The EU as a peace actor - peacebuilding in the EU and its neighbourhood

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Report

Background:

The award of the Nobel Peace Prize to the EU in 2012 highlighted the important role that the EU integration process and the EU itself played in preventing conflicts among and within EU Member States. As most peacebuilding organisations and academic research focuses on the EU's role in preventing conflict and building peace outside the EU, not much attention has been paid to the lessons that can be drawn from the EU as a peace process as well as conflict risks in Europe and how the EU as a peace actor can support peacebuilding in the EU and its neighbourhood.

Objectives:

The aim of the meeting is to:

- Examine the effect European integration has had on transformation of conflict within Europe;
- Discuss how a peacebuilding approach can be applied to contemporary conflict risks in Europe;
- Analyse the role of the EU as a peace actor in its immediate neighbourhood;
- Contribute to EPLO's work planning including a possible programme of work on the EU as a peace actor.

Session 1: The success of the EU as a peace process, contemporary challenges and conflict risks in Europe

The rationale for this discussion is that there is an increasing need for EU Member States to talk about risks within Europe, as events in Europe cause conflict elsewhere and that few of them as well as relevant peacebuilding organisations are participating in this conversation.

This session's goal was to assess the success of the EU as a peace process, identify challenges to this idea and explore the current conflict risks within Europe such as fragile peace processes, risk of violence in urban settings and increased social and economic inequality.

The EU as a peace project

Speakers made the following comments on the EU as peace project:

- From continent of war to continent of peace, institutional organisation and coordination in the European Union would replace wasteful use of resources in conflict and competition was exercised through bureaucracy.
- The EU's soft power is and should be peacebuilding tool in the enlargement area. The enlargement process is still a powerful peacebuilding tool. Cyprus is the exception, even as it is an EU Member State;
- The EU decision-making process itself is a peaceful mechanism, as EU Member States are constantly convened around a table to make joint decisions and overcome conflict;

- The EU is one of the most transformative examples of sustainable regime change, it is unanimously considered as a model of conflict transformation;
- While the UN doctrine of peacebuilding focuses on statebuilding, the EU's main peacebuilding mechanisms is Member state building. The EU construction makes it so that citizens would seek to strengthen rather than destroy the state structure. Member State building rests on legal approximation, institution building and constituency building. The creation process of domestic laws meeting the EU *acquis communautaire* is key, as it enforces reform of public administration. Corruption-free institutions are a pre-requisite for economic growth in a market economy.

Contemporary conflict risks in the EU

Speakers also described the typology of the current conflicts and peace processes in Europe. The majority of conflicts in the Europe today relate to countries, most of them federal, where constitutional arrangements have not been accepted by separatist groups, e.g. Spain and Catalunia / Basque country, Northern Ireland / UK, Belgium, Cyprus, Kosovo, Kurdish population in Turkey. There were international efforts to support peace processes and institution building, from which some lessons were drawn and even disseminated. Complex settlements were set up to prevent split of governments, however, the question of their sustainability remains. However, recent peace processes in Europe supported by the EU and other international organisations are still fragile, as shown by the context in Bosnia where there is now resentment towards international organisations.

Other conflict risks in the EU identified during the discussion were:

- The rise of nationalisms in Europe and incitement of racial hatred : tensions generated within the system undermines the peaceful bureaucratic system in Europe;
- National identities of minorities in European countries
- Risks of violence in urban settings;
- Increased social and economic inequality, generating violent social protests (Spain and Greece);
- Terrorism and response to terrorism: the challenge is to look differently at terrorism, essentially at the root causes that foment terrorist activities. The real dilemma is to agree on the definition of terrorism, which is increasingly considered a security risk in Europe;
- Distrust of political class, political legitimacy: in the UK for example, only 19% of British citizens trust the EU political class, similarly 20% distrust the British political class; this shows this mistrust has less to do with the EU than with an overall suspicion of politicians.

Some participants highlighted to internal dimensions of conflict risks in the EU are often overlooked in assessing EU external action, as some factors laying in Europe do cause conflict elsewhere, e.g.:

- arms trade
- organized crime
- trafficking

Conflict risks in the EU neighborhood

Some of the contemporary conflict risks in the enlargement and eastern neighborhood area were identified as follows:

- In Macedonia, the one party rule of Slav Macedonian nationalism is excluding the Albanian minority and dividing the country economically, which is fomenting tension. The last EC Progress Report is descriptive of this;
- Kosovo: ethnic violence in Mitrovica;
- Turkey is last European country in the Global Peace Index (GPI, insert rank), with a declining freedom of expression and assembly and a repeated crackdown on civil society. This is taking place while there is a Kurdish momentum towards the creation of a state with situations in Syria and Iraq.

- o Frozen conflicts: tensions over borders are still alive in Georgia and Moldova. The Eurasia Union initiative will have an impact on domestic issues. Overall, Russia wedges between the EU and neighborhood countries.
- o Ukraine: there is widespread concern about the EU's interpretation of what an appropriate response to the crisis is, which expressed itself mostly by calls to build EU military capabilities. Challenging statements were made by EU officials that the crisis in Ukraine was caused by EU defense cuts, which fail to identify to root causes of the conflict.

The European Neigborhood Policy (ENP) and EU accession policy are seen as a way to promote peace. The difference between the two: the EU is willing to use its leverage to encourage reform with enlargement as it provides a concrete and sustainable incentive (EU membership) and sets high standards for local enforcement, whereas ENP's standards are lower, e.g. minorities protection, anti-corruption standards are non-existent. Speakers highlighted that enlargement criteria could be extended to other EU instruments.

Possible peacebuilding responses by the EU

Two interpretations of the EU's response to contemporary conflict risks, which focuses on external action, were made:

- Positive interpretation: because risks are greater elsewhere, the EU should focus on peacebuilding in external action;
- Negative interpretation: the EU uses a neocolonial lens by which it is simpler and more profitable to address external threats rather than addressing internal issues. The EU statement about the 2013 Nobel Peace Prize is symptomatic of this approach: it focused on building peace elsewhere and neglected its own history as a peace project.

All comments pointed at the necessity of producing a comprehensive and rigorous conflict analysis in Europe, which could be including into EU instruments for external action such as ENP and enlargement. The peacebuilding community, including EPLO should identify clear advocacy targets and objectives.

Opportunities for policy change include the new Millennium Development Goals. Some participants found the pillars of peace of Global Peace Index a good goals frame and we should work on this collectively.

Discussion

The issue of **migration** can be considered as part of the issue of nationalism and extremism. Participants highlighted that migration is needed in the EU and that free flow of information is key for positive effects of migration to get to the citizens. **The economic crisis** exacerbated pre-existing tensions, with some bearing the burden of unequal distribution of resources. Moreover, it is difficult to say which level of violence qualifies as a risk. Two indicators appear to be key: freedom of speech and freedom of the media. **Gender-based violence** is one of the root causes of urban violence and yet it is not addressed adequately as the focus of authorities is on circulation of arms and drugs. Being pro- or not pro-EU in supporting peacebuilding was not perceived as a relevant question; rather some participants suggested that the main questions are **where the EU tools should be used in a more pro-peace way and on which challenges and conflicts do the EU and European civil society have a responsibility to act on?**

Other participants indicated that foreign policy experts are not best placed to discuss EU domestic issues and that the discussion should be held in an enlarged circle and focus on root causes of discrimination and anti-immigration from nationalists within Europe. **Some contexts are perceived as inseparable from EU context**, in particular in relation to diasporas in Europe, nationalism, discrimination, marginalisation. New technologies play an important role in spreading news of conflict, which can impact conflict dynamics inside and outside Europe

(example: the news received by text and Facebook of a land dispute in Kashmiri villages sparked riots in Northern UK where part of the diaspora lives). Among the challenges identified,

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Recommendations

To EU policy-makers and EU civil society should:

- Focus on immaterial ways to improve conditions of Europeans, such as gender equality, as public powers have less space to work on material conditions;
- Re-politicise the debate on the challenges of conflict prevention in the face of nationalism and extremism;
- Produce a comprehensive and rigorous conflict analysis in Europe, which could be including into EU instruments for external action such as ENP and enlargement.

EPLO and civil society should:

- Be more pro-active in making concrete suggestions beyond its strict mandate and identify clear advocacy targets and objectives.

Session 2: Peacebuilding responses to conflict risks in Europe

Working groups discussed the following questions:

- What are possible peacebuilding responses to conflict risks in Europe?
- What specific activities could civil society (including EPLO) carry out to address conflict risks in Europe?
- How can the EU contribute to peacebuilding responses?

Thoughts/questions raised and preliminary answers:

1. What are possible peacebuilding responses to conflict risks in Europe?
   - What are conflict risks?
     - Some participants questioned what the focus of peacebuildine responses should be: Should they focus on expressions of violence, not conflict per se which is present everywhere, all the time? Should we be looking at structural violence/root causes (lack of governance and accountability, poverty and inequality, etc.) or symptoms of violence (violent expression of discontent, discrimination of minority groups, rise in extremisms, criminality)?
     - Participants agreed that depending on the context, peacebuilders should adopt a preventive approach to the drivers of violence and conflict.
     - Among the issues highlighted:
       - Urban conflict (Spain, France, UK), urban development,
       - Social unrest
       - Isolation
       - Discrimination, minority rights (Roma, LGBT, islamophobia, anti-Semitism, etc.)
       - Constitutional conflict / Separatism (Kosovo, Spain, UK, etc.)
       - In the Neighborhood: Bosnia
   - What are possible peacebuilding responses?
     - What are the advantages of using peacebuilding tools when work is already being carried out on the ground to respond to both the root causes and the

symptoms of violence? How can a peacebuilding approach complement such work? What can peacebuilding bring to the table?

- o Who should carry out measures:
    - ▪ EPLO, as a peacebuilding organisation who can mobilise expertise from different parts of society and government;
    - ▪ The EU: The EU engagement would most likely differ whether it is inside or outside the EU, it should mobilise expertise. Within the EU, participants identified the following actors: European Parliament (specific MEPs who are champions of peacebuilding and sit in strategic committees such as trade), Directorate General (DG) Justice and Home affairs, DG Regio, DG Education and Culture.
    - ▪ EU Member States: they are the main decision-makers for internal and external affairs. However, they are less open to dialogue about internal affairs, because they are not willing to admit they have %ssues+ inside their country
    - ▪ Organisations working on discrimination, although they do not use the same language as peacebuilders in external action;
    - ▪ Academics, by helping identify correlations and build bridges between both peacebuilding terminology inside the EU (national/local references and concepts, related to domestic affairs?) and outside the EU (more international, related to foreign affairs)
- o Types of responses: Education (awareness-raising), supporting ongoing peace processes, continue efforts on radicalisation, build conflict-sensitivity in trade policy and financial institutions, anti-corruption measures, sanctions.

2. <u>What specific activities could civil society (including EPLO) carry out to address conflict risks in Europe?</u>

- Working on peace and security in Europe will contribute to defining the place of European peacebuilders in the world and increasing their legitimacy. They need to reflect on whether or not they are fit for purpose.
- Difficult to identify responses when peacebuilding actors inside the EU and outside the EU do not use the same terminology and do not consider they do the same type of work.
- There are ±onflict risksqin Europe which should be better understood and addressed (be that by Member States and/or the EU → see question 3). Therefore, CSOs (and EPLO which regroups organisations from a number of contexts) should start by doing a rigorous conflict analysis to:
    - o Create a broad picture and determine what issues are likely to create problems; what issues cut across various contexts so that analysis can be applied broadly; what activities are already being carried out on the ground to address these issues (and avoid duplication); who should be responsible for addressing these issues; and what our added value can be to ensure that conflicts can be prevented or managed more peacefully;
    - o Raise awareness about these ±onflict risksqacross EU institutions, EU Member States and their citizens.
- Depending on the conflict analysis carried out, activities could include:
    - o The priority should be on encouraging a meaningful dialogue among unlikely discussants at the community level by working with existing settings or creating new settings (would need first to establish during the conflict analysis what

already exists) through which citizens can safely voice their security concerns and define locally-owned solutions
  - o Encourage national and local authorities to engage with their citizens and thus work in favour of the social cohesion which is presently eroding
  - o Encourage the EU, both within and outside Europe, to:
    - engage with citizens and be more transparent
    - ±do no harmq
    - speak with one voice (EU MS always referring to ±Brusselsq when a controversial policy is being adopted)
  - o Engaging with diaspora groups to link security concerns in the European country with security concerns in their country of origin

3. <u>How can the EU contribute to peacebuilding responses?</u>
  - Question of competence with regard peace and security issues . what *can* the EU do? In addition, the EU might be perceived as a neutral actor in some contexts, but certainly not in all.
  - Most security-related concerns do not stem from the EU and must be dealt with at the national level by national actors. Is the EU level is the appropriate level of governance to address?
  - Regarding certain issues, increasing awareness about and by the EU would be useful to increase trust within the EU/Europe.
  - From an external point of view, working on peace and security in Europe will contribute to increasing the legitimacy of its foreign policy, including for instance in the framework of the negotiation of the post-2015 agenda.

Session 3: The EU as a peace actor in its neighbourhood

This session explored how the EU can act as a peace actor in its neighbourhood and whether there are lessons of its own integration process that it could apply in its engagement with this region. Speakers identified two possible roles for the EU in peacebuilding in the neighbourhood:

  - Support to peacebuilding actors, including mediators;
  - Being part of a peace process as a third party.

Observations and challenges

  - The gap between the analysis and the decision-making, e.g. on early warning activities: the decision to get involved depends on national interests rather than analysis;
  - Dilemma between EU interests and Member States interests (e.g. Bulgaria torn between implementing Russia sanctions and protecting its interests in relation to the situation in Ukraine);
  - Lack of a shared goal: EU tools will remain ineffective if this gap between policy aims and practice is not addressed;
  - Tendency to play a role of %honest broker+ and %neutral actor+ when it is actually a stakeholder who has its own interests in conflict-affected countries;
  - Danger in EU political discourse which promotes sanctions and interruption of dialogue as solutions to violent conflict, such as in Syria and Ukraine;
  - EU is only able to hold a dialogue with a mirror organisation and is missing opportunities to partner with constructive interlocutors.

- Transition is a messy process where there is insecurity. Expectations need to be managed. Catch 22 situation where there are only negative developments. A way to go about is to prevent opportunities from being crushed by negative developments in the neighbourhood (for example in Lebanon, where all hope is not lost).

The EU seems to be better in supporting other actors and not deemed to be an intervener. It is involved in some peace processes (e.g. observers in Moldova, Georgia, Israel/Palestine) but is so far more involved and more successful as a peacebuilding supporter.

Discussion

- **More for More policy:** participants find it to be an overrated and not useful policy. It has not been implemented consistently and in most cases, the EU does not have the leverage to promote democratic change. The drive for effective transformation is indigenous and only when it is created the EU can support it.
- **Trade is a major, if the not the major foreign policy tools of the EU**, therefore it is crucial to include conflict-sensitivity in trade policy. The EU needs to think strategically before engaging in trade agreements (e.g. in Ukraine);
- **Trade is not a conflict prevention instrument**: all the ENP agreements around trade have failed. The political will to use EU leverage is the key element that will make a difference: in Moldova (Transnistria), conditionality was included in the partnership agreement.
- **Trade opportunities alone do not provide enough leverage**: making products competitive enough on the European market and fulfilling the criteria is challenging for neighbourhood countries and does not by itself impact situations of fragility.
- EU Member States have a long history of fueling conflict in the Middle East therefore it has a responsibility in this particular region (e.g. Do No Harm principle);
- At times, the EU has been a victim of its arrogance, bringing inadequate solutions to misidentified problems. It is important to diversify the interlocutors beyond the usual suspects and the intellectual elite. The EU and perhaps European CSOs are not pro-active enough in reaching out to those who are not EU-minded or do not speak their language. The EU is attuned to the elite who speak the same language, not enough to the people and their aspirations. Dialogue (as opposed to propaganda) is based on identifying the local needs and realities on the ground and not visibility competition and offering of ready-made solutions.

On the situation in Ukraine, participants made the following comments:

- If it does not have concrete leverage now, the EU should stay involved with Ukraine to create an opportunity later. The political crisis with Russia was anticipated but not on this scale which is due to a purely political game.
- Participants made the argument for a stronger, collective communication and messaging from the EU and Member States on the crisis.
- EU should be clear about the fact that it is actually not open to a Customs Union with Ukraine.
- Some participants insisted that the Ukraine crisis as very much about Russia internal situation (isolation, totalitarian tendencies, crackdown on human rights activists). Others argued that it is more about regional geopolitics which was not born with Putin Minority felt overtime that their needs was not met and Russia offered them more.

Recommendations:

The EU should:

- EU should reach out more to civil society and citizens, not only to the intellectual and economic elite;

- Make more efforts to identify the right, legitimate actor to partner with, without looking for a mirror organisation, and seize opportunities to partner with constructive interlocutors, including non-state actors;
- Focus on safeguarding opportunities from being crushed by negative developments in the neighbourhood (e.g. Lebanon, Ukraine), including by promoting gender equality and stabilisation measures;
- Include accession criteria in other foreign policy tools;
- Focus on making the EU an effective peacebuilding supporter rather than an 'intervener' based on lessons and evidence from recent EU experiences;
- Be clear about the fact that it is actually not open to a Customs Union with Ukraine.

This meeting is part of EPLO's EU Member State Advocacy. The purpose of this work is to mobilise support for EU peacebuilding in the EU's Member States given that they remain key decision-makers in EU policy. The work was piloted under the Civil Society Dialogue Network, which is a three-year project co-funded by the European Union (Instrument for Stability) aimed at facilitating dialogue on peacebuilding issues between civil society and EU policymakers. For more information, please visit the EPLO website.