflict trap"

and the dangers of early relapse into violence (within the first ten years statistically), yes, NI has passed this test. But Collier's approach applies only partially to NI – a conflict less driven by „statebuilding issues" than many of the conflicts this analysis was directed to. However, the more general experience that root causes of a conflict if not addressed in a timely and adequate manner have the potential to reverse positive trends in other fields are definitely true also for NI. Recent results of international peace indices like *Human Security Report* or Steven Pinker's findings showing a stark decrease of violent conflicts and numbers of death toll in the past 10 years are yet highly controversial in their analysis of causes and consequences.

Two things concerning NI, in particular, come to my mind, adding issues along with the Ten Key Points:

A) The lack of, correct me if I am wrong, politicians on both sides – Unionists more than Nationalists though – to develop something like a trans-sectarian social-political agenda including job creation, especially for young people. That could have such a negative potential in the longer run ....

B) Let's not think There is sustainable immunisation against nationalist outbreaks, especially in a post-conflict situation where identity has mattered that much. I am not so sure whether what you say in Key Point 5 that (quote) „debates on national identity within Northern Ireland do not align with those in Ireland, the UK or Europe" gives a full picture of the under-the-surface issues, especially if we – and I explicitly include Germany here – do not manage to find a decent and economically fair way out of the obvious political crisis of the EU. (I leave that for further discussion).

(3) and final point: Measuring peace – does this project fit with other developments elsewhere?

Yes, it does, and will be even more in the future. Measuring peace building efforts closely, is internationally still a rather young discipline, within the somewhat older field of conflict resolution. Its only about 20 years that violent domestic conflicts – after the end of the Cold War – are being brought to more systematic attention, analysis and practical treatment. NI pp may count among the „oldies" being in its 15th year – which bears a certain degree of responsibility

for dealing with its lessons. You have taken this up.

Your monitoring approach: the combination of 4 crucial dimensions – security or safety as of this year (is there a reason behind this slight change?), equality, political progress and cohesion/sharing – must still be seen as unique in the international arena. Similarly longstanding pps like Bosnia or Kosovo, to stay in Europe, have not yet developed likewise sophisticated instruments for their experience – one reason being that results may seem less promising so far.

When we discussed to have a chapter on peace processes in this years' German Peace Report we chose case studies of the Balkans, Columbia and Sudan using some of your parameters as guiding questions – my suggestion to include Northern Ireland was rejected though, among other things because it would be seen as comparatively far advanced, ahead of the others. I would call this the „success trap". Instead, the more reason to exchange the Know-How. Monitoring Peace could become a valuable export article for the lingering European conflict prevention and peace building debate, inside the EU and to the outside world..

To conclude: Going into your third edition from tomorrow on you may have to spend some more ideas with friends abroad on how an evolving „measuring peace market place" would benefit from the NI indicators, parameters and guiding norms.

But, first of all, let us work for public attention on Number Two. Congratulations again!