



Civil Society Dialogue Network

EU Conflict Prevention after the Global Strategy: A Look at Mediation and Security Sector Reform

Thursday 10 November 2016, Helsinki

Meeting Report

The EU Global Strategy on Foreign and Security Policy (EUGS) presented in June 2016 provides an opportunity for the EU to close the implementation gap in its support to conflict prevention. While the EUGS confirms that tackling root causes of conflict and promoting peace are priorities of EU external action, in practice conflict prevention remains a relatively minor dimension of the EU's external relations, receiving limited political support and human and financial resources despite the strong support of key Member States.

In this context, the purpose of this meeting was to review the implementation of the EU's commitments on conflict prevention, in particular on mediation support and security sector reform, focusing on improving practices and maximising the impact of EU external action in fragile and conflict-affected countries. The meeting brought together 65 participants, including representatives of civil society peacebuilding organisations, academics, and officials from the Finnish Ministry of Foreign Affairs and EU institutions.

This meeting report is organised into three sections. The first section summarises key points and recommendations related to the EU Global Strategy, the second focuses on the EU's role in mediation and dialogue processes, and the third and final section discusses how to implement the EU-wide Strategic Framework on Security Sector Reform in a conflict sensitive way.

As the meeting was held under the Chatham House Rule, 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 Office (EPLO) and its member organisations, or the co-organisers.

The 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](#).

1. Analyzing the EU Global Strategy from a conflict prevention perspective

In the first session, participants discussed: 1) The context for and priority areas of the EUGS; 2) Perceptions of the EUGS; 3) Expectations for conflict prevention; 4) The role of the Member States in the implementation of the EUGS.

1) Context and priority areas

The context for the EUGS in 2016 is significantly different from the previous European Security Strategy issued in 2003. The 2003 Strategy began by stating, "Europe has never been so prosperous, so secure, nor so free." The 2016 EUGS, by contrast, states that, "The purpose, even existence, of our Union is being questioned, the wider region has become more unstable and more insecure and refers to the crises and challenging times facing Europe within and beyond its borders. Migration, refugee issues, violent extremism and radicalization are barely mentioned in 2003 but come up repeatedly in the 2016 document. Thus, some participants felt that the 2003 strategy was more values-focused while the 2016 strategy is more interests-focused and a key issue is therefore how to hold on to Europe's values while also protecting Europe's interests. The group discussed the need to maintain a focus on a human security approach as a key principle of EU foreign policy.

Participants discussed three main areas brought forward by the EUGS:

- **Implementing the EUGS' priorities will be a challenge.** Many participants agreed that implementation will be the real test of the EUGS. Of the five priorities to be implemented, so far the focus has been on the "Security of our Union." The remaining priorities (State and Societal Resilience to our East and South, an Integrated Approach to Conflicts, Cooperative Regional Orders, and Global Governance for the 21st Century) have received less attention. Some participants argued that the "Integrated Approach to Conflicts" and "Resilience to the East and South" should be the next priorities, while others noted that the five priorities should not be kept in silos, but rather progress should go forward simultaneously.
- **The EUGS introduces the concept of the "Integrated Approach" two years after the launch of the EU Comprehensive Approach to external conflicts and crises.** Although participants felt there was not a significant difference between these two concepts, some saw the Integrated Approach as an opportunity for the EU not only to coordinate better internally, but also to respond to conflicts and crises in a more coordinated manner externally. While this is a positive aspiration, it is clear that it will be challenging to implement, given that the Comprehensive Approach was already difficult to achieve. A participant mentioned that the EU is not alone in its struggle for internal and external coherence. The UN and other large bureaucracies face the same challenges. Yet, on a practical level, there are many activities where the EU could implement the broader Integrated Approach, such as: joint conflict analysis, an improved conflict early warning system, more accountability for action following early warning, improving EU capacity on conflict sensitivity, building a "conflict prevention mindset" and including related tasks in job descriptions, further strengthening EU and EEAS capacities in support of mediation and dialogue and the creation of an EU peacebuilding and stabilization division (which is upcoming as a result of the merger of the SECPO.L2 and CSDP Coordination and Support divisions in the EEAS).
- **A focus on the neighbourhood versus a global approach.** There was some debate about whether the EU should focus primarily on its own neighborhood (broadly interpreted) or whether it should maintain a global outlook. Some participants felt that seeking to work across the globe is too great a responsibility and that the EU should try to manage what is happening in and around Europe first. Other participants believed that while the EU neighborhood is a priority, the EU's

strength is its long-term presence and the size of its assistance and it can therefore play a key role around the globe. It was mentioned that the EU's positive contribution to conflict prevention and peacebuilding in Colombia and Myanmar would not have been possible if the EU had focused only on its neighbourhood. It was reported that there was a consensus among Member States that on certain issues there is a need to focus on the neighbourhood while on other issues (such as Global Governance for the 21st Century) the focus is by necessity global.

2) Perceptions of the EUGS

Numerous participants felt that the EUGS presents a positive opportunity for conflict prevention and peacebuilding. It emphasizes the importance of conflict sensitivity across the EU institutions, and also supports specific actions on conflict prevention, mediation, and peacebuilding such as engaging in preventive diplomacy, investing in the conflict early warning system, and supporting women in peacebuilding. From a strategic perspective, the EUGS is in line with previous strategy documents and does not represent a major shift away from previous policy.

At the same time, the EUGS also has limitations and challenges. Several participants felt that there are too many priorities in the EUGS and no allocation of resources to these priorities, so it is not clear what will be taken forward and what will be left on paper. A related point of discussion was that it is not clear where the funding for conflict prevention activities will come from, with one participant arguing that it should not be a new budget allocation but rather should come from a reduction to other parts of the existing budget. It was also noted that investing in conflict prevention should not be seen as coming at the expense of crisis management. Rather, such an investment can make the EU's overall response to crises more effective and sustainable and reduce costs. Another participant said that there has been real progress on conflict and peacebuilding in the last decade or more, and that it is important to ensure that this progress is sustained.

Other areas of concern noted were that there should be a stronger emphasis on partnerships in order to make better use of limited resources, that there is a need to build the capacity of EU Delegations in the field and that the EUGS simply summarizes pre-existing policy documents without bringing new ideas. Finally, a question was also raised about whether the EUGS is paving the way for a politicization of donor funds intended for poverty eradication by also using them as a way to support EU interests and strategic priorities (such as on migration control and security), and that the level of cuts to development funding in the EU and among Member States is worrying.

3) Expectations for conflict prevention

Beyond the EUGS, participants discussed the EU's broader approach to conflict prevention and expectations for it. Several participants suggested that there is still a need to define key terms, such as 'conflict prevention' and 'resilience'. It was noted that both terms are rather broad and vague, and that there is not a clear consensus about what they really mean. Conflict prevention is easy to support in principle, but there is less agreement about what it means in practice, what works, and what resources are needed. One participant noted that supporting conflict prevention also does not always require additional financial resources but rather better human resources to understand and apply conflict sensitivity principles as well as to plan projects in a strategic and targeted way.

Resilience can also have many meanings. From social resilience to resilience in the face of natural disasters. The EUGS mentions resilience several times but without a clear definition and so greater discussion with Member States and stakeholders is required before any Joint Communication is presented. A participant noted that it is also important to be aware that resilience against internal and external shocks are not necessarily the same thing, and that conflict is more about internal shocks. The group also discussed the importance of ensuring

that promoting resilience does not lead to just strengthening the status quo instead of seeking to transform it, as this is not effective long-term.

Participants then discussed the EU's theory of change regarding its interventions, and the pace at which it expects societies to go from one stage of development to another. It was noted that some EU strategies seem to be unrealistic and expect a country to go from ~~zero~~ to democracy in five years. A participant cited the example of EUPOL in Afghanistan where the mission was being considered a failure because it hadn't brought rule of law to Afghanistan, when that is clearly an unrealistic goal given the resources and capacity of the mission. Another participant noted that looking at the EU's own history could help provide a more realistic sense of timing for democratic development.

A final set of challenges discussed were: getting people from across the EU institutions to agree on the conflict analysis and strategy on a particular issue or place; the issue of conflict prevention being perceived as intrusive; and the importance of engaging partners directly in EU conflict prevention discussions and planning rather than just seeing them as ~~targets~~ for EU engagement. Finally, several participants noted that conflict prevention is being done within the EU but is not always labeled or recognized as such.

4) *The key role of Member States*

In order to make the Integrated Approach work, it was suggested during the discussion that Member States ask the EU leadership to find ways for the institutions to work better together, so that clear direction comes from the top down. The Member States can also play this role in the Council, especially if they coordinate their efforts. The pressure to effectively implement the Integrated Approach is not just on the institutions but on the Member States as well to help make it happen.

Some Member States have informally provided their input to the High Representative Federica Mogherini on how the EU could enhance its integrated approach to conflicts, including by improving the conflict early warning system, ensuring that early warning leads to early action and calling for improved EU delegations and Member States embassies involvement on the ground, as well as more resources for mediation and conflict prevention.

A participant suggested that it is worthwhile to consider other ways the Member States can provide political impetus to implement the EUGS commitments on conflict prevention and peacebuilding. It was noted that it has been three years since the last big push from Member States (the Concept on strengthening EU mediation and dialogue capacities adopted in 2009, the Council Conclusions on conflict prevention in 2011, and the Joint Communication and Council Conclusions on the Comprehensive Approach in 2013-2014). Political signals are needed regularly or priorities may get forgotten. Other tools or avenues were discussed in brief, with a question about which may be most effective - Foreign Affairs Council discussions, Council Conclusions, dedicated PSC meetings, or inviting conflict experts from capitals to relevant Council working groups to discuss concrete preventive action in a particular country or region.

Recommendations

The EEAS and the European Commission should:

- Continue to strengthen the conflict early warning system, conflict analysis, and mediation capabilities, in particular by providing adequate resources, staff time and attention to it.
- Make conflict sensitivity a part of the institutional culture, e.g. by ensuring that human resources and recruitment policies support conflict sensitivity. Specifically, conflict sensitivity and conflict analysis should be included in relevant job descriptions and staff should be evaluated on these grounds in order to create appropriate incentives.

Staff who want to specialize in conflict issues should have a viable career path for doing so. Conflict expertise could be deployed in parts of the EU that are concerned but less involved in peace and conflict related policies: for example a conflict expert could be seconded to DG trade when working on trade deals so that the negative impacts are anticipated and addressed and the positive effects maximized.

- Consider creating conflict expert rosters - taking into account lessons on the use of rosters in other regional and international organisations - in order to build capacity for conflict prevention not only in Brussels but also at the Delegation level. This means hiring more staff in some cases but also getting the right expertise in the right place at the right time and building capacity for engagement with external actors such as civil society.
- Avoid putting effort into producing further strategy documents and focus instead on implementation and action. To support implementation, it could be useful to have a brief working paper that covers what the EU is currently doing on conflict prevention, the tools currently available, the partners, the areas of focus, and areas that need improvement.
- Seek to document conflict prevention when it happens (for example, when a Head of Delegation conducts outreach that serves to support conflict prevention) so that its value and behaviors associated to it are clearer.

The EU leadership should:

- Issue clear and regular statements that demonstrate that conflict prevention is a top priority in order to ensure that this message is heard and internalized across the EU institutions and Member States.
- Be realistic about the EU's conflict prevention goals and recognize that deep change takes time. If the goals are realistic, there is a better chance of making a difference.
- Maintain a focus on a human security approach as a key principle of EU foreign policy.

Member States should:

- Coordinate their efforts and request that the EU leadership and institutions implement the Integrated Approach.
- Continue to seek opportunities to maintain and enhance political attention for conflict prevention and peacebuilding activities.

II. Strengthening the EU's role in mediation and dialogue

In the second session, participants discussed: 1) Current trends, successes, and challenges of mediation support; 2) The EU's mediation support capacity; 3) The importance of partnerships; 4) Issues surrounding the evaluation of mediation efforts.

Regarding the broader context of the meeting and the focus on the EUGS, a participant noted that the EU Global Strategy is positive regarding mediation but also contains some concerning language, such as using the terms mediation and diplomacy interchangeably, which was mentioned as worrying because diplomacy is generally interest-driven while mediation is not.

1) Current trends, successes, and challenges of mediation support

Participants highlighted two trends in conflict situations today: 1/they tend to be between states and non-state actors, and 2/ there is often a strong regional dimension. The conflicts in Syria and Ukraine both fit these patterns. Such conflicts do not respond well, generally speaking, to military solutions; mediation and dialogue are much more effective. Specifically, research cited by one participant on dismantling terrorist groups shows: 43% of groups ended their activities through a political process; 40% through local policing efforts; 10% by reaching their goals; and 7% by international military intervention. It was noted that there is often disproportionate attention to military solutions, while the most effective means of combatting terrorist groups . peaceful political dialogue . has received the least attention. Reportedly, approximately \$4 billion dollars per day are spent on global military expenses, which could pay for 100,000 mediation rounds, calling into question our funding priorities.

It has been 10 years since the first institutional capacity for mediation support was created, at the United Nations in 2006. There have been a number of positive developments since that time. One is that there are now 10 mediation support units globally. The EU and the UN Units do capacity building work for other Units, such as those at the African Union and the Organisation of American States. According to one participant, a key success is that collectively these actors, oftentimes with the support of civil society, have managed to get technical expertise to all the peace processes that have happened in the last 10 years. Mediation experts have helped generate technical solutions to power sharing dilemmas, dealt with key constitutional questions, and largely managed to avoid peace deals with far-reaching amnesties, which was a problem historically. There has also been real progress made on facilitating greater women's participation in peacemaking.

While mediation has had real successes, challenges remain and there is a need for better process design throughout. Mediation remains messy and non-linear, often involving many parallel processes and competing initiatives. It is important to think strategically about how to engage, with whom to engage, and the quality of the process overall. Often there is a focus on inclusion in terms of issues and who gets to the table, but less attention to ensuring that the participation is high quality and not just tokenistic. The more attention is given to the process, the more substantive inclusion can be achieved. Another challenge raised by participants was the lack of a clear, widely agreed definition of mediation, which would help with impact evaluation, quality assessment, and justification for political support and funding. This does not mean mediation efforts should stop until these issues are resolved, but it does point to the need for better process design throughout.

2) The EU's capacity for mediation support

The EU Mediation Support Team (MST) was created in 2011, largely thanks to the support of Member States including Finland, Sweden, Belgium, Germany and others. It remains a positive example of how new initiatives can indeed be successfully created within the EU. The MST is fairly small: it currently has three staff, and will soon receive an additional expert seconded by Finland. When it receives a request for assistance, the MST seeks to respond first internally using in-house expertise, and then request support from external experts as needed and appropriate. It has framework contracts with NGOs to deploy mediation experts¹, which not only provides access to top-level expertise but also helps create a dialogue with other organisations in country.

The EU tends to be involved in mediation processes as a donor, and because of the size of its funding it is often engaged in supporting high-level Track 1 peace processes. For example, in Addis Ababa, the EU financed a significant amount of the Track 1 peace mediations that were carried out by the African Union and the East African Community.

¹ Those include European Resources for Mediation Support (ERMES) and the Conflict Prevention and Mediation Support Project.

Another role the EU often plays is to build the mediation capacity of other actors, such as the African Union. In some cases it also plays a role in supporting the coordination of different negotiation tracks and ensuring there is a connection between the grassroots level, civil society organisations, and high-level political leaders.

Over the last five years, the MST has increasingly been requested to provide innovative solutions on the post-agreement implementation phase. Mali is a case in point . when the EU was called to the mediation table, it was already agreed that a significant portion of the implementation phase would require the EU's cooperation. So the question for the EU is how to work with this reality in a structured, smart, and strategic way and to remain engaged in key funding decisions. Syria and Myanmar are both cases where the EU is working to do so.

Finally, there are several challenges facing the EU's MST. Not all EU Delegations staff are aware that the Team is available as a resource for mediation and dialogue. Civil society can help in this regard by raising awareness when possible and also by making recommendations when they think the MST could be of use. Another challenge that applies to the EEAS more broadly is that there is a lot of staff rotation within the EU institutions, so building staff capacity on mediation and peacebuilding issues can be difficult. Last, there is a need for the EU to think carefully about the most appropriate and effective role that it can play and ensure that its tools and structures are fit for purpose. Recently, the EU has been shifting from a donor approach to mediation (i.e. as a funder and outsourcing entity) into a more substantive mediation partner that does analysis and learning together with external partners. It is worth considering when the EU is best placed to play a main role versus that of ~~Best~~ Supporting Actor.+ This is particularly the case in considering the EU's role in its own neighborhood as compared to places further abroad. From a mediation perspective, the EU has often played its most constructive role far away from its own neighborhood . for example in Aceh, Myanmar and the Philippines.

3) The importance of partnerships, local actors and meaningful participation

There are a variety of stakeholders who engage in mediation efforts, from formal Track 1 efforts to local level dialogue sessions. Participants noted that formal diplomacy in support of conflict prevention and resolution is necessary but not sufficient. Different actors bring different strengths, and there is value in understanding these differences in order to determine who may be best placed to act in a particular situation at a given time. One participant said that smallness and (perceived) weakness can be an asset if used effectively, and that all stakeholders should consider their role, their goal, and the context (both the conflict context and the community of actors) in order to determine whether and how to engage. Another argued that it is also valuable to get beyond the idea of ~~tracks~~+altogether, as this can be quite rigid, and instead to think in terms of multiple paths that may cross or bring in different components.

Furthermore, the importance of local peacebuilding efforts and ensuring that the voices of people who would otherwise be left out are heard is crucial. In South Sudan, for example, the process has been quite elite focused, and there is an important question about how to expand beyond the elite circles, especially when the government has such little reach. Several participants stated that it is valuable to support the participation of citizens in the process in order to create local level buy in and motivate the elites to engage with the population. At the same time, this participation needs to be done in a strategic manner so it is not tokenistic, as noted above.

Finally, the value of partnerships within the peacebuilding community should not be underestimated. One participant noted that partnerships can help to broaden access; share expertise and learning; optimize resources; ensure relevance and credibility in a given context; and deliver the work effectively. It is not possible for any actor to succeed entirely independently. Rather, there is a need to move away from harmful rivalries, support

collaboration and constructive competition and build greater trust in order to increase our effectiveness overall.

4) *Evaluation of mediation efforts*

There was broad consensus that more attention is needed on how to effectively evaluate mediation efforts. This is crucial in order to demonstrate that mediation is effective, to build the strength of the mediation and dialogue community, and to show that funding for mediation makes a real difference in people's lives. At the same time, a participant noted that mediation is an inherently risky business with a relatively high likelihood of failure. Mediation efforts can be thought of like venture capitalism and start-up businesses. Nine out of ten attempts may fail, but if one succeeds the human and economic impact is so important that it outweighs the other failures.

The group discussed the fact that conflict situations are complex and the simplistic question of 'has peace been achieved or not' often doesn't capture the real issues. Such an approach, which focuses on the signing of an agreement, risks missing important underlying achievements and can even be misleading, as a large percentage of peace agreements are not sustainable over time. There is also a tendency for evaluations to focus on whether programs were implemented as planned, when in reality, conflict situations evolve and so activities may also need to evolve or change. One participant described an example in Thailand where a local organization was so successful in its mediation efforts that it was invited to participate in the national dialogue process and as a result could not implement some of its previously set plans. It took effort to convince the evaluator that this was an excusable failure. Finally, another challenge is that there is still resistance to greater cooperation from some within the mediation community due to a culture of secrecy and reluctance to expose assets and approaches that others might use. In the discussion, this was deemed a disservice to the field and ultimately unsustainable.

There are many factors to consider when thinking about how to evaluate mediation efforts. One issue is the question of quantitative versus qualitative measures. Quantitative measures may be simpler to understand, but it is questionable how meaningful they truly are. Instead, some participants felt it can be more useful to focus on good analysis, milestones and how to move towards them, and how to tell the story of the change that has occurred. Peer reviews and external/internal partnerships can also be very useful. One participant noted that their organization seeks to evaluate itself through five 'results baskets' including: building trust; building capacity; creating channels and keeping them open; supporting inclusion that leads to meaningful contributions from all participants; and helping to create a shared vision of society looking forward, with concrete recommendations for how to do so. Finally, it is important to remember the ultimate goal of an evaluation should be to learn, both for the implementing organization and the donor when possible. Reportedly, the Netherlands' Ministry of Foreign Affairs has started asking its civil society partners to report back on what they have learned, rather than show what they have achieved (which can lead to exaggeration or simplification). A focus on learning creates a positive incentive to ensure programming gets continuously better.

Recommendations:

The EEAS and the European Commission should:

- Increase the political reach and visibility of the EU Mediation Support Team so that it becomes more institutionalized. One idea is that all EU Special Representatives should systematically receive training on mediation and the MST's resources.
- Consider instituting a system of EU focal points for conflicts and peace processes across the geographic and thematic departments of the EEAS (including EU Delegations) and European Commission (in particular DG DEVCO, NEAR, ECHO, Trade) so that information is shared effectively.

- Support an emphasis on learning as a key goal of evaluation efforts and move away from assessments that focus too heavily on quantitative measures or do not recognize the complexity and evolving nature of conflict issues and mediation efforts.

Civil society organisations should:

- Work to support strong knowledge management in the mediation community as a whole . what do we know, what are we still learning about, what are our successes and shortcomings.
- Continuously position mediation as an instrument that can be used throughout the conflict cycle . before, during, and post-conflict.
- Focus attention on improving evaluation methods and strategies for mediation, and ensure an emphasis on learning as a priority.

III. Implementing the EU-wide Strategic Framework on Security Sector Reform (SSR) in a conflict sensitive way

The third session addressed the EU and the Finnish approach to Security Sector Reform (SSR), including 1) the rationale behind the Strategic Framework, 2) Participants perceptions, and 3) conflict sensitivity in the framework.

1) Rationale behind the EU-wide Strategic Framework on SSR

SSR is understood by the EU as ¹the process of transforming a country's security system so that it gradually provides individuals and the state with more effective and accountable security in a manner consistent with respect for human rights, democracy, the rule of law and the principles of good governance.²

Although the EU has had multiple policy documents on SSR, it did not have a single comprehensive strategy document. For this reason, the Foreign Affairs Council invited the High Representative and the European Commission to develop an EU-wide Strategic Framework to enhance the EU's effectiveness on SSR support. Wide consultations took place within the EU institutions, Member States, Delegations, CSDP missions, and with civil society and academics. A Joint Communication was adopted in July 2016 and the Council has endorsed it in November 2016. The Communication is intended to cover all EU actors and all SSR-related external action instruments and actions in all contexts, including post-conflict. It is intended to be sufficiently broad so that it can be adapted to each country's specific needs. The five key areas of engagement in the Strategic Framework are: institutional support; training; equipment; support to oversight mechanisms; and community security.

It is hoped that the Strategic Framework will lead to greater coordination and complementarity, better integration of SSR support into the governance and human security agenda, and guidance for improving delivery of SSR actions on the ground. The Strategic Framework can also play a role in implementing the EU Global Strategy, particularly in regards to the Integrated Approach and to building resilience.

SSR provides a way to address crisis factors within the security sector and thus contribute to conflict prevention. For example, the EU Training Mission in the Central African Republic has identified SSR and inclusiveness as a core area of work in order to avoid future risks arising from the security sector. Capacity building of partners has been a significant part of

² Joint Communication; <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A52016JC0031>

the EU's SSR-related work and this is a key objective of CSDP missions. Civilian missions also take on SSR when they deal with issues related to policing, border management, rule of law and civilian administration and good governance. SSR can also be a part of the military operations of the EU and of EU Training Missions. Overall, the Strategic Framework is a valuable policy document and the main challenge will be implementing it effectively.

In terms of implementation, at the institutional level the EEAS and EC have established an inter-service task force that will monitor implementation and coordinate the work; at the policy level work on a risk management methodology has started and Member State input is being solicited; and at the project level the Instrument contributing to Stability and Peace (IcSP) is supporting the creation of a Facility to provide expert support on SSR.

2) Perceptions of the Strategic Framework

It was noted that the Strategic Framework is an important step forward and that it is useful to have a comprehensive strategy document on SSR. The consultations with Member States and other stakeholders on the Strategic Framework were found to be well done and echoed the view that implementing it will also support implementation of the EU Global Strategy.

At the same time, there were mixed views on the EU's shift towards a greater focus on security and defense. A participant noted it is valuable to strengthen the EU as a security community and actor, and that Finland, Germany, France, Spain, and Italy were among the Member States that share this view. EU citizens have expectations that the EU will produce security in the current context. Other participants expressed serious concern about this direction for the EU and wanted to push back on the emphasis on defense cooperation and security.

3) Conflict sensitivity in the Strategic Framework

The main tenets of a conflict sensitive approach are to do a robust conflict analysis, apply that analysis to planning, and seek to avoid negative outcomes and maximize positive ones. From this perspective, participants felt the Strategic Framework is positive in that it recognizes the importance of conflict sensitivity and the value of good analysis, including gender analysis, and maintains a clear focus on human security. Additionally, it was noted that there are efforts to integrate conflict sensitivity into the EU, for example with a chapter on conflict sensitivity in the staff handbook for Brussels and Delegation-based staff and with work ongoing to develop an online training course on conflict sensitivity.

Among participants, there was agreement in principle on the importance of ~~to~~ no harm+ and conflict sensitive approaches to SSR including understanding local dynamics, being aware that SSR is often very political, the importance of local ownership, and the key role for civil society. However, there was some debate about what this actually means in practice.

Specifically, it was noted that civil society tends to focus on a human security approach and on community security, and particularly what makes local people feel safe. This model focuses on building relationships and working with communities to identify security concerns and advocate for changes with security providers. However, it faces challenges because security does not function exclusively on a local level, and other levels of governance and conflict have an impact. On the other hand, the group discussed that governments and regional organisations such as the EU risk focusing too heavily on state structures, because states are seen as natural partners and because it can be easier than working with a multitude of civil society and other organisations. One criticism participants noted about the Strategic Framework and the Global Strategy is that their implementation relies heavily on a top-down approach.

A concrete example and subject of some debate was Train & Equip (T&E) efforts. From one perspective, T&E represents a useful way of working to improve the security sector and the

main challenge is that training without providing appropriate equipment is ineffective (an example was given of EU training armed forces in Somalia but the soldiers did not have boots). However, from a conflict sensitivity perspective, several participants noted that train-and-equip activities risk building the capacity of security services that may be unaccountable, corrupt, or abusive and may not contribute at all to improving people's security. An example was given of the Better Migration Management project where Ethiopia, Eritrea, and Sudan were being asked to manage migration and human trafficking issues and were struggling. Some of these states have themselves failed to protect human rights or hold individuals accountable for abuse, so it is concerning to put them in charge of managing migration and human trafficking issues. It was noted that there is limited evidence that big T&E programs are effective, particularly over the long-term. Additionally, train-and-equip activities can be extremely expensive, and risk taking funding away from more effective and more conflict sensitive peacebuilding approaches.

Another note of caution was sounded in regards to the principle of local ownership, noting that it is an important but very challenging in practice. In many cases, the EU may not have the leverage to push for comprehensive SSR reforms, therefore governments can pick and choose what they want to do under the guise of local ownership. Leaders often select reforms that will keep them in power. Thus, external support in the security sector can have wide-ranging implications, not always positive.

Recommendations

The EEAS, the European Commission, and Member States should:

- Seek to ensure a focus on human security by pursuing SSR from the perspective of citizens and communities, and avoiding excessive reliance on state and government structures and perspectives.
- Support inclusive dialogue on SSR issues and ensure that marginalized groups, women, and civil society are part of processes the EU and Member States are supporting. Inclusion of civil society in discussions and planning of SSR processes should be a red line for the EU and Member States.
- Recognize that SSR is a long-term process that takes generations, avoid short-term expectations and instead focus programming so that SSR investments can have a transformative effect on the next generation.
- Re-assess the EU's (potential) T&E activities from a conflict sensitivity and cost-effectiveness perspective, and consider carrying-out and/or commissioning research into the long-term impact of such activities.