

Strengthening EU Policy and Guidance on Conflict Prevention

In 2001, the European Council adopted the EU Programme for the Prevention of Violent Conflicts (Gothenburg Programme), which includes specific and detailed commitments on how the EU can increase its efforts to prevent conflict. The High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Catherine Ashton has repeatedly stated that the central objective of the European External Action Service (EEAS) is the prevention of conflict. There is now widespread recognition by EU Member States that conflict is an obstacle to the EU meeting many of its other policy objectives. The prevention of conflict contributes to promoting security, human rights and development; it protects EU investment and enables trade; finally, it also contributes to meeting internal policy objectives.

The tenth anniversary of the Gothenburg Programme and the recent establishment of the EEAS offer an unprecedented opportunity for the EU to both develop policy guidance on conflict prevention and to integrate responsibility for its implementation into the EEAS. In this regard, the recent discontinuation of the Gothenburg Programme review constitutes a lost opportunity. EPLO believes that the following steps will support EU action to prevent conflict.

1) Learn from the implementation of the Gothenburg Programme

EPLO assessed the implementation of the Gothenburg Programme in January 2011.¹ Our conclusion was that the EU is contributing to the prevention of conflict but it could do more, it could do better and it could also both better evaluate and better present what it is doing in the field of conflict prevention. In this context, we believe that the EU needs to develop a strategy for conflict prevention that should address some of the shortcomings of the Gothenburg Programme, including tackling one peculiar aspect of EU policy-making: policy has limited impact on action.

A conflict prevention strategy needs:

- Legal mechanisms to ensure action;
- Resources for implementation;
- Strategies to remove the political obstacles to action;
- Specification of which actions are to be taken and by whom;
- A shift in strategy from response to prevention.

2) Seize the opportunity to strengthen conflict prevention policy

Conflict prevention refers to a variety of activities aimed at anticipating and averting the outbreak of violent conflict or the intensification of violence once a conflict has emerged as well as the progressive reduction of the underlying causes of conflict. Foreign policy does not automatically contribute to the prevention of conflict. There are many examples where foreign policy – and external affairs more broadly – have generated conflict rather than prevented it.

The extent to which other EU policies have had a positive or negative impact on conflicts is not well-documented. There are obvious cases where there is a likely effect on conflict, such as trade or investment, and less obvious cases such as fisheries, and cases where there is reluctance to accept links to conflict, such as internal affairs, including response to terrorism, and asylum and migration policies. The EU should apply the ‘Do No Harm’ principle and then go beyond it to try to integrate conflict sensitivity, including promotion of peace, into all of its policies by developing its ability to:

¹ A discussion paper on the review of the Gothenburg Programme is available to download from the EPLO website [here](#).

- understand the context in which it operates;
- understand the interaction between its intervention and the context; and
- act upon the understanding of this interaction, in order to avoid negative impacts and maximise positive impacts on conflict, including using its leverage to promote peace.

The UN, the World Bank, NATO, and several governments have all recently developed policies which focus on preventive action. In order to remain relevant, the EU should also develop its thinking on conflict prevention – a policy area where it has significant comparative advantages. Without the development of policy, strategy and practical guidance, it is unclear how the EU will meet its political commitments and legal obligations to conflict prevention.

3) Increase the EU's institutional capacity to prevent conflict

Although the Directorate for Conflict Prevention and Security Policy within the EEAS has been supported by the secondment of Member State officials to the Unit for Peacebuilding, Conflict Prevention and Mediation, more human resources are needed to ensure that the Directorate can bring conflict policy expertise into the development and implementation of EU policy. The transfer of 18 staff members formerly with DG Relex to the EEAS was part of the inter-institutional agreement in July 2010 and should be implemented.

A strong directorate with the adequate standing and clout could be responsible for, *inter alia*:

- Inserting policy expertise on peace, conflict and security into the development of regional strategies, such as the recently published EU Strategy for Security and Development in the Sahel;
- Ensuring that EU policy is implemented in a conflict-sensitive way, for instance in the case of the European Neighbourhood Policy which is currently under review;
- Integrating conflict sensitivity into EU policies such as enlargement policy the peacebuilding potential of which has yet to be realised.

4) Overhaul development assistance

The World Bank's *World Development Report 2011: Conflict, Security and Development* provides clear evidence that a new approach based on tackling the underlying causes of conflict and building citizen security is needed in fragile, conflict-affected states. Informed by these findings and in accordance with OECD-DAC guidelines, the EU should fully integrate conflict prevention and peacebuilding activities into its development assistance programmes.

The EU should publish the proposed but apparently shelved EU Action Plan for Situations of Fragility and Conflict or develop equivalent guidance. This would be in accordance with the 2007 OECD-DAC peer review which recommended: "The Community should formulate an explicit strategy for fragile states and a clear set of criteria for resource allocation to them. It should also ensure that a conflict lens is applied to all country strategies and programming."

In addition, the inherently political nature of development co-operation needs to be reflected in a conflict strategy alongside the fact that development funding does not automatically contribute to the prevention of conflict and may even generate conflict if it is not conflict-sensitive. A conflict prevention strategy should, therefore, illustrate how conflict prevention and peacebuilding can be integrated into the EU's development policies, programming and implementation.

5) Overcome institutional separation and develop an integrated approach

In order to address threats to European security, the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) needs to contribute effectively to the prevention of conflict and the building of long-term

peace. A conflict prevention strategy should address how the institutional separation between crisis management structures and the rest of the EEAS, as well as the European Commission's Directorate General EuropeAid, Development and Cooperation (DEVCO), can be overcome to ensure that Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) missions are deployed as part of an overall EU strategy for a particular conflict or country.

In order to develop an integrated approach, the envisaged conflict prevention (or crisis management) platform² should bring together the Directorate for Conflict Prevention and Security Policy, relevant geographic directorates, CMPD, CIVCOM and the Fragility and Crisis Management Unit in DEVCO. Civil society would be pleased to contribute to the work of the platform. Its purpose should be both short-term conflict prevention and early warning – gathering and collating early warning information in cases of high conflict risk - and long-term prevention – assessing conflict situations and developing strategies on how to build conflict resilient institutions in fragile states.

Detailed recommendations:

To the management of the EEAS:

- Provide an alternative to the cancelled Gothenburg Programme review that specifies how the EEAS will meet its objective to prevent conflict and which allocates responsibilities and resources for implementing conflict prevention. A first step could be to include strong, concrete commitments including an action plan in the proposed Council Conclusions on conflict prevention;
- Ensure that the envisaged conflict prevention (crisis management) platform overcomes institutional separation and includes external experts.

To the European Commission:

- Prepare a proposal for the transfer of staff currently in FPI (Commission) to the Directorate for Conflict Prevention and Security Policy (EEAS) in line with the Madrid agreement;
- Use DEVCO Fragility and Crisis Management Unit (A6) as a hub of expertise on conflict issues, including for example, drawing and applying lessons from the World Bank's World Development Report 2011 regarding the EU's activities in conflict-affected countries.

To the European Parliament:

- Insist on the transfer of staff from FPI (Commission) to the Directorate for Conflict Prevention and Security Policy (EEAS) in line with the Madrid agreement;
- Monitor and evaluate the EEAS' efforts regarding the prevention of conflict.

To the EU Member States:

- Request that the EEAS management provides a clear alternative to the Gothenburg Programme review, starting with strong commitments in proposed Council Conclusions;
- Propose conflict policy experts to be seconded to the Directorate for Conflict Prevention and Security Policy.

To parliaments in EU Member States:

- Ask national governments to push for a review of the Gothenburg Programme at EU level;
- Demand that their government draw lessons from the World Development Report 2011.

² This is distinct from the crisis management board which is a co-ordinating body convened on an ad-hoc basis by Agostino Miozzo. The proposed crisis management platform would bring together representatives from various EU institutions and external experts; EPLO argues that it should be a conflict prevention and crisis management platform.