



Civil Society Dialogue Network - Member State Meeting Austria

The EU, conflict prevention and peacebuilding: State of play and the role of civilian Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP)

Thursday, 16 October 2014 (13h30 – 17h30)

Meeting Report

This meeting was organised by EPLO in co-operation with the Austrian Federal Ministry for Europe, Integration and Foreign Affairs, the European External Action Service and the European Commission.

The objective of the meeting was to discuss the EU's role in conflict prevention and peacebuilding with Austrian civil society organisations and policy-makers, increase understanding of EU peacebuilding and Austria's role within it as well as identifying opportunities for Austria to support EU peacebuilding.

No opinion expressed in this report necessarily represents the position of the CSDN as a whole, or of EPLO, the European External Action Service, the European Commission or the Austrian Federal Ministry for Europe, Integration and Foreign Affairs. The key recommendations of the meeting are available [here](#).

Session 1: The EU, conflict prevention and peacebuilding – state of play

How effective is the EU at preventing conflict and building peace?

The EU has a wide range of policy commitments to conflict prevention and peacebuilding and with the Lisbon Treaty conflict prevention has become an objective of EU foreign policy. The EU's advantage regarding conflict prevention is that it can address conflict on several levels, including through diplomatic relations with governments, development assistance, and support and co-operation with civil society. The Communication on the EU's comprehensive approach to external conflict and crises¹ should hopefully address the fragmentation of responsibilities and tools for responding to conflict and supporting peacebuilding that currently persist within the EU.

Within the EU's approach to conflict, Member States are both a weakness and a strength. While it often takes very long to agree on a common position, once it is found the EU has the support of 28 Member States which is an enormous asset. Through the establishment of the European External Action Service (EEAS), the EU is developing a new type of diplomatic service which may lead to a different kind of foreign policy. EPLO is arguing for a peacebuilding approach throughout external affairs, which would entail a detailed understanding of conflict contexts, identification and tackling of root causes of conflict and prioritisation of prevention rather than response.

Conflict prevention, peacebuilding and mediation have grown in importance inside the EEAS as well as in certain Member States. Federica Mogherini reiterated her commitment to build on the existing capacity and to integrate conflict prevention in the co-operation between the European Commission (EC) and the EEAS. Inside the EEAS, the division for conflict prevention, peacebuilding and mediation instruments is staffed with experts from different backgrounds that are working on the integration of conflict prevention into different aspects of EU external action. They focus on the following: Establishment of an early warning mechanism; development of shared conflict analysis; and mediation. In terms of mediation, the work includes operational support (in the form of experts, organisation of meetings),

¹ Joint Communication on the EU's comprehensive approach to external conflict and crises (2013). Available at: http://www.eeas.europa.eu/statements/docs/2013/131211_03_en.pdf

development of internal policy guidance, training and coaching of EU staff and knowledge management.

In the past, the EU has had some success in conflict prevention and peacebuilding. The evaluation of ten years of EC support to conflict prevention published in 2011² demonstrated the ways in which the EU has had an impact on preventing violent conflict. In the meeting, the case of Burundi was mentioned, where the EU operated mainly as a funder. Another example is Somalia where numerous attempts at building peace were made and where the EU proved to be one of the few international actors with commitment to stay and continue engagement despite setbacks. More recently, the Serbia-Kosovo agreement and the Iran negotiations can be regarded as success and in individual cases, development assistance has contributed to peacebuilding.

Where the EU has had success, it was able to combine a clear strategy with political weight. Geographically, this happened either very close to its borders or very far away. This was the case in Central and Eastern Europe where the enlargement process guaranteed a clear political strategy and the EU membership perspective provided the EU with leverage. Another example is Asia, where the EU has played an important role in supporting the respective peace processes, through among other things a CSDP Mission in Aceh and the support to the International Contact Group on Mindanao.

What are the current obstacles for the EU becoming more active and effective in conflict prevention?

- Financial crises which has developed into a wider legitimacy crisis for the EU: It has dominated the political agenda of Member States, leaving little room and capacity to discuss external action. In addition, it has resulted in different types of Euroscepticism: one that could be described as soft and which is likely to fade once the effects of the financial and economic crises ease; the other one is hard and is likely to remain a feature of the political landscape in several Member States.
- Weak leadership on foreign policy at the EU level: part of the criticism of Catherine Ashton has been justified and the lack of guidance and leadership has meant that at times morale in the EEAS has been very low and that Member States were not brought on board.
- Fragmentation of conflict prevention and peacebuilding across the EU: Currently, the application of conflict prevention and peacebuilding is inconsistent and it depends on the commitment of the individual involved whether principles are translated into practice.
- Re-nationalisation of foreign policy: there is enormous difference between Member States' positions on EU foreign policy in terms of objectives, approach and tools. As these differences are not reconciled, some Member States rather conduct their policy at the national level. Similarly, the bureaucratic and sometimes dysfunctional structure of the EU provides disincentives for Member States to get involved in EU foreign policy.
- Hard-line and realist (in the international relations sense) approaches to conflict: this has been specifically prevalent in discussion about the Ukraine crises in Brussels which has for instance been presented as a result of cuts in national defence budgets.
- Lack of an integrated approach: as the majority of instruments that the EU has at its disposal are the prerogative of the EC and Member States continue to be the main actors in defining EU foreign policy, for the EU to deliver on conflict prevention and peacebuilding, the EEAS has to overcome institutional separation and develop joint approaches.

² Thematic Evaluation of European Commission Support to Conflict Prevention and Peace-building (2011). Available at:

http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/fpi/documents/thematic_evaluation_of_ec_support_to_pb_and_conflict_prevention_2011_en.pdf

How can the obstacles be overcome?

- Leadership within the EEAS with a focus on prioritising co-operation with the EC, development of policies that guide EU external action and negotiation of compromise between Member States.
- Policy and guidance has to be developed to address the arbitrariness with which conflict prevention and peacebuilding principles are applied at the moment.
- Integration of contemporary thinking and evidence regarding analysis of security threats and how they can be tackled into EU policy-making to avoid the temptation to provide standardised responses to conflict situations.
- Ensure that detailed context and conflict analysis is the starting point for the development of EU responses. External actors should be modest and self-critical regarding the degree to which they understand a specific situation.
- EU delegations have to be provided with the right kind of expertise covering conflict and security analysis.
- Simplification of different regulations governing EU external action to reduce bureaucratic hurdles for co-operation with Member States and civil society. Involving the new Vice-President of the European Commission in charge of Better Regulation in this process may be an opportunity.
- Sensitising policy-makers on the receiving end of early warning information to ensure they act upon the information that they are provided with.
- Development of a broader understanding of the possible tools that can be employed for mediation purposes ranging from EU Special Representatives to CSDP missions and development assistance.

How can Austria support the EU's peacebuilding efforts?

Austria's neutral tradition in foreign policy and the fact that it does not have a colonial history play to its advantage in EU foreign policy. Among the things that Austria could do to support EU peacebuilding are:

- Integration of conflict prevention into European Neighbourhood Policy, through e.g. channelling expertise and seconding diplomats.
- Setting-up a system for recruiting civilian experts into CSDP missions and crisis management bodies and investing in development of niche expertise for civilian CSDP.
- Contributing to the implementation of the EU's comprehensive approach which is similar to the 3 C (Coordinated, Complementary and Coherent measures in fragile situations) approach that Austria has developed.
- Sharing information about national initiatives and continue the support for the EEAS in this area of work.

Integrating conflict prevention in EU institutions and policies

Conflict prevention needs to be institutionalised to ensure that policy-makers are sensitised for early warning information. In order to mainstream conflict prevention knowledge in the EEAS, rotation of staff is crucial. Current officials will rotate out of the division for conflict prevention, peacebuilding and mediation instruments and contribute their understanding when they work on e.g. geographic issues.

Several participants mentioned the need to be more careful in the assessment of the situation in Ukraine and to what extent it is the result of flaws within the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP). Some argued that the ENP was designed as a peacebuilding tool but that certain components did not work as planned. Others suggested that previously the ENP was successful and that it only recently has lost its effectiveness. The fact that Association agreements were able to consider the situation in a specific country was considered as especially useful.

The inconsistency between EU support to peace and EU policies that undermine peace has to be addressed. The example of the EU's innovative approach to peace laboratories in Colombia and the negative effects of the simultaneously negotiated EU-Colombia Free Trade Agreement (FTA) were mentioned in this regard. Several participants argued for trade to be included in the EU's comprehensive approach to external conflicts and crises to ensure it does not undermine EU conflict prevention and peacebuilding.

The role of EU Special Representatives

Parameters which define when a EUSR mandate is established (e.g. where there are cross-border conflicts, need for shuttle-diplomacy that cannot be fulfilled by other EU officials) as well as when it is terminated need to be agreed. In addition, the profile and representativeness of EUSRs should be addressed, at the moment they are all male.

EUSRs should more often task Ambassadors from EU Member States, some of whom have a wide range of experience and expertise and may in certain instances have more access. The example of Greek Ambassadors having in the past worked on relations with the Orthodox Church was given.

In the past, some EU Special Representatives have received little instruction from EU institutions in Brussels or Member States and they therefore had a lot of autonomy in formulating the EU's policy and approach. With the establishment of the EEAS, this has been addressed.

Engaging with civil society

International actors should be wary of considering only those actors as civil society that they are funding as the civil society landscape varies from country to country. Detailed analysis is necessary to assess who are the actors that constitute civil society. In addition, civil society should not be considered only as implementation partner but rather as a source of knowledge, expertise and analysis. In this regard, ways in which civil society analysis and expertise can be integrated into EU policy-making were discussed. Compared to other international actors and donors, the EU probably ranks at the upper middle of the spectrum what co-operation with civil society is concerned. In their work in conflict-affected countries, the EU and other international actors should focus on empowering civil society to operate as peace agents.

Change in the nature of conflicts

The increased role of non-state actors both as a party to the conflict and to its solution has to be acknowledged and the EU has to develop its policy and practice in this regard. The increasing societalisation of conflict means that a focus needs to be placed on developing the capacity of individuals to empathise with others. Other participants mentioned the need to consider eco-social aspects of conflict, taking into account the role that resources play in conflicts and aspects related to sustainability. An enlarged vision of what constitutes peace processes would also enable the consideration of eco-social issues.

In addition, it was mentioned that many interventions do not take into consideration the important questions related to identity that are at the heart of many conflicts and grievances. The EU which includes many Member States with multi-ethnic societies has a specific role to play in this regard, especially as the EU's role as a peace process is inspiring for many people outside the EU.

Session 2: The role of civilian Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) in conflict prevention

What are the priorities for increasing the effectiveness of civilian CSDP? What should be the focus for the preparation of the European Council Summit in June 2015 where CSDP will be discussed?

Participants highlighted the following priorities for increasing the effectiveness of civilian CSDP and for discussion at the European Council Summit in June 2015:

1) CSDP as part of the EU's comprehensive approach

CSDP needs to be part of the EU's comprehensive approach to a given context. By integrating CSDP into overall EU strategies, the fragmentation of EU responses to conflict can be addressed. This would also counter the trend of overemphasizing short-term crisis response and enable a relation between CSDP missions and longer-term EU activity in a conflict-affected country. EUAM Ukraine is a success in this regard, in the way in which the mission is planned and established. However, there continues to be a problem with the level of oversight that Member States demand in the planning of the missions, at times amounting to micro management.

More co-ordination, complementarity and coherence is also needed in relation to other actors present in conflict-affected countries, such as the UN, OSCE or civil society. Co-operation with the latter should be sought on a much more regular basis, possibly exploring the opportunity of forming an informal alliance to hold governments to account for reform progress.

2) Clarity about the role and function of CSDP

The extent to which CSDP missions are crisis management operations was raised. Looking back, only three CSDP missions fall into the category of what is usually considered crisis management, in that there was a need to rapidly intervene with a short-term mission to guarantee peace: The Aceh Monitoring Mission, EUBAM Rafah and EUMM Georgia. Only the Aceh Monitoring Mission was able to deploy and end within 18 months; the EU faces difficulties in closing down the other missions. All other CSDP missions are concerned with more long-term processes, mostly security sector reform (SSR). As rapid crisis response remains the exception, more time should be invested in the planning and design of CSDP missions since the preparation of CSDP missions is often rushed and important steps are skipped.

Within CSDP, there should be greater focus on engaging at the strategic level. EULEX Kosovo was mentioned as an exception in this regard. It should be ensured that CSDP missions are used when the contexts necessitates a strategic engagement of the EU. Certain activities that are carried out by CSDP missions can also be undertaken by EC instruments. The two EUBAM missions are illustrative in this regard: While EUBAM Rafah is a CSDP mission, EUBAM Moldova and Ukraine is a Commission instrument. As not all crisis management activities have to be carried out by CSDP mission, the EU should bear the specificities of CSDP missions as an instrument in mind.

3) Work on capabilities

The work on civilian capabilities has to be increased. Austria has tried to overcome the current impasse of work on civilian capabilities by organising seminars that address the issue of identification of capabilities necessary to address specific crises as well as their development. Related to this, the list of generic CSDP tasks agreed upon in Feira (2000) should be updated and further developed to reflect the wide range of activities that CSDP missions undertake. In the case of EUAM Ukraine for instance, one third of the mission's tasks are related to medial relations and strategic communication with a variety of stakeholders.

4) Improve staffing, recruitment and training

Within the EEAS, very few people actually work on civilian CSDP missions. At the moment, ca 40 people are in charge of conducting all civilian CSDP missions. To increase the

effectiveness of civilian CSDP, increasing the number of staff involved in planning and conducting the missions is important.

In terms of political weight and commitment, seconding one civilian expert equals a significantly higher number of military personnel. This is due to the political and bureaucratic hurdles related to secondments on the civilian side (including police). Apart from the difficulties related to identifying and recruiting the right staff, the career development of staff that returns from a secondment has to be addressed. Often their acquired skills and expertise are not taken into consideration or built upon when they return home.

The European Civilian Peace Corps which has been suggested several times by European Parliament resolutions could provide support to CSDP. Similarly, it could be explored how the already existing Austrian Service Abroad could be used to support civilian CSDP.

In terms of qualifications, there is room for both high-level as well as mid-level secondments. In the field of rule of law, constitutional judges can advise on constitutional arrangements but also appeal judges are needed to advise and support their peers in other contexts. However, it should be born in mind that practicing an activity is not the same as advising others to carry out certain activities and that specific training regarding mentoring and advising is needed.

The training of CSDP staff has to be standardised and a sustainable solution following the end of Europe's New Training Initiative for Civilian Crisis Management (ENTRI) should be found. The different types of CSDP activities should be reflected in the training that is offered for military, police and civilian staff. Ideally, they would be trained under EU auspices in general courses on CSDP, function-specific courses depending on the specific type of work and mission specific courses. In case courses are using national curricula, different types of CSDP activities should be reflect as well.

How can CSDP contribute to conflict prevention specifically and what are the opportunities to develop the role of CSDP in conflict prevention?

- Integrate conflict analysis into mission planning to consider causes, actors and dynamics of conflicts, assess the impact of the mission on conflict dynamics and maximise conflict prevention potential.
- Revise policy guidance that underlies CSDP activities (SSR, police reform) to ensure that evidence about successful interventions in conflict contexts informs CSDP activities; simplifications of certain concepts is necessary as well.
- Improve relationship between CSDP missions and local population and seek a constructive working relationship with civil society.
- Introduce more rigorous assessment of CSDP missions: some participants thought that increasing evaluation of CSDP missions may not be useful, especially because the extent to which CSDP missions can adapted to evaluation results is limited; the current self-impact assessment may be a more suitable approach.
- Explore the possibility of conflict prevention missions, meaning missions which have conflict prevention as their objective. This would be reflected in the activities they are undertaking and the expertise and profile of staff recruited; certain participants thought that EUSR's would be the more appropriate tool in this regard. Others mentioned that EULEX Kosovo is a conflict prevention mission as it works on the predictability of state institutions. In addition, its role in the implementation of the border arrangement between Kosovo and Serbia, which has a conflict prevention component, is considerable.
- Introduce training for conflict sensitivity, not only for the Heads of Mission but for all staff in CSDP missions.

How can Austria as a Member State with expertise and interest in civilian CSDP further support its development?

Apart from supporting the priorities listed above, participants recommended that Austria:

- Improves swift recruitment and deployment of qualified civilian experts to crisis management bodies in Brussels and to CSDP missions. This includes establishment of data bases and improvement of legal modalities for the recruitment and deployment of civilian experts. At the moment, Austria does not rank very high regarding secondments of civilian experts. Certain participants suggested that concentrating on only fulfilling its responsibilities regarding civilian CSDP (as Denmark does) could be a possibility.
- Supports operational and strategic training for crisis management, for instance by initiating a follow-up to ENTRI.
- Advocates for research regarding conflict prevention and transformation of violent conflicts to inform policy responses including impact assessments of EU mechanisms and tools.
- Provides consistent support to the Austrian Peacebuilding Platform.

Role of the EU in conflict contexts

The question of the legitimacy of the EU in conflict contexts was raised as well as challenges to this legitimacy, either where the EU is party to the conflict or where EU representatives are nationals of the former colonial power. Certain participants thought that the legitimacy of the EU flows from the commitment of Member States. This of course does not necessarily mean that the EU is well placed to support peace in a certain context. As the EU is present in many conflict contexts, the objective is to ensure that where it is present, it does not contribute to instability but rather prevent conflict. The EU needs to take its own position and how it is perceived into consideration when developing its policy and responses to conflicts.

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](#).