



Civil Society Dialogue Network Geographic Meeting

Armed violence and capacities for peace in Iraq: Actors, causes, impact and EU responses

Wednesday 3 December 2014, Brussels

MEETING REPORT

The overall objective of the meeting was to gather civil society input into the European Union's (EU) assessment of the situation in Iraq and the development and implementation of its strategies and ongoing activities.

The specific objectives were:

- To identify causes of armed violence in Iraq and the role of different armed groups
- To outline possible scenarios for the evolution of armed groups in Iraq
- To identify local, regional and international capacities for ending and resisting violence and for the promotion of peace in Iraq
- To assess possible response options for the EU.

Participants included civil society analysts primarily from Iraq but also from the wider region, a limited number of international civil society peacebuilding experts on Iraq and Syria, and policy-makers from across the EU institutions.

Session 1 and 2 – Armed Violence in Iraq: Causes and Actors

Civil society participants were invited to provide their analysis of:

- ***the causes of the current armed violence in Iraq***
- ***the groups currently involved in and supporting armed violence***
- ***the groups armed and prepared for violence and/or providing security***
- ***the motivations, composition, and recruitment tactics of these groups.***

They were then invited to provide their analysis of the likely evolution of armed violence in Iraq, the most likely scenarios in one year and in three years, and the best case and worst case scenarios.

Civil society participants expressed a wide range of – sometimes divergent – views. There was no attempt to generate a consensus and the report contains all the key points made.

Deep and increasing sectarianism in Iraq is fuelling violence

- There is increasing segregation and discrimination between different groups.
- The heterogeneous nature of Iraqi society means that the situation is doomed to repeat itself.
- No single group can claim to represent all sections of Iraqi society: there is a need for a broad-based government with veto powers for certain groups in order to ensure stability and that everybody has a share in the economy.

- In the past, there was class conflict; this has also been supplanted by conflict between competing religious groups.
- Religion plays an important role in elections. There is a whole generation of Iraqis who are ignorant about democratic elections. Traditions are based on tribes and clans.
- Political parties have very limited capacities and do not reflect national interests.
- There has been a growth in clan and sectarian identities: there is a need to re-create a national identity which is now eclipsed by these identities. There is no sense of national citizenship.
- All groups are fragmented politically: this is shown by the large number of tiny militias.
- Traditional forms of democracy cannot function in Iraq.
- People think of statebuilding in a totalitarian way: monopolisation of power, exclusion of others and provision of benefits to their own group.
- Politicians do not safeguard the national interest but promote sectarian interests.
- There is a major lack of trust between different groups.
- There is a need for the emergence of intellectuals and for the development of a middle class in order to create the momentum for the establishment of a civil state which surmounts sectarian, clan or ethnic differences.
- Since 2003, politicians have exploited divisions in Iraqi society and focused on their own economic interests. Politicians use religion for political gains. The ongoing conflicts are about power and wealth distribution.
- ISIL/Da'esh emerged due to internal divisions in Iraq.
- The social fabric of Iraq is currently under threat due to inter-confessional rifts. Divorce rates are rising, especially in inter-confessional marriages.
- There are problems with Iraqi family law and personal status laws. In the past they were uniform but now all religious groups want to apply their own. This means that certain communities would legalise child marriage.

Iraq is over-run by militias of all types; ISIL/Da'esh is one among many armed groups

- There is a plethora of armed groups in Iraq; the collapse of the Iraqi armed forces led to people joining militias; many small groups are emerging in Baghdad due to the perceived weakness of the Government.
- There is significant competition between militias in the south of Iraq.
- New militias tend to and will continue to emerge following national and regional crises.
- Citizens join militias as they feel that their rights are not protected nor their interests served by the state. Militias provide services and security for "their" community in the absence of state provision.
- The high level of youth unemployment is a major problem: financial gain is a reason for young people to join both state and non-state armed groups and economic problems are fuelling extremism.
- The collapse of the Saddam Hussein regime led to a complex settlement and the influx of jihadists to fight the US invasion.
- Long-standing militarisation of Iraqi society dating back to the regime of Saddam is one of the causes of current levels of violence; there is a need therefore to change the mentality of violence which is impregnated into people's minds in all areas of Iraq.
- The US is training tribal forces and providing arms to numerous militias. It has supported the creation of armed groups in order to destroy Al Qaeda. This has resulted in a new problem: armed groups cannot give up violence as a method of securing their rights.

Tackling militias: different perspectives

- There are many different armed groups in Iraq. It is, therefore, necessary to categorise them and to consider strategies for dealing with them individually.
- The US and Europe currently have leverage they could use to tackle militias.
- It is necessary to bring the various armed groups under the control of the state.

- The proposal to establish a national guard could help to bring militias under the control of the Ministry of Defence and make them more accountable.
- Armed violence will continue unless the Government can regularise the various militias.
- However, others argued: there is a need to keep militias away from state institutions and to reintegrate their members into society.
- The state is built on militias. They have existed since the Saddam Hussein regime.
- Armed groups, including the Peshmerga, are unfamiliar with international humanitarian law (IHL) but they are responsible for management of internally displaced persons (IDPs).
- The Peshmerga and other armed groups require training on IHL and human rights law.
- The Peshmerga are not prepared to run cities. This is a major problem in the short-term.
- The provision of weapons is exacerbating the militia problem.

ISIL/Da'esh

- There has been an influx of foreign fighters. However, the backbone of ISIL/Da'esh in Iraq is composed of former members of Saddam Hussein's forces.
- ISIL/Da'esh is divided into two factions: army officers, intelligence officers and bureaucrats from the old regime who are interested in power, and the ideologues. The division between the two factions is likely to increase. Whether or not this is beneficial for ending violence depends on the existence of an inclusive government and the success or otherwise of reforms.
- ISIL/Da'esh has no future. However, they are very media-savvy and they create the perception that they are invincible.
- There are unconfirmed reports that ISIL/Da'esh stopped recruiting very recently.
- Iran's role in Iraq is weakening ISIL/Da'esh.
- The emergence of ISIL/Da'esh and al Qaeda is due to a lack of trust between different groups which needs to be tackled to prevent their continued success.
- It is not possible to fully understand ISIL/Da'esh without understanding its ideological background (i.e. Wahabism).
- The culture of violence in Iraq did not emerge with ISIL/Da'esh. It is deep-rooted in the region and has multiple manifestations.

Iraq is a site for proxy wars

- Iraq is the theatre for proxy wars between different regional and international powers (i.e. Iran, Turkey and some Gulf states, the USA); this is one of the causes of violence in Iraq.
- The current government is the product of a tacit compromise between the US and Iran rather than the choice of the Iraqi people.

There are different views on the Constitution of Iraq

- Despite the provisions on federalism and decentralisation in the Constitution of Iraq, over-centralisation remains a problem as articles of the Constitution are not implemented.
- In addition, the Constitution of Iraq includes a number of unclear articles which limit the effectiveness of the Federal Government of Iraq and it also contains many elements which divide the Iraqi people.
- The main reason for the focus on religion and tribalism is the Constitution which provides for support for them. It is, therefore, important to amend the Constitution. The EU should support a project on amending the existing Constitution or drafting a new one.
- A confederal system could be a solution as it could reduce competition for positions and resources.
- The Constitution is not working and therefore needs to be amended or replaced. This will be very difficult but not impossible.
- There is a need to build the state first before considering a confederal system.
- The Constitution includes lots of progressive elements but it is not always respected.
- It would not be possible to amend the Constitution without a certain degree of trust between different groups.

- The Constitution is highly ambiguous in terms of whether Iraq is a civil or a religious state.
- Many people equate federalism with division and confederalism is not properly understood.
- The inner structures of provincial councils are unstable and they are far from being able to meet citizens' needs.
- It is pointless discussing constitutional amendments if the current set of policy-makers is going to be responsible for leading it: there will be no change. However, there is a need for the problematic articles to be clarified.
- Policy-makers talk about establishing the Council of Union. However, it has no mandate. All powers lie with the Parliament and it will not relinquish them. Furthermore, it is dangerous to discuss the establishment of the Council of Union if the terms of reference are ambiguous.
- Kurds often feel that the Government's policies go against their interests.
- The struggle between the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) and the Government is based on each side trying to gain at the expense of the other: there is no consideration of mutual gain.
- A legal framework is being created to reinvigorate the role of tribes by creating tribal councils.

Failures of governance and of statebuilding are key causes of violence

- The previous government made many mistakes, including pursuing divisive and sectarian policies and unravelling the power structures which had had existed in Iraq. There was no clear strategy on the part of the government and there continues to be an absence of statesmen.
- There is poor governance, including inefficient administration and widespread corruption, taking the form of clientelistic practices.
- The Iraqi people are unable to hold the Government to account so there is not a functioning democratic system.
- The Government is powerless to stop the spread of militias.
- Iraq's foreign policy has been mismanaged: relations with Iran have improved but relations with other countries have been neglected. Iraq's relations with the EU are currently not good.
- There has been a failure of statebuilding in Iraq, despite the huge amount of money spent on statebuilding since 2003.
- Military-led change without corresponding political changes has resulted in chaos in Iraq.
- The dismantling of the army and the police force resulted in chaos and their reconstruction has been mishandled.
- Repeated failures during the transitional period mean that Iraq is a failed state.
- Iraq is a unique case and models of governance which have been applied in other countries with diverse societies cannot serve it.

Reforming state institutions

- There is a need for a broad-based cabinet in order to avoid a monopoly of power.
- Government institutions need to be neutral: ministries currently only serve the needs of certain communities and nepotism is rampant.
- The Government does not believe in diversity: all appointments represent particular groups.
- Recruitment to state institutions must be competence-based.
- Clerics should not be allowed to apply for positions in state institutions. However, some of them have played a positive role in trying to promote the national interest.
- There is a need for civil government based on civil skills and capacities and away from sectarian divides.
- There is a need for deep reform/complete overhaul of the judiciary, given levels of impunity.
- The police needs to be completely overhauled; additional training for police officers will not be sufficient.

Reforming the Iraqi Army to overcome sectarianism

- The Iraqi Army should be inclusive and recruitment should be done on the basis of the relative size of different demographic groups.

- There is a need for security sector reform (SSR) as the Iraqi Army is made up of 60-70% of the old officer corps. In addition, Kurds made up approximately one-third of the post-2003 army but they have been purged.
- The Government has taken a number of positive steps in trying to reform the military and the administration. However, it still has a very narrow ethnic base.
- It is important to rebuild the army on a national basis and to move away from sectarian affiliations: the new army should be depoliticised and respect the rule of law.

Gender inequality is a problem for the new government

- Only three out of 30 government ministers are women and none of them holds a key portfolio.
- None of the vice-presidents of the Council of Representatives (Parliament) is female.
- There is a need to overcome the trend of gender-based segregation by creating an atmosphere of citizenship regardless of gender.

The absence of the rule of law allows armed groups to flourish

- There is an absence of the rule of law and the judiciary is ineffective: it has marginalised many elements of society. It is highly politicised, not impartial and incompetent.

Civil society has a role to play

- Civil society is key to developing a different philosophy and tackling causes of violence.
- Policy-makers see civil society organisations (CSOs) as providers of humanitarian assistance: they believe that civil society should not engage in politics.
- There is a need to invest in capacity building but also to change the approach to capacity building: since 2003, huge amounts of funding have been spent with only limited impact.
- Some of the CSOs established since 2003 are covers for political parties and they contribute to the conflict: there is a need to filter them out.
- IDPs are a potential source of future civil society leadership.
- There is a need to promote the establishment of civil society in Iran and Saudi Arabia.

Transitional justice has been over-looked; it should now be supported

- Transitional justice has not taken place in Iraq: past events have resulted in mutual hatred.
- Transitional justice processes are required urgently. A process modelled on the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa could be useful.
- The EU could support transitional justice processes in Iraq.

Human rights abuses by government and militias are widespread

- There have been many human rights violations in recent years, including under counter-terrorism laws: torture in prisons and other human rights violations have led to the emergence of more extremists.
- Terrible human rights violations are taking place in areas under the control of militias.
- The Ministry of Human Rights only recognises human rights violations committed by the Saddam Hussein regime. Its focus needs to be much broader.

Young people are vulnerable to recruitment into armed groups

- Social media in Iraq is dominated by bloodshed and young people are attracted by it.
- Young people tend to live in a vacuum: they only find an identity if they join a movement.
- Young people are angry about their dire economic situation and general exclusion. As a result, they are easily recruited into militias.
- Young people are lack workless and skills: militias are their only options. They need opportunities to work and to make a useful contribution to society as an alternative to violence.
- There is a need to reform school curricula in order to move away from extremism. In this context, it is important to educate people on citizenship.

Other issues raised:

- One of the reasons for violence in Iraq is pragmatic: people have not been able to exist or to gain their rights without using violence.
- There are hidden causes of violence such as the US' negotiations with Iran on the nuclear issue; and Ukraine, and the politics of oil and gas pipelines.
- The situation in Iraq cannot be separated from the situation in the wider region, including spillover from Syria.
- Iraq is still feeling the effects of its 13 years of isolation from the international community and the fallout from the Iran-Iraq War during which the education system collapsed, state institutions did not function and civil society was non-existent.
- Increased economic opportunities and education are the most important factors for tackling violence.
- Internal violence within communities and domestic violence are also issues in Iraq.
- A growing number of marriages take place informally. This means that the children may not be entitled to citizenship.
- There are also numerous cases of teenage and child marriages and an 85 % divorce rate.

Future scenarios

- The Government is both strong and weak at the same time: the ruling coalition is split.
- There is currently a window of opportunity: it should be exploited by all stakeholders who are interested in building peace
- Given the lack of belief in a unified Iraq, the violence will continue.
- Violence is likely to continue for several years.
- If the violence continues at its current rate, people from minority groups will leave the country and this will lead to significant demographic changes.
- If the situation continues, Iraq will become like Syria.
- It may take up to ten years to destroy ISIL/Da'esh.
- Alternatively, some argued: if Iranian forces continue to support Iraqi forces, ISIL/Da'esh will be weakened and will eventually disappear.
- If the US supports the tribes and Iran supports Shia militias, ISIL/Da'esh will be weakened but not eradicated.

Session 3 – Capacities for Peace; Resilience to Violence

Participants were invited to provide their assessment of the capacities and initiatives in Iraq to end and resist violence, and to support peace in the long-term, and the regional and international capacities to end violence and to support peace.

General remarks:

- The huge amounts of money which have been spent supporting military responses have so far failed to produce a significant result and could have been spent more wisely.
- There is a need for a greater focus on addressing the root causes of violence rather than just the results of violence.

Limited capacity of state institutions at central and regional levels to end violence

- Since 2003, the capacity of the political system to end violence has been very low. The EU can play a role in addressing this shortcoming.
- The limited capacity of the Iraqi Army was demonstrated when ISIL/Da'esh captured Mosul.
- There is a need for SSR as the police force is corrupt and divided and between 40 and 60 per cent of the army is made up of 'ghost soldiers'.
- To date, parliament has only dealt with a limited number of issues linked to the interests of the various political parties

- It is important not to ignore capacity in the local police forces in the beleaguered regions.
- It is necessary to do capacity building with judges and members of parliament (MPs) outside Iraq for maximum effectiveness. However, one problem with the EU's training for judges and security personnel is that it is not followed up within Iraq.

Supporting local communities is important

- It is vital to pay close attention to local communities which can be a valuable source of information (e.g. regarding divisions within different armed groups). It will not be possible to achieve anything without them.
- A number of Iraqi citizens are pleased about seeing the Government suffering at the hands of ISIL/Da'esh but many more are choosing to flee. Those people, who are currently refugees or IDPs, could be a major peacebuilding asset in the future.

Civil society in Iraq is skilled and able to play a role in supporting peace

- Civil society has evolved greatly since 2003 and is able to play a major role. There are now CSOs specialising in conflict prevention and peacebuilding work, campaigning, governance and service provision (see Annex 1).
- CSOs working in Iraq have undertaken numerous activities aimed at reforming political processes and influencing the Government's policies.
- There is a good CSO law in Iraq and the genuine CSOs working in the country could have a greater impact. CSOs fought hard for the CSO law which took five years to be adopted. It is the most progressive CSO law in the region.
- Some CSOs have participated in the process of drafting parliamentary reports.
- CSOs can have a significant impact so they should focus more on promoting peaceful existence between communities.
- In 2005-2007, CSOs played a major role in overcoming the sectarian crisis.
- CSOs established women's listening centres. They learned from victims of violence that there is a strong desire for retaliation, especially among IDPs. There is a pressing need to open centres in IDP camps.
- Many civil society activists are extremely active on Facebook and there various major social media campaigns taking place.
- However, social media is used much more to promote violence than it is to build peace. Certain human rights bloggers are able to have a small impact but it is dwarfed by those people who are pushing a violent agenda.
- CSOs have campaigned extensively on the issue of freedom of expression.

However, civil society is also under threat and daunted by current problems

- It is becoming more difficult for CSOs to have a significant impact due to the high levels of armed violence and enormity of the problems currently facing Iraq.
- Many civil society activists have been lost due to violence over the past ten years.
- The EU needs to provide appropriate support for CSOs (e.g. the objectives and expected results of calls for proposals need to be realistic). It also needs to support CSO capacity building rather than just providing funding for the implementation of specific activities.
- The EU could support CSOs to do mediation, conflict mitigation and monitoring government.
- The EU and wider international community need to support long-term projects and to use good selection procedures (e.g. geographical balance, support for women, youth and minorities etc.)
- CSOs working in Iraq need core funding in order to support their capacity building and to enable them to take long-term approaches to their work. Unfortunately, they are not currently able to access it.
- The EU could play a role in convincing the Government to listen to CSOs.
- The EU should increase its visibility in Iraq as some policy-makers are more responsive if they see that a CSO project is funded by the EU than by another donor.

- There are thousands of so-called “suitcase CSOs” in Iraq: the EU should examine how to support the genuine CSOs to work on conflict management and resolution.
- International non-governmental organisations (INGOs) have focused too much on implementing programmes and have failed to build the capacity of their local staff.
- While it is clearly important that CSOs help victims of violence in the short-term, they should also be able to provide assistance to survivors (e.g. widows, orphans etc.) in the long-term.
- CSOs could work with officials in neighbourhoods in order to raise awareness and explain sensitive issues (e.g. debunk the myth that ISIL/Da’esh was caused by the US).

Religious leaders have a crucial role to play

- Religious leaders are now more open to working with other civil society actors than they were in the past. Some CSOs feel that it is not difficult to have exchanges of views with religious leaders and that many of them could support peacebuilding.
- One CSO works on building bridges between religious groups. It is a secular organisation but it brings together very high-level religious people.

Other issues raised:

- There is an old tribal tradition of dividing the tribe when it is threatened with a view to reuniting it once the threat has passed. This is happening now: members of the same tribes are fighting on both the government and the ISIL/Da’esh sides in the same regions.

Session 4 – Response Options for the EU

The session began with a summary of current and potential EU activities:

- It is important to be conscious of the limits of the EU’s possible response to the challenges facing Iraq: solutions must come from within the country.
- Regional actors can also play an important role. As a first step, they need to step back and stop fighting proxy wars in Iraq.
- The Iraqi people need to take responsibility for the construction of a society which addresses the root causes of ongoing conflicts (e.g. corruption, sectarianism, etc.)
- The EU can bring its own negative and positive experiences (i.e. continent-wide conflict followed by reconstruction and reconciliation), and financial support.
- Regarding institution-building, the EU can only provide support: the main effort needs to come from Iraq itself and the region.
- It is necessary to confront Iraq’s neighbours with the implications of violence in Iraq (i.e. they need to accept that ongoing conflicts in Iraq also pose a threat to them).

The EU provided comments in response to discussions during the day:

- The EEAS is currently developing a regional strategy to be adopted in early 2015.
- The events of recent months have served as a wakeup call for EU policy-makers.
- The main focus in the EU is on ISIL/Da’esh. However, EU policy-makers are aware that this is not the only issue to be addressed.
- The emergence of ISIL/Da’esh did not take place in a vacuum: it was fed by various factors (e.g. weak governance, corruption, poor decision-making etc.) which affect all regions of Iraq.
- The EU is not focusing on a military solution. It is aware that EU citizens are contributing to the ongoing conflicts in Iraq and that it needs to deal with them. As a result, it adopted a strategy on foreign fighters on 20 October 2014.
- The EU is focusing on helping to improve governance in Iraq and is developing responses for when ISIL/Da’esh is pushed back.
- The EU is supporting civil society which has been somewhat neglected in the past: there has been support for humanitarian work and activities in the field of education but CSOs in Iraq also need support to undertake advocacy towards the Government and to do peacebuilding .

- The EU has taken note of criticism of its support for the judiciary in Iraq and accepts that it needs to learn from mistakes made in its previous rule of law programmes in the country.
- Regarding policing, the EU takes on board the need to ensure that it is human rights-compliant and that future support should focus on establishing a new environment for policing efforts.
- Regarding the economy and trade, it is important to ensure a better distribution of wealth and the EU should say what mechanisms can be put into place by the Government in order to achieve this objective. In this context, the EU cannot resolve the issue of corruption but it can use its leverage to promote improved wealth distribution.
- Regarding social media, the EU could explore support for CSO-led campaigns.
- Regarding religious leaders, the EU is not particularly engaged in dialogue with them yet and the peacebuilding potential of this activity could be explored and possibly supported.
- Regarding the issue of reforming the Constitution, although the existing Constitution may have a number of weaknesses, any efforts to amend/replace it run the risk of getting bogged down in sectarian infighting and discussions of principle.
- Regarding the issue of decentralisation, including the regularisation of militias and/or the creation of a national guard, the question remains: who at the local level would be in charge of the new armed forces? In addition, there is a risk that decentralisation could increase the sectarian divide. Is there a need to rebuild the state before even considering decentralisation? On the other hand, some people have argued strongly that it is necessary for decentralisation as a matter of urgency in order to stop the bloodshed.
- Regarding regional actors, the EU needs to engage with Iraq's neighbours, including possibly considering engaging with Iran on issues other than on nuclear non-proliferation.
- Regarding the Gulf states, there is a very one-sided sectarian perspective.
- The overarching focus on ISIL/Da'esh is understandable in the current context. However, there is a need for a 'whole-of-Iraq' approach in order to combat sectarianism.
- Regarding financial support for Iraq, many EU Member State's (MS) external spending budgets are currently extremely limited. It is, therefore, necessary for EU policy-makers to ensure that Iraq remains in both the policy and budget foci.

Participants were invited to provide their comments and recommendations on options and overall strategy, including:

- the windows of opportunity for external actors
- the options for new activities and assessment of the feasibility of different options
- the impact on conflict dynamics, actors and structures of possible new options.

Overall

- The development of a strategy by the EU is an important positive step.

Regional actors

- Regarding working with Iraq's neighbours, pressure should be brought to bear on Turkey to reveal the nature of its relations with ISIL/Da'esh, including regarding the importation of oil at cheap rates. Similarly, pressure should be brought to bear on Iran to make it accountable for violations.
- Regarding Turkey, the time has passed to criticise its relationship with ISIL/Da'esh. Following pressure from the US, it is currently engaged much more positively than before.
- There is a need to engage Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates as they are currently providing financial support to ISIL/Da'esh.
- The EU needs to take into account its 'neighbours' neighbours' (i.e. the countries which share borders with those countries in the EU's Neighbourhood. In this context, the EU's policies in Iraq will not be effective if they ignore the situation in Syria.

Civil society

- Assistance to civil society is required to increase the civil nature of the state in Iraq. The EU's strategy should include projects aimed at supporting the strengthening of practices of civil statehood in all countries in the region.
- The EU should focus on its areas of expertise and support civil society and coalition-building.
- There is a need to engage with women and youth. Regarding the latter, they must be supported in terms of training and participation in political life in a capacity other than just as voters. In this context, the EU could support CSO activities aimed at bringing young people into political parties and parliaments.
- The EU should also support the involvement of CSOs in political and economic reforms, and the reform of state institutions. In this context, all EU-supported reform programmes should include both officials from state institutions and representatives of CSOs in order to strengthen monitoring and accountability.
- CSOs are currently involved in training people in state institutions (e.g. judges and security personnel); this should continue.
- The UN Security Council Resolution on the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) provides for the Mission to support both the Government and civil society. Technical support for CSO capacity building should, therefore, also be provided.
- The EU Delegation (EUD) in Baghdad is currently working on reform of the criminal justice system and rule of law. They should also involve CSOs in their work.
- Leaving the EU aside, CSOs in Iraq should also work on strengthening the partnership between CSOs, the Parliament and the Government.
- EU officials should insist on meeting CSO representatives whenever they visit Iraq.
- The EUD in Baghdad needs to reach out to CSOs working in the provinces.
- There is a great deal of civil society capacity in Iraq. It is important to try to support local organisations and to work with them.

Human rights

- The EU should also provide support to human rights defenders (HRDs) in Iraq: they are either being killed or leaving the country.
- The EU should support the establishment of the National Commission for Human Rights in Iraq to replace the Ministry of Human Rights. Specifically, the EU should put pressure on the Government to dismantle the Ministry and to transfer its competences and resources to the Commission.
- The EU should take into account the numerous recommendations which CSOs have presented to the Commission for Human Rights and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) Committee when it considers its options for engagement in Iraq.

Constitutional issues

- Another possible area of EU expertise could be in reforming the Constitution. There are different views on the existing Constitution. With some civil society participants supporting reform and others believing that this would not be desirable as the existing Constitution reflects both the post-2003 balance of power in Iraq, and its societal and political nature, and efforts to amend/replace it could lead to more violence.
- Some see the main problems of the Constitution as differences in interpretation and lack of implementation.
- Regarding the issue of decentralisation, the relationship between the Government and the regions is covered by Article 21 of the Constitution but the previous government failed to implement it. Any efforts to establish a confederal system of governance in Iraq could result in the breakup of the country.

Humanitarian assistance

- The EU can continue to provide humanitarian assistance to the six million IDPs in Iraq.

- The EU should continue to focus on humanitarian assistance.
- The Red Cross should restart its activities in Iraqi Kurdistan in order to ensure that human assistance reaches those in need as quickly as possible.
- The European Commission (EC) is aware of the substantial humanitarian needs in Iraq and it has scaled up its response to deal with the high number of IDPs.

Other issues raised:

- The EU needs to take into account the common list of grievances against the Government if it wants to engage in Iraq.
- Armed violence is a problem throughout the region. The EU needs a comprehensive vision to address violence and its multiple causes.
- Countries in the region share many characteristics and the EU should not treat them as separate entities.
- The EU should ban would-be foreign fighters from travelling from EU countries to the region and consider withdrawing nationality.
- In 2006-7, the US froze the assets of suspected terrorists. The EU should do the same.
- The EU should pressurise the Government to end the indiscriminate shelling of Fallujah.
- The starting point for any engagement in Iraq has to be the liberation of the approximately one-third of the country which is currently under the control of ISIL/Da'esh. Since this will require a military undertaking, the EU has no role to play there.
- There have been some positive developments, including the recent deal on oil between the Government and the KRG.
- A multifaceted effort is required to contain ISIL/Da'esh. The EU can be part of that effort.
- A clarification was offered from the EU: it is able to develop military responses (e.g. Central African Republic and Mali). One possible component of the proposed regional strategy could be to try to rebuild services in areas which have been liberated from ISIL/Da'esh control and to ensure that they remain liberated.
- An EU military taskforce would increase the impact of the EU's political position and increase the leverage of both its humanitarian assistance and support for CSOs. It would also be more effective than the current involvement of a limited number of EU Member States.
- Some recommendations for future EU engagement in Iraq will be set out in the delayed 2014 Iraq Studies report.
- Recent research has shown that the people in Iraq continue to trust the EU.
- There is a need to build support for political parties which work to serve the needs of the Iraqi people rather than their own interests.
- Religious leaders played a key role in mobilising people to resist ISIL/Da'esh
- Regarding the EU's support for judicial reform through the EU Integrated Rule of Law Mission for Iraq (EUJUST LEX-Iraq), it is necessary to undertake an independent evaluation to ensure that mistakes are not repeated.
- Security issues must not be used as an excuse for not engaging in Iraq.
- Many mistakes have been made over the past eight years but the establishment of the new government has provided a window of opportunity for change. The EU should seize on it by supporting the capacity building of policymakers in the various ministries (e.g. on the use of social media).

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 (EPLLO), 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 [EPLLO website](#).