

12 June 2017, Brussels

Dear Ambassador to the Political and Security Committee,

Re.: The Integrated Approach: an opportunity to operationalise conflict prevention

I am writing to you on behalf of the European Peacebuilding Liaison Office (EPLO) with regard to the implementation of the EU's commitments on conflict prevention as part of the new EU Integrated Approach to Conflicts and Crises.

As a platform of 35 European non-governmental organisations (NGOs), NGO networks and think tanks working across the world to prevent violent conflict and build peace, EPLO believes that, in the current global political context, the implementation phase of the EU Global Strategy on Foreign and Security Policy (EUGS) is a timely opportunity for the EU to position itself as a hub of expertise, learning and good practice in building peace.

Further to the letter on the EUGS which we sent to High Representative/Vice-President (HR/VP) Federica Mogherini in May 2016¹, we would like to set out a number of concrete recommendations which could help to move forward and operationalise the EU's policy commitments on conflict prevention while stimulating a more preventive institutional culture. The recommendations are centred on enhanced political support from EU Member States and human resources factors.

Building upon the achievements so far

In the past years, the EU has invested staff time and resources in developing tools, access to expertise and initiatives in the areas of early warning, conflict analysis and mediation support in order to enhance the sophistication of its contribution to the prevention (or escalation) of violent conflict. There is real potential for the EU to distinguish itself as a global peace actor through enhanced preventive diplomacy, attention to election-related violence prevention, as well as increased resources and support for mediation and dialogue initiatives carried out by the EU itself or by other actors, including civil society. However, despite the opportunities, these tools and resources are not yet applied systematically or comprehensively; remaining the exception rather than the rule.

Not all EU external action automatically contributes to conflict prevention, human security² and sustained peace. EU assistance can, unwittingly, exacerbate particular dynamics of a conflict context or sustain dysfunctional or repressive structures. Failure to map adequately the risks to human security in third countries, the potential negative responses by external stakeholders in a conflict, or the existing capacities for resilience to violent conflict, could undermine the

¹ EPLO, [An EU Global Strategy for Peace](#) (May 2016)

² Human security is people-centered, focusing attention on the security of the individual and society at large rather than just state security, which focuses on the territorial integrity of the state. According to the [Human Security Initiative](#), 'human security focuses primarily on protecting people while promoting peace and assuring sustainable continuous development. It emphasizes aiding individuals by using a people-centered approach for resolving inequalities that affect security'.

EU's normative commitments and declarations. Furthermore, risks such as those associated with support to security structures in particular partner countries, problematic trade terms, and hurried responses to refugee movement and migration can all work against the EU's medium- and long-term interests if they ultimately result in the EU having to spend more of its resources managing subsequent conflicts and crises at home and abroad.

Effectively mapping the conflict dynamics and anticipating the impact of EU policy and action is not systematic and requires intention, political support, expertise and resources. It cannot be left to individual committed EU officials in Brussels or in EU delegations (EUDs), whose endeavours are not sufficiently encouraged and amplified by the existing institutional framework³.

Sending a strong political signal for conflict prevention

As demonstrated with the EUGS implementation plan on security and defence, meaningful change requires a clear and strong political ambition from EU Member States, reinforced by the necessary human and financial resources. It is time for such an investment in conflict prevention. The EU's policy commitments, including the recent Joint Communication on A Strategic Approach to Resilience in the EU's External Action, will not translate into practice by any other means; and without visible advancement, the EU and its repeated declarations in support of peace and conflict prevention will lose credibility.

We recommend that EU Member States:

- Restate their commitment to conflict prevention and peacebuilding to advance human security through a **dedicated set of Council Conclusions**. Three years have passed since the Joint Communication and Council conclusions on the EU's Comprehensive Approach and six years since the most recent Council conclusions on conflict prevention.
- Dedicate two **Foreign Affairs Council meetings** per year to conflict prevention issues, under the same format as the FAC meetings dedicated to defence and development.
- Continue to hold discussions in the **Political and Security Committee (PSC)** on countries which are at risk of conflict and where the EU can invest in a preventive role, as a regular item on PSC agendas.
- Invite conflict prevention experts from their capitals to join **Council working parties** on a regular basis in order to discuss conflict and peace dynamics, and EU options for preventive action in a given country or region.
- Invite the HR/VP to ensure that the **Commissioners' Group on External Action** also holds regular discussions on countries which are at risk of conflict and how the services can work for a more integrated approach in the EU's prevention efforts.

Putting the necessary human resources arrangements in place

As good as they may be on paper, the EU's policy commitments and action plans for conflict prevention have to be matched with sufficient human resources. If not, they will remain inoperable.

For effective implementation of the Integrated Approach, we recommend that EU Member States support the following administrative and political steps:

³ Civil Society Dialogue Network (CSDN), [Updating the Business Model for Conflict Prevention](#) (October 2016)

In the short term (3-6 months):

- Increase the number of **Member States peace and conflict experts seconded** to the different parts of the EU institutions, in particular within the European External Action Service's (EEAS) Division for Prevention, Rule of Law/SSR, Integrated Approach, Stabilisation and Mediation (PRISM), the Unit for Fragility and Resilience within the European Commission's Directorate-General for International Cooperation and Development (DG DEVCO) and the EUDs, in order to enhance the EU's ability to deliver conflict analysis and resilience assessment, to support mediation and to translate early warning assessments into actionable preventive options.
- Encourage the secondment of **non-governmental peace and conflict experts** to the EU institutions and promote more regular exchanges with external experts to refine and test ideas for preventive responses.
- Raise awareness of **existing EU and Member States tools and concrete guidance** for conflict and gender analysis, resilience assessment, conflict sensitivity or theories of change (e.g. training, handbooks, guidance notes, workshops, etc.) among EU officials in Brussels and in EUDs, and regularly review their use in order to improve their usability.
- Ensure that resources and mechanisms to **access external (civil society) conflict expertise** for EU officials are more flexible and sustainable (e.g. European Resources for Mediation Support (ERMES) and others).
- Increase the number of **focal points for in-country civil society** in EUDs' operational sections and create civil society focal points in political sections in order to take greater account of complex sub-national political dynamics and to monitor the effectiveness of EU actions.

In the medium term (6-12 months):

- Embed mechanisms for **peer-to-peer exchange** of officials working in/on fragile and conflict-affected environments across institutions and with MS (e.g. to share knowledge on administrative flexibilities within instruments).
- Consider creating an internal **peace and conflict expert roster**, to be deployed (or consulted) temporarily in those parts of the EU which are less engaged in conflict issues (e.g. **conflict expertise for DG Trade** negotiation teams working on trade agreements – **or DG Home** when working on a migration compact – in conflict-affected contexts in order to map potential negative conflict impacts and/or identify opportunities to multiply peacebuilding effects at an early stage).

In the long term (>1 year):

- Invest in sustainable internal expertise by **recruiting and maintaining a quota of permanent conflict experts on staff**.
- Add conflict sensitivity as a task or conflict expertise as a skill in **EU job descriptions** and **evaluate officials** on these grounds in order to create incentives for them to better take into account conflict and resilience dynamics in their work.
- Provide a **viable career path** for EU officials who want to specialise in conflict issues.
- Build and sustain **institutional memory** on prevention and peacebuilding good practice. As much as external facilities or rosters are useful for providing additional technical expertise at lower costs and in a short timeframe, they cannot fully replace building in-house expertise. They should be complemented by better institutional **knowledge management**, including by:
 - Ensuring a proper handover between rotating staff,

- Documenting lessons learned and successes (e.g. through cases studies, reflection seminars and listing of past prevention activities),
- Mentoring programmes between experienced and new EU officials working on peace and conflict issues.

Such arrangements and incentives are essential to foster the more political, creative and conflict-sensitive EU institutional culture called for in the EUGS.

We hope that you will take EPLO's recommendations into consideration in the implementation of the Integrated Approach to Conflict and Crises and we would be very happy to discuss any of the abovementioned issues with you or a member of your team.

In the meantime, please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any queries or if you would like any additional information.

Yours sincerely,



Sonya Reines-Djivanides
EPLO Executive Director

cc: All Ambassadors to the Political and Security Committee

Mr Jean-Christophe Belliard – Deputy Secretary-General for Political Affairs, Political Director, EEAS

Mr Pedro Serrano – Deputy Secretary-General for CSDP and Crisis Response, EEAS

Mr Walter Stevens – Chair of the Political and Security Committee, EEAS

Ms Maria Manuela Cabral – Head of Unit for Fragility and Resilience, DG DEVCO, EC

Mr Alfredo Conte – Head of Division for Strategic Planning, EEAS

Mr Stefano Tomat – Head of Division for Prevention of Conflicts, Rule of Law/SSR, Integrated Approach, Stabilisation and Mediation, EEAS

Mr David McAllister – Chair of the European Parliament Committee on Foreign Affairs

Ms Fabrizia Panzetti, Mr Michael Curtis and Mr Enrico Petrocelli – Cabinet of the HR/VP

Dr Nathalie Tocci – Special Advisor to the HR/VP