



Civil Society Dialogue Network Geographic Meeting

An EU Strategy for engagement with Iraq: Gathering civil society input

13-14 September 2017, Brussels

MEETING REPORT

Background

The overall objective of this Civil Society Dialogue Network (CSDN) Geographic Meeting was to gather Iraqi civil society analysis and recommendations on the development of an EU Strategy for Iraq.

The meeting brought together approximately 60 participants, including representatives of Iraqi peacebuilding civil society organisations (CSOs), officials from the European Commission (EC), the European External Action Service (EEAS) and the General Secretariat of the Council of the EU.

This report is a summary of the analysis and the key recommendations made by individual civil society participants during the meeting. The views expressed may not be attributed to any participating individual or organisation nor do they necessarily represent the views of all of the meeting participants, the European Peacebuilding Liaison Office (EPLO) and its member organisations, or the co-organisers (the EC and the EEAS).

Session 1: Analysis of current conflict and peace dynamics in Iraq

In this session, civil society participants provided their general assessment of the current political and security situation in Iraq, taking into account areas in which the EU has a specific added value.

In their initial comments, several participants described a very unstable political and security situation in Iraq, including the emergence of religious, ethnic, sectarian and tribal identities which threaten the country's political unity. They therefore emphasised the need to establish a stable, inclusive political and judicial system which is no longer based on sectarian and party-based quotas. One participant added that this should include a reform of the Iraqi constitution in order to include the Sunni Arabs' needs, the disputed territories and the oil and gas revenue problem between the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) and the Federal Government of Iraq (hereinafter referred to as 'the Government'). A number of participants agreed that ethnic and religious minorities should receive particular support and that their participation in decision-making processes should be enabled.

While acknowledging that Iraq had a strong civil society, particularly in terms of women's and youth organisations, which was willing to support the country's political, economic and social reforms, several participants stated that civil society actors did not receive sufficient support from the Government. One participant highlighted that the Government only allowed party-based CSOs to receive funding from the EU and other international donors. In this context, several participants urged the EU to try to ensure that all Iraqi civil society actors would be eligible to receive support from international donors. They also recommended that at least 20 to 25 percent of funding should

be assigned directly to local CSOs instead of to international non-governmental organisations (INGOs) as a means of building local capacity.

One participant referred to the involvement of civil society actors in the implementation of United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 2250 on youth, peace and security and of UNSCR 1325 on women, peace and security while another highlighted the need to lower the age of candidacy for elections and to include more women in decision-making positions. Another participant stated that the EU should encourage the Government to accede to the Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights as it would enable civil society actors to submit complaints to the UN.

A number of participants emphasised that the upcoming referendum on independence for the Kurdistan region of Iraq might pose a threat to the stability of the country and entail a new ethnic conflict. One participant suggested that the EU should assist by facilitating dialogue between the Government and the KRG. Another participant emphasised that internally displaced people (IDPs) who were currently living in the Kurdish area did not feel secure due to the upcoming referendum and that their return to their homes should be facilitated.

One participant stressed that the root causes of extremism such as corruption, political instability, discrimination and the sectarian division of Iraqi society, which had led to the rise of the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), had not yet been addressed and that the EU should support the Government in addressing these issues. Another participant recommended addressing the problems of young people, in particular unemployment and homelessness, in order to fight against the possible return of Da'esh.

Several participants expressed concerns that reconstruction alone would be insufficient to make IDPs and Iraqi refugees feel safe enough to return to their homes. One participant emphasised that IDPs were often unable to return to their homes as they had family members who were suspected of supporting Da'esh.

A number of participants made concrete recommendations regarding the EU's involvement with the Government in the context of the current political and security situation. Some of them suggested making EU aid conditional on the Government's achievement of certain goals in areas such as the rule of law or inclusive governance. Others recommended that the EU could play a role in monitoring the upcoming elections in Iraq. One participant emphasised that the EU should encourage the Government to try to disband militias as they were making certain ethnic groups (in particular Sunnis) feel insufficiently safe to travel and thus preventing them from joining negotiations in Baghdad.

Some participants highlighted the need for both community reconciliation and the rebuilding of social cohesion, and the reconstruction of infrastructure, including hospitals and schools, in the areas which had been liberated from Da'esh. One participant emphasised that education also played an important role in teaching young people their identity and in forging an Iraqi identity. Another participant emphasised that the reconciliation process should avoid the mistakes of previous elite- and foreign-driven processes in Iraq and instead ensure their ownership by all Iraqis.

Some participants suggested that the EU could help to train Iraqi local tribes and contribute to integrating them into the Iraqi security forces as they played an important role in Iraqi identity. However, others were against integrating tribal actors and militias into the security forces as the law for Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF) did not expel criminals and human rights violators from the PMF and as this experience had already failed with the Awakening Forces; a large number of whom had later joined Al-Qaeda.

One participant expressed concerns regarding the large number of sectarian Iraqi television channels, some of which were based in or financed by Western countries, which were spreading hatred and inciting violence amongst sects. They recommended that such channels should be blocked and that the free media in Iraq should be strengthened.

Another participant warned against only focusing on those people who had been affected by Da'esh and highlighted that a large number of people had been affected by bombings in the north of Iraq due to the broken ceasefire between Turkey and the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK). They urged the EU to help to reinstate the ceasefire and to develop a strategy for re-establishing peace in the border region.

Several participants agreed that human rights violations and the undermining of the freedom of expression by the Government, including attacks on human rights defenders (HRDs) and journalists, also had to be taken into account. One participant suggested that the international community should make an official statement on the issue of human rights violations in Iraq.

Session 2: Security and justice sector reform (SJSR), and disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR)

In this session, civil society participants shared their analysis and recommendations regarding SJSR and DDR in Iraq.

SJSR

Several participants highlighted the importance of building trust in the security and justice sector by including civil society actors in its reform and in the design of new justice measures. One participant suggested including civil society actors in the implementation of the joint communiqué between Iraq and the UN on the prevention of conflict-related sexual violence. Another participant emphasised the need for specific protection measures for minorities and to hold those who have perpetrated crimes against minorities to account.

A number of participants stated that there was a need to bring Iraq's laws into line with international standards and to ensure that they were fully respected by political and judicial institutions. They asked the EU and the international community to assist the Government in improving standards and reviewing laws, in monitoring their application and in building the capacity of prosecutors and judges. One participant highlighted that the Iraqi penal code needed to be updated as it did not cover the crimes which were committed in Iraq after 2014 (i.e. war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide). Another participant stated that any new justice measures should be inclusive and address aspects of social reconstruction within transitional justice in order to provide opportunities for victims groups to deal with the atrocities which they had suffered.

One participant urged the international community to support the Iraqi people in bringing Da'esh to justice and in helping Iraqi society to recover from the effects of Da'esh's crimes. Given the Government's reluctance to join the International Criminal Court (ICC), another participant suggested that Da'esh's crimes could be tried through an international court which would be established specifically for this purpose. They also urged the international community to ensure that the Government followed up on the 'Bringing Da'esh to Justice Coalition' initiative which it had launched together with the governments of the United Kingdom and Belgium in 2016.

Several participants stressed the need to review the composition of Iraq's security forces. While acknowledging the difficulty of avoiding tribal affiliations, they stated that Iraq's security forces should represent all components of Iraqi society in order to ensure that all citizens feel that they are protected.

DDR

One participant suggested reintegrating militias into the military system. However, several participants disagreed. One participant stated that this reintegration had failed with the Awakening Forces. Another participant emphasised the importance of rebuilding Iraqi national forces from the bottom up in order to avoid the types of internal disagreements which could be seen in the

Peshmerga which was still split between allegiance to the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) and the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP).

Several participants stated that proper disarmament mechanisms had to be developed in order to provide militant groups with livelihoods after they had been disarmed (e.g. through voluntary work, strengthening the private sector and helping people to set up their own enterprises). One participant stated that conflicts were ongoing between different religious groups living in the same areas, in particular between Sunnis and Shias, and that a conflict could erupt at any moment. Another participant added that disarmament should also be linked to efforts for controlling arms smuggling in Iraq.

Session 3: Stabilisation and reconstruction

In this session, civil society participants provided their analysis and recommendations on the stabilisation and reconstruction of Iraq.

Several participants agreed that the return of IDPs to their homes was a prerequisite for stabilisation and reconstruction. One participant stated that IDPs should be provided with support to help with their return as well as the reconstruction of their homes. A number of participants stated that the return of IDPs should also be connected to programmes for social cohesion and reconciliation amongst the communities of the returnees, in particular for women and children. Moreover, cultural programmes should be established to facilitate discussion about social issues such as lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) rights, and about peace education.

Some participants highlighted that social reconstruction should be the primary objective of any stabilisation and reconstruction programmes, followed by the reconstruction of cities and infrastructure, and that stabilisation projects could not be limited to six months. One participant stated that reconstruction should include the reconstruction of hospitals and schools, in particular in the areas which had been liberated from Da'esh. Another participant emphasised that, in order to avoid corruption, any financial support for reconstruction should be coordinated by the local population and civil society instead of by local governments.

Several participants stated that decentralisation was an important part of stabilisation measures. One participant suggested that the EU could play a role in encouraging the Government to adopt a reward-based, gradual decentralisation, which would involve giving powers to local governments as a reward for their efforts in terms of anti-corruption measures and in co-operation with the Government.

Session 4: Governance and reconciliation

In this session, civil society participants shared their analysis of and recommendations on issues relating to governance and reconciliation.

A number of participants emphasised the importance of co-operation between the Government and civil society. One participant stated that civil society actors could be a useful partner for the Government in drawing up a national action plan (NAP) on the implementation of UNSCR 1325. Another participant stated that the EU, and in particular the EU Delegation in Baghdad, could help by facilitating platforms for citizens to reconnect with politicians. Some participants suggested that political parties should no longer represent different sects and that they should be subject to the scrutiny of civil society and the international community.

Regarding inclusive governance, several participants stated that there was a need to include women in decision-making processes at all levels and that this had to start from an understanding of the reasons for their exclusion. One participant stated that religious authorities were interfering with

governance and therefore recommended the development of a greater number of programmes focused on social rather than religious issues as a means of countering this problem.

Some participants recommended that the EU should play a role in observing the upcoming elections in Iraq and supporting both the Government and the KRG. One participant stated that solutions should be found for people who did not feel secure enough to go to the polling stations. Another participant highlighted the need to include areas which were affected by displacement as electoral areas so that IDPs could return to their homes and exercise their right to vote.

While some participants acknowledged that reconciliation had to take place both at governmental and community levels, several of them emphasised that it had to start at the community level in order to avoid the mistakes of previous reconciliation processes in Iraq. Some participants stated that reconciliation at the community level was interlinked with the return of IDPs to their homes. Others highlighted that reconciliation could not take place without transitional justice, in particular regarding accountability for crimes committed by Da'esh. One participant stated that there had been successful local initiatives for community reconciliation with tribes in Basra.

Session 5: Education

In this session, civil society participants provided their analysis of and recommendations on the possible contribution of education to reconciliation in Iraq.

A number of participants highlighted the importance of dealing with the immediate needs of the Iraqi education system in terms of infrastructure and human resources. They described the absence of student movements and extracurricular activities for students, the lack of resources for research and the shortage of school buildings in areas which had been affected by displacement. They also described the pressures from security forces to which some educational institutions had been subjected.

Some participants emphasised that more support was needed for people working in the educational sector and that teachers should receive an adequate pension to be able to retain their living standards. They also asked the EU to support the training of teachers and professors. One participant recommended reintroducing school meals in order to incentivise children to go to school and as a means of improving their overall health. Another participant stated that there was a drug problem in many schools, in particular in Basra, and that there was a need to fight drug trafficking.

Several participants stated that including peace education in school and university curricula, making curricula more conflict- and gender-sensitive, and including women in the design of education policies could contribute to reconciliation in Iraq. They added that curricula should avoid ethnic and religious sectarianism and instead further the peaceful coexistence between different groups in Iraqi society by including the history of all ethnic and religious groups.

Some participants stated that Iraqi civil society actors should participate in the review of curricula and that the EU should assist schools and universities in carrying out this task. They also recommended the promotion of exchanges between universities in Iraq and Europe. Another participant stated that the education system should be based on an understanding of the needs of the labour market as a means of reducing unemployment in the future.

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 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). The third phase of the CSDN will last from 2017 to 2020. For more information, please visit the [EPLO website](#).