



Civil Society Dialogue Network Policy Meeting

The EU-wide Strategic Framework for Security Sector Reform: Consultation workshop with civil society organisations

Friday 4 December 2015, Brussels

MEETING REPORT

Background

In May 2015, the EU's Foreign Affairs Council (FAC) adopted the following conclusions during its discussions on the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP):

'In line with the EU's Comprehensive Approach and in order to maximize the impact, efficiency and consistency of EU support, the Council invites the High Representative and the Commission to develop, in consultation with the Member States, an EU-wide strategic framework for Security Sector Reform by mid-2016. This policy concept should bring together CSDP and all other relevant CFSP tools as well as development co-operation instruments and Freedom, Security and Justice actors, while respecting their respective legal bases, primary objectives and decision making procedures.'¹

The overall objective of this Civil Society Dialogue Network (CSDN) Policy Meeting was to enable civil society organisations (CSOs) to provide input into the development of the EU-wide Strategic Framework for Security Sector Reform (SSR).

The meeting brought together approximately 50 participants, including representatives of civil society peacebuilding organisations, and officials from both the European Commission (EC) and the European External Action Service (EEAS).

This report is a summary of the discussions which took place and the key recommendations made by individual participants during the meeting. The views expressed may not be attributed to any participating individual or institution nor do they necessarily represent the views of all of the meeting participants, the European Peacebuilding Liaison Office (EPLO) and its member organisations, or the co-organisers.

¹ See <http://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2015/05/18-council-conclusions-csdp/>

Welcome

The EC reminded participants about the EU's two existing SSR concepts: the 2005 [EU Concept for ESDP support to Security Sector Reform](#) and the 2006 [Concept for European Community Support for Security Sector Reform](#). It also highlighted the importance of a comprehensive approach to SSR since the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty and outlined the steps to be taken both within the EU institutions and externally to develop the EU-wide strategic framework for SSR. In this context, particular importance was attached to the role of CSOs in the ongoing process.

Participants' initial questions were focused on the overall timing of the process and its links to and coordination with other initiatives such as the review of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) and the preparation of the EU Global Strategy on Foreign and Security Policy. The EC stated that following a series of consultations in late 2015, a first internal draft of the Strategic Framework for SSR would be ready by mid-January 2016 and that a final draft should be ready by the end of March 2016 for adoption by mid-June 2016.

Regarding links to and coordination with the ENP Review, the EC stated that, while these were two separate exercises, security was at the heart of both sets of discussions. Regarding the EU Global Strategy, it highlighted the need for effective coordination between the various actors working on the two processes and suggested that the issue of hybrid threats, which is common to both, could provide a good starting point.

The issue of gender mainstreaming in the Strategic Framework was also raised. The EC acknowledged that this aspect had not been properly addressed in previous SSR concepts and stated that the ongoing process would be fully in line with the provisions of the EU's [Gender Action Plan 2016-2020](#).

Session 1: Introduction

During this session, the EC and the EEAS introduced the overall thinking behind and process for developing the new EU Strategic Framework for SSR, and the four topics for discussion:

1. Political engagement to support implementation (Politics)
The EC and the EEAS asked CSO representatives to provide input on how to better link political dialogue with technical expertise, and how to establish robust accountability processes in order to ensure a whole-of-society approach to SSR.
2. Governance, accountability and effectiveness (Governance)
The EC and the EEAS asked CSO representatives to provide input on what it could do to encourage participation, inclusion and accountability, to strengthen the role of national parliaments and to engage more with the beneficiaries of its programmes.
3. Supporting local ownership and building sustainable solutions (Ownership)
The EC and the EEAS asked CSO representatives to share lessons learned regarding ownership of EU-funded projects.
4. Community security and service delivery-focused interventions (Community security)
The EC and the EEAS invited CSO representatives to make recommendations on what the EU could do to reconcile the top-down, bottom-up approach to human security.

Session 2: Small group discussions

1. Political engagement to support implementation

Participants in the working group which discussed the issue of 'Political engagement to support implementation' raised the following issues:

- When talking about the political dimension of SSR, it is important to take into account regional dynamics. CSOs can play an important role in this.
- Context analysis, especially the assessment of local contexts focusing on the political economy, donor coordination, etc., is important and must be given due regard before developing SSR processes.
- It is important to maintain impartiality in political engagement.
- There is a need to explore further the role of CSOs in holding governments to account.
- The following elements should provide the basis for political engagement in SSR processes: inclusion of all local actors, trust-building between security forces and the population, and continuity of engagement.
- Experience from the peace accords in Guatemala has shown that political engagement is crucial. It is important to consider how to include all political parties in SSR processes.
- It is important to consider how to ensure co-operation between civil society and institutions if they do not trust each other.
- In Tunisia, there is a problem in the way the EU conceives SSR. The financial and administrative tools are not adjusted to the local context.
- It is important to develop indicators to assess the implementation and impact of SSR processes, including in terms of tangible benefits for the local population and community service delivery.
- With regard to gender mainstreaming in SSR, there is a need to go beyond "token participation".
- In Guatemala, there is an innovative method of supporting SSR which involves donors providing funding directly to CSOs for work on arms control.
- It is important not only to support CSOs financially but also to empower them to do SSR. This empowerment is especially important in cases where the government uses civil society as a service provider but civil society does not agree with the government's policies.

Participants in this working group also made the following recommendations to the EU:

- Regarding political will, the EU could consider capitalising on peace agreements.
- The EU should consider whether and to what extent it should apply conditionality. In this context, the EU should take into account lessons learned from its own enlargement process as it can offer important guidance on using conditionality and embedding leverage into programming.
- Regarding support for political dialogue, the EU should make use of existent dialogue mechanisms and simply add other actors to them. CSOs could take up this task, including by helping to share information on existent initiatives and coordinating with the EU and other donors.
- The EU needs to address the gender dimension in its CSDP missions, including by increasing the number of female staff members. This should help it to have better leverage when advocating gender mainstreaming in structures in its partners countries.

- To improve its SSR practice in general, the EU should avoid deadline diplomacy and be more modest in the way it brands and packages SSR, including by ensuring that it adopts the right terminology for each local context.
- The EU should consider working through civil society actors to reform institutions, and supporting CSOs to train and provide technical expertise to SSR actors.

2. Governance, accountability and effectiveness

Participants in the working group which discussed the issue of 'Governance, accountability and effectiveness' raised the following issues:

- CSOs and security forces do not see each other as partners. This means that they miss out on significant opportunities to co-operate on SSR. CSOs are not sufficiently listened to by security forces and often face threats and retaliation when exposing security issues. Spaces for dialogue are shrinking and there is no political backing for the CSO sector advocating for transparency and accountability.
- The Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) provides an example of the risk of donor interventions which reinforce institutions without reinforcing the control mechanisms over them.
- SSR processes need to be informed by local needs. It is important to ensure that local communities are engaged in conflict analysis, and throughout the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of SSR processes.
- Gender dynamics must not be overlooked in SSR processes.
- There is a need for innovation in the way civil society approaches SSR. In this context, CSOs should share the innovative methods they are using in dealing with SSR-related issues.
- In Nepal, the local police created a 'Citizens' Help Desk' to find out how to better engage with the community.
- Education is a key aspect in the governance debate: it is essential to raise awareness at the community level about SSR processes, including about the security actors involved and their respective roles. It is also important to educate local populations about security issues, including taboo subjects such as gender-based violence.
- The training which the EU provides to security forces does not always take into account the sometimes low level of education of the trainees. In the DRC, CSO-run training programmes have included a wide range of activities, including participatory theatre, role play and visual presentations.
- Accountability should be provided through a whole-of-society, people-centred approach.
- Effectiveness can be provided by strengthening the capacities of CSOs to engage in SSR processes.

Participants in this working group also made the following recommendations to the EU:

- Given the importance of adequate capacities and political will for SSR processes, when they are lacking at the national level, the EU should seek to engage at lower levels, including at the community level.
- Given the difficulties faced by CSOs in many contexts to engage with authorities and with each other, a potential role for the EU in SSR processes could be to bring actors together in order to facilitate dialogue and productive partnerships.

- In addition to supporting state institutions, the EU should also support CSO capacity building for ensuring oversight of SSR processes.
- Regarding the issue of accountability towards different stakeholders, the EU should engage with women and men, try to address the gender dynamics at play in specific conflicts, and pay due regard to the diversity of social, cultural, ethnic, religious, and political backgrounds.
- When engaging with different stakeholder groups, it is essential to reach out beyond capital cities and to prioritise small, grassroots organisations which do not necessarily have the capacities to implement the size of the programmes which the EU and other donors might be envisaging.
- Poor governance should make donors, including the EU, reflect on the type of support they provide.

Session 3: Small group discussions (continued)

3. Supporting local ownership and building sustainable solutions

Participants in the working group which discussed the issue of ‘Supporting local ownership and building sustainable solutions’ raised the following issues:

- It is important to ensure the sustainability of SSR efforts. In Nepal, CSOs worked together with the local police to create a steering committee consisting of representatives from both sides.
- There is a need to look at security as a common good, and empower citizens to be able to demand and receive better services.
- Competition and the lack of structured communication between different actors involved can have long-term implications for the outcomes of SSR processes.
- Local ownership should start at the conceptualisation phase.
- Financial contribution from the state budget of the partner country contributes to strengthening local ownership.
- Both local and international CSOs can play a key role in ensuring the visibility of SSR processes on the ground.
- Different types of partnerships are needed for different SSR contexts.
- Local ownership goes hand in hand with trust-building. Civil society can play a role in fostering ways to re-engage with those who have lost trust in the security sector. However, shrinking spaces for civil society make it very difficult for CSOs to operate in certain areas.
- Trust-building at different levels, including within local communities, and between local communities and different security actors involved in SSR processes, needs to be taken into consideration. CSOs can play a key role by facilitating communication between security actors and local communities. The role of the media in trust-building is also important and should be further strengthened.
- In Nepal, CSOs have developed a programme to facilitate interaction and trust-building between police and community by a variety of means.
- In Colombia, a local CSO was tasked and funded to facilitate trust-building between state institutions and the local community.
- Local ownership needs to incorporate ownership by security actors themselves.
- It is important to balance national-level ownership with community-level ownership.

- It is important for SSR processes to reach beyond capital cities and to include small, grassroots initiatives.
- There is a need for both quantitative and qualitative indicators for measuring trust in security providers.
- It is important to ensure the correct design of SSR processes from the outset. Therefore, more diversified funding instruments and broader consultative processes prior to the launch of processes are required.
- SSR processes need to be flexible enough to facilitate engagement at different levels and with different groups, including with informal structures. There is a need to ensure that SSR structures are not established without roots in local communities and without careful consideration of traditional mechanisms which are often ad-hoc/informal.
- Staff turnover in EU delegations could have potentially disruptive effects on SSR processes which are, by definition, long-term and reliant on trust-building.
- There is a need to have special oversight organisations in SSR processes, as well as clear procedures for guaranteeing accountability, transparency and better coordination among the different actors involved.
- Sustainability needs to be rooted in local demands. However, the EU should also demand change and lend its support to ensuring that less powerful voices are also heard.

4. Community security and service delivery-focused interventions

Participants in the working group which discussed the issue of 'Community security and service delivery-focused interventions' raised the following issues:

- Community security requires space for dialogue, trust-building, and information sharing at various levels.
- The needs of local communities should be reflected in all SSR-related decisions.
- CSOs can play a key role in ensuring a context-specific, people-centred approach to community security by liaising directly with local populations and by assessing community needs. CSOs can also facilitate monitoring by local communities following interventions.
- Innovative approaches to demands from local communities are very important for more effective SSR interventions.
- Security issues should be addressed at different levels.
- SSR processes should be rooted in the 'Do No Harm' principle and balance practical impact with accountability. The risk of processes being donor-driven must also be assessed.
- CSOs who are helping to train the personnel of the criminal justice institutions in Bosnia and Herzegovina deplore the fact that trained personnel are eventually assigned to completely different fields of activity than those for which they were trained.
- There is a need to strengthen ties between CSOs and academia in discussions on SSR; they are often perceived as critics of each other rather than as partners.
- There is a lack of coordination between CSOs and donors in SSR processes.
- SSR processes can get stuck at times of political crisis. To minimise the potentially negative effects of political crises on SSR processes, there is a need to invest more at the community level and to support trust-building measures by engaging directly with the population.

- The potential risk of SSR processes being perceived as too technical can be minimised through proper information sharing and communication with all relevant stakeholders.
- The Global Community Engagement and Resilience Fund (GCERF) provides a good example of how to engage grassroots organisations.
- Some CSOs are implementing the same SSR project under different names for different donors and receiving separate funding for each of the differently-named projects.
- National security advisors cannot always share information on the different players involved in SSR. CSOs therefore often face difficulties when trying to access information deemed too sensitive.
- It is important to be careful with the terminology used for SSR: in some countries 'reform' is a sensitive term which should be avoided.
- In order to increase the sustainability of actions undertaken, CSOs should share information about their programmes both with each other and with donors, including the EU.

Participants in this working group also made the following recommendations to the EU:

- The EU should focus on outputs rather than inputs in order to enhance service delivery.
- SSR should not be seen as too sensitive to be communicated to CSOs. The EU should push for greater clarity about what can and what cannot be considered as confidential.
- There is a need for the EU and other donors who engage in SSR processes to seek to better understand both the context in which they are providing support and the diversity of actors involved.

Session 4: Reporting back from the small group discussions

Representatives of each of the four working groups gave short reports of the issues raised within their respective groups and the key recommendations made to the EU by CSOs taking part in this consultation.

The EC and the EEAS thanked the CSO representatives for their input into the consultation on an EU-wide strategic framework for SSR. They also stated their intention to continue the dialogue with CSOs on this issue in 2016.

Civil Society Dialogue Network

The Civil Society Dialogue Network (CSDN) is a mechanism for dialogue between civil society and EU policy-makers on issues related to peace and conflict. It is co-financed by the European Union (Instrument for Stability). It is managed by the European Peacebuilding Liaison Office (EPLO), a civil society network, in co-operation with the European Commission (EC) and the European External Action Service (EEAS). The second phase of the CSDN will last from 2014 to 2016. For more information, please visit the [EPLO website](#).

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