



Civil Society Dialogue Network Policy Meeting

The EU and Peacebuilding – Taking Stock

Thursday, 26 March 2015

MEETING REPORT

Introduction

The European Union (EU) has been committed to ‘preserve peace, prevent conflicts and strengthen international security’ since the Lisbon Treaty (Article 21.2(c)). While the EU has been developing several tools and resources to respond to conflict, the global environment has been changing too, with a series of acute crises and more, increasingly complex conflicts taking place around the world.

The Civil Society Dialogue Network (CSDN) hosted a policy meeting to take stock of external and internal changes since the Lisbon Treaty in order to identify potential opportunities and challenges to make the EU more effective at building peace.

The 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, now called Instrument Contributing to Stability and Peace). 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). This current phase of the CSDN will last until 2016. For more information, please visit the [EPLO website](#).

The meeting brought together representatives of civil society organisations and officials from the EU institutions, EU Member States and the United Nations.

The first session was designed to assess the role of the EU in the new global context ahead of the upcoming European Council and discussions on the review of the European Security Strategy, above all aiming to identify the comparative advantage of the EU as a global player.

On the basis of discussions in the first session, the aim of the second session was to identify tangible means to improve the EU’s response to conflict.

This report summarises the discussion and the key recommendations made by participants during the meeting, which was held under the Chatham House Rule. No opinion expressed here may be attributed to any participating individual or institution, nor necessarily represents the position of the CSDN as a whole, or of EPLO, the European External Action Service or the European Commission.

The role of the EU in the new global context

Situation

The meeting began with an assessment by the panel of the current global context. There was general agreement that **the existing international system is under pressure**, as are traditional international actors – states and institutions alike – and that concepts such as international law and human rights are increasingly perceived as western, rather than universal, values.

In addition to this international crisis of legitimacy, participants agreed that the EU was also under pressure from the inside, for example from unemployed youth, the mainstream media and nationalist and extremist circles, and that this malaise had been noted by international partners.

It was noted that while some current trends provide cause for concern, it is important to remember that from a long-term perspective **the world has never been safer or seen less poverty than at the current time.**

Threats and challenges

Following the assessment of the current situation, speakers and participants identified a number of existing challenges to the international system, most notably the following:

- The evolution of the existing system based on nation states and multilateral institutions and the increasing diffusion of power, even to individuals
- The changes in non-state armed groups, becoming more technologically savvy, developing global business models and harbouring territorial ambitions
- The disintegration of states closer to the EU
- Forms of territorial intervention through hybrid warfare
- Social unrest both within and outside Europe and waves of migration

Risks and challenges related to climate change, high technology (cyber-attacks, biotechnology) or pandemics were also briefly mentioned.

While the reality of the terrorism threat was not contested, a couple of participants emphasised the **risk of seeing terrorism everywhere** without further analysis and of applying short-term counter-terrorism responses (proscription of terrorist groups, prioritisation of military options, etc.) **that may be counter-productive and detract attention and resources from peacebuilding approaches.**

Comparative advantage of the EU

Speakers and participants assessed the comparative advantage of the EU in the above context and identified assets and impediments to EU actions. There was general agreement that the nature and range of tools at its disposal – trade, diplomacy, aid, financial means, sanctions, membership incentives, CSDP, mediation – make **the EU a unique player, one broadly seen to be a force for good, albeit regarded as a super-partner rather than a super-power.** Some participants argued that the EU should be more overtly political in its actions and use of these instruments.

It was recognised that the need for agreement between 28 Member States and the institutions mean that the EU is often slow to act. Furthermore, it was stated that **the Foreign Affairs Council (FAC) and the Political and Security Committee (PSC) were**

too often in crisis mode and needed to become more preventive in their mind-set rather than reactive. However, participants also acknowledged that a few Member States are already supporting such a shift towards conflict prevention. It was mentioned that these Member States need support from civil society to convince other Member States in this regard.

Another participant later stated that discussions were likely to continue focusing very much on crisis management, therefore recommendations on **peacebuilding approaches to crisis management should be further developed, in particular on protection of civilians.**

Participants also had **different views on the public's expectations towards the EU's role in external action.** Some explained that populations tend to expect a more robust answer to external conflicts from the EU, an expectation which can hardly be met because of the limited resources available. Others argued that according to opinion polls, European citizens are not in favour of military intervention and prefer conflict prevention approaches.

Review of the European Security Strategy (ESS)

Ahead of the European Council in June, Federica Mogherini, the EU's High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy/Vice-President of the European Commission (HR/VP) will produce a report on changes in the global security environment. Participants were informed that this report would be a first step in order to inform the discussion on the potential review of the ESS.

It was recommended that all stakeholders – Member States, EU institutions, civil society – should fully participate and ensure complete ownership of the review process and its final outcome.

Speakers and participants agreed that a revised ESS would need to be **flexible and adaptable in its form**, as well as allowing the EU to act more quickly and effectively than is currently the case.

Regarding the content of the review, a participant explained that some small Member States, with limited diplomatic reach, tend to underestimate what can be achieved through the EU. A new ESS should give them the opportunity to **think big** and for instance consider more closely the EU's relations with Asia.

Even if it is likely that different concepts of security will be juxtaposed in the final strategy, as was the case in the 2008 Report on the Implementation of the ESS, some participants insisted **the new ESS should include references to human security**, looking at individuals and communities' security within and outside the EU.

It was also underlined that **communications and public diplomacy** were vital to the effectiveness of the EU as a security provider, particularly in light of recent events in Ukraine. Finally, given that most threats do have an internal component, the importance of **linking the internal security strategy with the ESS** was stressed as well.

Improving the EU's response to conflict

Impact of new tools and resources

Speakers and participants were positive in their assessment of the tools and resources introduced since the Lisbon Treaty and the creation of the position of the HR/VP but they

stressed that these alone were not enough and had to be accompanied by **a change in mind-set**. For example, it was argued that there remained too many differences between EU institutions and between the EU and Member States and that this would have to change in order for the Comprehensive Approach to be properly implemented and operationalised.

The example of **EU Special Representatives** (EUSRs) was cited and the argument was made that firstly they should be used entirely for the operationalisation of the Comprehensive Approach, secondly they should be deployed systematically within an overall strategy and not just appointed arbitrarily. It was added that it would be increasingly important to ensure a higher calibre of appointee than is currently the case, not to mention the need to see women properly represented among EUSRs (currently none out of a total of eight). Finally, it was suggested that EUSRs could regularly attend the PSC to present what has been achieved and their future plans.

The EEAS Division for Conflict Prevention, Peacebuilding and Mediation instruments was praised by several participants for developing operational tools for conflict prevention and peacebuilding.

The **EU early warning system** was discussed in some detail with participants in agreement that the instrument **is showing great potential**, in particular for the implementation of the Comprehensive Approach, **but that it was imperative to translate this into action and the operationalisation of prevention**. Lists of countries at risk will be discussed every six months at PSC level, as well as in the relevant working groups.

Participants also mentioned the Division's capacity for conflict analysis which is increasingly being used within the Service by geographic divisions. Its investment in mediation expertise was also acknowledged, in particular because mediation can be understood as a tangible alternative response to conflict by decision-makers who may not necessarily be sympathetic to the concept of peacebuilding. It was noted that such **expertise on conflict prevention and peacebuilding issues is also needed at the level of Delegations**.

Challenges to and possible improvements for effective peacebuilding by the EU

There was universal agreement that conflict prevention would not be successful without proper consideration of gender but it was argued that the EU does not fully implement UNSCR 1325 and needed **more female leaders and gender expertise in the EEAS and CSDP missions**. The suggestion was also made that the EU appoint a Special Representative on 1325, following the examples of NATO and the African Union.

A recurring theme was the fact that the PSC spends the bulk of its time dealing with existing conflicts and CSDP missions and that a shift in focus to early warning and preventive action would constitute a significant improvement. Regarding Member States, it was argued that middle-ranking states continue to overestimate their global influence and, consequently **require greater incentives to work through the EU as opposed to unilaterally**.

On many issues, the **need for a change in working culture** was highlighted. It was argued that, despite recent changes and new instruments, the institutional incentives for working in silos remained intact and that the best way of changing that working culture would be to ensure that competent and creative people were put in place and given the right incentives and support in order to work together and bring good ideas to the leadership.