

Civil Society Dialogue Network Policy Meeting (Strategic Debates¹)

Protection of Civilians: Key international debates and the role of the EU

Wednesday 25 February 2015, Brussels

A Civil Society Dialogue Network (CSDN) meeting took place on Wednesday 25 February 2015 in Brussels, Belgium. The objectives were (1) to examine the key contemporary debates on protection of civilians (PoC) and (2) to explore the current and potential roles of the European Union (EU) and of civil society in the PoC.

The meeting was moderated by Catherine Woollard (Independent Diplomat) and started with a set of three introductory presentations by Mel Duncan (Nonviolent Peaceforce), Commander Vincenzo de Benedictis (EEAS, EU Military Staff), and Borhan Osman (Afghanistan Analysts Network).

With regard to the context, participants were reminded that this discussion was taking place during a review of UN Peace operations, many of which include PoC in their mandates. This fact tends to restrict the debate to the issue of peacekeeping operations and their so-called robust mandates, although other PoC methods exist. Participants were also given an update on the development and finalisation of the Concept on Protection of Civilians in EU-led Military Operations.

Participants discussed the changing nature of armed violence and the increasingly pressing need to ensure effective PoC. They presented different approaches to protect civilians, ranging from military responses to dialogue with armed groups and unarmed civilian protection carried out by civil society. The respective challenges of these different methods were also discussed.

The lack of a common definition for PoC was raised, with some participants arguing that the UN three-tiered approach is too broad to be useful. Should PoC be primarily about protection from imminent physical violence or should it be about something broader? In addition, what definition of civilians should be used? Another part of the discussion focused on how non-state actors could be held more responsible with regards to PoC.

Some participants insisted that, even on paper, the sum of armed and unarmed initiatives is far from enough to cover all PoC needs. Given the scale of the problem, some argued that armed and unarmed initiatives should not be seen as mutually exclusive. On the contrary, more should be done to improve cooperation between different actors and initiatives.

It was suggested that the upcoming case studies to be conducted by Nonviolent Peaceforce on unarmed civilian protection could provide greater knowledge of effective methods of PoC. In addition, some participants stated that it would be useful to conduct an empirical assessment of what the EU has been doing in terms of PoC in places where it is already using the Comprehensive Approach.

The meeting brought together 38 participants, including representatives of CSOs, academics and officials from the European External Action Service (EEAS).

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 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 CSDN strategic debates are roundtables on key topics in peace and security.