

Civil Society Dialogue Network¹

France and the implementation of the EU Global Strategy: A look at conflict prevention and economic diplomacy

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Report

Fifteen years after the adoption of the EU Programme for the Prevention of Violent Conflicts (also known as the 'Gothenburg Programme') and almost ten years after the Lisbon Treaty enshrined conflict prevention as a key goal of the EU external action, the EU Global Strategy on Foreign and Security Policy provides a major opportunity for the EU and its Member States to close the implementation gap in its support to conflict prevention.

The objective of this *Civil Society Dialogue Network (CSDN)* was to analyse the implementation of the EU commitments on conflict prevention following the publication of its Global Strategy as well as to analyse and gather recommendations on the role of the EU and its Member States, France in particular, in addressing the economic dimensions of conflicts. The meeting gathered around thirty participants, including representatives of civil society organisations (CSOs), officials from the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Development, as well as the European Commission and the European External Action Service (EEAS).

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, of the European Peacebuilding Office (EPLO) and its member organisations, of ESSEC IRENE, France Strategie, the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Development, the European Commission or the EEAS.

Session 1 - Conflict prevention in the Global Strategy of the EU: what are the possibilities for France?

A Global Strategy to strengthen the role of the EU on the international stage

The various speakers emphasised the context in which crises are multiplying, in particular in neighbouring European countries, as well as the existing budgetary constraints, in order to illustrate the importance of the EU's role on the international stage and the need for a global strategy that is both ambitious and realistic.

Participants identified several different factors that make up the strength of the EU in conflict prevention: its identity based on norms and values, its economic and legal power, its role as the prime global donor of development aid, as well as its continuous support for

¹ 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 lasts from 2014 to 2017. For more information, please visit the [EPLO website](#).

multilateralism. Others cited further advantages, such as the multiplicity of its instruments and its long-term presence in third countries through its Delegations.

Although one of the participants insisted on the necessity to implement the security and defence aspect of this global strategy, he also did recognise that, in view of these complex and asymmetric crises, a military approach is not sufficient. Political solutions are needed to manage the deep-rooted causes of these crises and they can be facilitated by mediation procedures or by one of the numerous other instruments available to the EU. It was also noted that such processes must be as inclusive as possible and involve civil society, women, young people, etc.

Preventing conflicts while managing crises

As recalled by one participant during the meeting, prevention encompasses four axes: anticipating crises, articulating comprehensive replies, acting on the internal and external levels as well as intervening on the root causes of the conflict. Several participants emphasised the importance of better coordinating the different types of intervention, whether preventive diplomacy, humanitarian aid, a Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) mission, or development aid, so as to ensure lasting conflict prevention. France is trying to implement such a continuum via the Stabilisation Mission of its Crisis and Support Centre, as well as with the new budget line of the French Development Agency for conflict prevention. It was also mentioned that, with its global approach, the EU is also trying to better coordinate its various instruments, including those of Member States. One of the participants incidentally underlined that it is not the task of the EU to do everything and that complementary action with Member States is essential.

Some participants underlined the need to adopt a conflict sensitivity approach so as to ensure that the actions taken (whether development aid or other forms of action) do not heighten tensions but rather strengthen the positive dynamics for peace. Incidentally, an online training programme on this issue has been launched by the DG DEVCO. A participant also explained that it was necessary to pay greater attention to political and social vulnerabilities when devising development policies. In a similar vein, another participant also recommended investing more in governance. Inclusive governance that allows participation by civil society in developing public policies is an important factor in stabilising countries and having a lasting impact.

The term “resilience” is used frequently in the Global Strategy, more so than “conflict prevention”. One of the participants wondered if the first term was not in the process of replacing the second, perhaps because it was seen as being too limited. Another participant explained that the concept of “conflict resilience” would allow people to concentrate more on the key role of local players and to better capitalise on existing local peace initiatives. More positive than the term “fragility”, it would also allow several sectors to be clustered around a common issue and to facilitate their coordination.

Appropriate instruments and institutional culture?

The majority of participants were of the opinion that the financial instruments of the EU should be used in a more strategic manner and reflect the content of the Global Strategy. But widely differing opinions were expressed on setting priorities.

For one of the participants, the EU should be able to provide equipment to the armed forces of partner states. For another, the need for such a change remains to be demonstrated; it should not result in cutting funds for development or peace consolidation and should be monitored very closely so as to avoid the misuse of such equipment.

One participant noted that the creation of European trust funds offers several advantages in terms of rapidity of implementation and mobilisation of Member States. For another, the comparative advantage of a trust fund is that it would allow a regional approach which is required in numerous situations. However, the size of budgets raises questions about the type of players capable of receiving these funds.

For some, the instruments of the EU should focus on the most vulnerable countries. For others, they should focus on countries posing a direct security threat to the EU. And for yet others, it is above all important that the EU continues to focus on the long term wherever it is present, and not only in the countries or regions that are currently experiencing a crisis, so as to be fully capable of preventing conflicts before they become violent.

Furthermore, two participants explained that institutional culture influences the way in which these instruments are used. However, they drew very different analyses and conclusions from this. For one, development culture dominates within the European institutions, and especially the Delegations. Yet the latter play a key part in determining the priorities for action in partner countries. Consequently, according to this participant, security issues are not considered sufficiently in cooperation agreements, which prioritise the interests of partner countries instead of European (*inter alia* security) interests. Other participants responded that the preparation and implementation of cooperation agreements follow precise rules, including the principle of appropriation. Finally, one participant commented that in all instances the humanitarian sector is separate and must comply with the principles of neutrality and impartiality, especially so as not to endanger personnel working in conflict zones.

For the participant, institutional culture must become more preventive; this requires incentives to be put in place in terms of human resources, as well as strong political support from the hierarchy. For example, the imperative of conflict sensitivity must be incorporated in job descriptions and in employee appraisals in order to create an incentive to really use this analysis grid. The Delegations should also be strengthened. In order to allow such changes to take place, it is essential that political decision-makers send a strong message to this end, perhaps through Council conclusions.

Investing in early warning and conflict analysis

Most participants agreed on the importance of capabilities for conflict analysis and early warning so that the EU can adapt its responses to crisis and conflict situations in the best way possible. For some, the current capability to understand and analyse is not developed sufficiently and does not allow threats to be identified adequately. The different Member States could share information more. Additional resources could also be allocated to the Delegations of the EU so that they can produce more quality analyses of the conflicts dynamics and the political economy of a country, especially by using the expertise of local civil society. It was noted that structured dialogue mechanisms with civil society, such as the CSDN, also help to improve analyses. The capabilities of the EEAS to analyse conflicts, which are currently to be found in the new PRISM division (Prevention of conflicts, Rule of law/SSR, Integrated approach, Stabilisation and Mediation), are also particularly important in this regard and should be strengthened.

However, information is no guarantee for response. For several participants, efforts should focus above all on the decision-making process which follows the information-gathering process. One of the participants explained that positive changes had recently been made to the manner of responding to warnings issued by the EU's conflict early warning system, in collaboration with the Political and Security Committee (PSC). Such efforts must be reinforced. Intensifying the early warning systems of partner states or regions was also mentioned. Finally, knowledge of the local situation, a trustworthy relationship with local

authorities and populations as well as civil society involvement allow the creation of early warning systems. Actors such as the European Union can therefore play their mediation role by involving themselves thoroughly, which could give satisfactory results as it was the case for Colombia, an example highlighted in the discussions.

Setting an example inside the EU?

Several participants questioned the capability of the EU to export a set of values when those values are being challenged internally. Vulnerable situations are not to be found only in third countries and it is very important to focus on what can be done inside the EU in order to maintain certain credibility on the international stage.

Recommendations

Different participants made the following recommendations, which do not necessarily reflect a consensus:

The instruments of the EU

- The financial instruments of the EU should be used more strategically.
- The special nature of the humanitarian sector and its principles of neutrality, impartiality and independence must be respected.
- All the actions of the EU should be conflict-sensitive and support human security, including development aid, humanitarian aid, diplomatic actions or CSDP missions.
- Conflict sensitivity should be incorporated in job descriptions and in employee appraisals, also within the Delegations, in order to create an incentive to really use this analysis grid and take a more preventive approach.
- The instruments used should allow a regional approach to be taken, both during analysis and when implementing programmes, whenever necessary. The role of regional trust funds in this respect should be explored further.
- The EU should continue to invest in mediation, preventive diplomacy, conciliation and other political, multilateral and collective solutions.
- The EU and its Member States should invest more in governance.

Investing in conflict analysis and early warning systems

- Human and financial resources for conflict analysis and consolidation of the EU's conflict early warning system should be increased.
- EU personnel, in delegations as well as in Brussels, should have the means to rely more on the expertise of local civil society in order to better understand the local dynamics of conflicts and potential resilience factors.
- Specialists in the dynamics of conflicts from Member States could travel from their capital cities to participate in meetings of Council geographical and thematic working groups when they focus on a specific country or region.

Coordination with Member States

- Member states should share information more and in a less uneven manner on early warning and conflict analysis. Cross-checking information for the early warning system in particular should be considered.
- The integrated approach of the EU should allow for joint analyses and programmes with Member States.
- Member States should monitor the exemplary nature of the EU internally so they can defend its values and its credibility on the international stage.

Session 2 - How to integrate the economic dimension of conflicts within the Global Strategy of the EU?

The EU and its Member States have extensive economic leverage

The majority of speakers agreed on the influence of the EU as an economic, financial and normative player on the international stage. The EU Global Strategy mentions the need to have more systematic recourse to European economic diplomacy, including in conflict situations. Numerous instruments are already in place and can potentially serve the EU as direct leverage in conflict situations, for example: conditionality of development aid, the Kimberly process certification scheme for diamonds, the new EU regulation on conflict minerals, regional economic partnership agreements, the Commission's new external investment plan, the integration of businesses in international summits (for example on the sides of EU-Africa summits), or even economic sanctions. A participant also cited the rules of due diligence to which numerous European multinationals are subject, shortly to be joined by the French following the adoption of a law on this matter in February 2017.

According to one of the participants, the normative influence of the EU on economic questions should, however, be nuanced given the current international context in which the system of rules and standards created over the past decades is being challenged.

Above all, participants pondered the actual capability of the EU to utilise such economic leverage to support its foreign and conflict prevention policy. In numerous cases the EU is looked on as a donor but not as a player in its own right. Financial support for the Palestinian authority was presented by one participant as an example of an initiative that was costly for European taxpayers for a very limited result. A more ambitious approach is needed and would require other political and economic levers to be applied.

Economic development for conflict prevention: a relationship subject to conditions

Fragile economic conditions (such as a shortage of jobs) can be the cause of crises, as was the case, according to one of the participants, with the Arab Spring. Furthermore, crises and violent conflicts are more often than not the cause of a fall in economic activity. But several conditions must come together for economic development to be able to have a positive influence on peace. Several participants emphasised the importance of increasing good governance and, in certain cases, working on a new economic and social pact in certain countries experiencing violent conflict.

The need for a job-creating economic growth was also mentioned. Sometimes businesses are in a rush to create jobs rapidly when conditions stabilise. However, one of the participants called for prudence. The type of jobs created must be looked at more closely. Inappropriate or precarious jobs, sometimes even close to modern slavery (for example in the construction industry in Qatar), are far from creating conditions to foster lasting peace.

One participant also commented that when big companies arrive in zones with severe conflicts or in the process of stabilising, this gives the impression that solutions will be found to problems to which they cannot actually respond. Such expectations must be handled carefully.

What role for companies?

Businesses are not generally associated with reflecting on questions of lasting conflict prevention. However, for several years now, and on the initiative of certain civil society organisations, conflict sensitivity is becoming increasingly incorporated in investment projects by private business, especially in the mining industry and agribusiness. Private sector actors

are currently not considered as stakeholders in the EU's definition of civil society. However, the EU should be able to take advantage of all available pieces of economic leverage for its European economic diplomacy. The possibility of using companies' leverage, integrating the private sector in conflict prevention and peace processes should therefore be envisaged.

However, the due diligence which companies are required to exercise is sometimes limited by the authorities in the country concerned which, according to one participant, can deny existing conflictual problems (e.g. territorial or social claims) so as to encourage contracts to be signed. It is also possible that local national legislation does not abide by (or can go so far as to contradict) international standards. These elements can also be aggravated by corruption. For this participant, the most important point for leverage is at the moment when concessions are being negotiating and contracts are being signing. The EU could play a more supportive role in such moments.

The limits of economic diplomacy can also be felt in zones of severe conflict, e.g. in certain countries in the Middle East, abandoned by economic players because they have been identified as dangerous on the MAEDI website of the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The number of companies which have the capability to work in such regions is very limited and the risks (including that of financing terrorism) are significant.

What role for civil society?

Even if several civil society organisations are very active in promoting conflict sensitivity in companies and economic development, their number and scope of influence remain limited. One of the participants therefore recommended that the EU continues to expand the capabilities of civil society in this field. On the other hand, another participant added that such support for civil society must focus on legitimate organisations that are already in place, so as not to artificially create organisations that are dependent on European funding.

Participants also praised the added value of a better dialogue between the different players (donors, businesses, civil society), while recommending that civil society should be careful not to be used by companies attempting to just improve their corporate image.

Recommendations:

Different participants made the following recommendations, which do not necessarily reflect a consensus:

Better use of the leverage at the disposal of the EU and its Member States

- The EU should use its economic leverage better in support of its foreign policy, including for conflict prevention. Clarifying its role would enable it to use the leverage European companies can exert on third countries (for example, when signing contracts), in order to maximise positive benefits for peace.
- The EU and its Members States should further integrate the economic dimensions of conflicts in their analysis and actions, and use trade and development cooperation, as well as interaction with the private sector, in order to promote peace-conducive economic development. Those actions could be developed as part of a European economic diplomacy.
- The EU should include companies in conflict prevention activities and peace processes given their key role for stabilisation and development.
- The EU could create a "due diligence kit" by country, including indications on the limits of local legislation, as well as suggestions of what would constitute a conflict-sensitive investment in this country.

- Governance should be promoted in the same way as economic growth so as to avoid corruption and encourage a more balanced distribution of wealth. The social and environmental conditions of economic development must be taken into consideration.
- Outward investment of European players in the field of agriculture should allow an export economy which, at the same time, meets the needs of small farmers and encourages job creation.
- The embassies of EU Member States and the EU Delegations, can facilitate the work of companies on due diligence by putting them in contact with civil society organisations.

Better communication

- The EU should make an effort to explain and present EU-African economic relations in a more positive way to people in Africa and Europe.
- Civil society organisations should invest more in demonstrating the economic dividends of peace.