Civil Society Dialogue Network Policy Meeting

The 2015 Review of the European Neighbourhood Policy: A peacebuilding perspective

10 June 2015, Brussels

MEETING REPORT

Background

Ten years after its creation, the ENP is undergoing its second review, for which the EEAS and the EC are conducting a consultation based on the EU's Joint Consultation Paper entitled "Towards a new European Neighbourhood Policy".

Many of the EU's neighbouring countries are at risk of or affected by conflict (Libya, Syria, Ukraine, Israel, Palestine), including what can be described as protracted and frozen conflicts (Moldova, South Caucasus). This stocktaking exercise provides a timely opportunity to assess the impact of the ENP since the last review in 2011, and to implement reforms aimed at strengthening the EU's efforts to foster stability, build peace and prevent violent conflict in the Neighbourhood.

This meeting gave civil society organisations an opportunity to share their analysis of and recommendations on issues relating to the EU's support for peacebuilding and conflict prevention in its neighbouring countries. It also provided a platform for EU representatives to share reflections on the next phase of the ENP related to security and stability dimensions of the revised ENP.

For this meeting, EPLO brought together 20 participants, including representatives of civil society peacebuilding organisations working in the European Neighbourhood, and officials from both the EC and the EEAS. This meeting report summarises the discussions between EU and civil society participants on lessons learned from the 2011-2014 phase of the ENP and the inclusion of peacebuilding and conflict prevention in the new ENP. It starts by listing the main recommendations of civil society to the EU for the next phase of the ENP.

Summary of civil society's recommendations to the EU

1. Establish clear peacebuilding and conflict prevention objectives based on the EU's existing commitments to promote peace and use peacebuilding language in the revised ENP to ensure coherence with the Instrument contributing to Stability and Peace (IcSP);

2. Create political space for civil society in the EU and the neighbourhood by supporting capacities of civil society for political dialogue, programming and monitoring of the ENP;

3. Engage and support partners outside of government (e.g. academics, civil society organisations and movements, private sector, etc.), to mobilise constituencies behind the objectives of stability, democratisation and prosperity of the ENP, focusing on opinion-formers, peacebuilding champions and watchdogs;

4. Address the particular needs of women and girls in the ENP by supporting the role of women in conflict prevention, peacebuilding and security aspects (including addressing violence against women), with reference to the EU's commitment to UNSCR 1325 and other related policy commitments;

5. Prioritise accountability of institutions for new activities related to Security Sector Reform (SSR) in the revised ENP;

6. Prioritise access to justice and support to the judiciary for new activities related to the rule of law in the revised ENP;

7. Support the capacity of civil society (from the EU and the European neighbourhood) to participate in oversight and monitoring of public institutions and anti-corruption activities;

8. Utilise conflict analysis expertise to formulate and implement the next phase of the ENP;

9. Take into account regional dynamics in the new ENP, even if the revised policy leans towards a classic bilateral approach based on the interests of each partner government;

10. Draw clearer distinctions in language and activities related to radicalisation, countering violent extremism, organised crime, migration and asylum respectively, and use internal and external expertise to understand the links between them;

11. Build connections between different EU instruments and processes, including the EU agenda on migration, the human rights action plan, the strategic review, the EU strategy on Syria and Iraq as well as the threat of Daesh;

12. Ensure that the implementation of the ENP is conflict-sensitive to avoid exacerbating tensions, especially since ENP partners are currently prone to conflict escalation;

13. Provide training on intercultural communication for EU officials engaged with ENP partners to foster an equal and stable relationship with partners.

Lessons from the 2011-2014 period and reflections on the way forward

EU and civil society participants discussed the EU's assessment of the 2011-2014 period laid out in the Joint Communication Paper of 4 March 2015, in which the EU seems to have recognised that the policy did not adapt to the rapidly changing socio-economic, political and security context of certain regions of the European Neighbourhood (e.g. Arab Spring, Ukraine). All participants welcomed this recognition as a positive step towards making the ENP more coherent with the wider Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) and more politically effective and relevant.

EU representatives stressed that the ENP is by definition political and that the Council Conclusions on the Review of the European Neighbourhood Policy of 20 April 2015 recognise the ENP as part of CFSP:

- *"The ENP is key for both the EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy and other areas of the EU's external action"*
- *"The on-going ENP review should aim at closer coordination between ENP and wider CFSP/CSDP activities in a comprehensive manner".*

Challenges

One participant identified three reasons why the ENP has had limited leverage in conflict-affected countries:

1. The ENP review in 2011 was not tailored to address violent conflict per se, and rather focuses on shared values, democratisation and corruption;
2. It did not address International Humanitarian Law (IHL), which was absent from progress reports. While there were positive developments in referencing IHL in the ENP framework, IHL is still not systematically used by the EU to recall the obligations of parties to hold parties to their obligations.
3. Negative conditionality is absent from the ENP, which diminishes the EU leverage and credibility as a political actor (*More for More → Less for Less*). Financial assistance has not systematically been reduced in the face of evidence of human rights violations.

Other participants asserted that the civil society space is shrinking even in the most interested and invested ENP partner countries (e.g. Lebanon, Morocco). Others raised the issue of inclusive participation of civil society, describing how the same capital-based NGO representatives are brought to the table with EU representatives; often marginalising important sections of society who do not have access to resources and decision-making processes. For example, in the Caucasus, key actors of civil society said the ENP does not mean much to them because they have not been consulted. Diaspora and expatriate communities are also important economic and peace actors to engage with through the ENP (e.g. Lebanon: 14 million diaspora members worldwide, a major source of revenue in a country where economic inequality is extremely high).

The lack of flexibility of EU procedures remains a frustrating issue for ENP stakeholders and partners. Although often framed as a technical issue, the simplification and flexibility of procedures are perceived by some participants as important enough for effectiveness and inclusivity of civil society . especially in conflict-affected countries . to launch a campaign to push the EU institutions and Member States to reform the system. This reform would require a detailed understanding of the technicalities of the EU's legal and administrative architecture. It was suggested that Commissioner and Vice-President Frans Timmermans could address this issue in the long term.

EU representatives explained that efforts are ongoing within the European Commission to address this issue and make support from ENP instruments more accessible to target audiences. Many CSO participants commended these efforts and offered their support in developing solutions.

Government and civil society ENP partners regularly report that they appreciate space for exchange with the EU; however the engagement must be respectful and considerate. Training on intercultural communication of all interlocutors is central to fostering an equal and stable relationship within the ENP framework.

Successes and best practices

It was pointed out that positive effects of the ENP seem to have been more palpable in the Eastern Neighbourhood. One participant highlighted that the approach based on norms and reforms has successfully contributed to peaceful transitions (e.g. in Moldova and Georgia). As the Eastern Partnership is by definition political, most participants encouraged the EU to clearly identify and communicate its interests to partners to promote a meaningful political dialogue within the ENP framework.

Civil society representatives in the Eastern Neighbourhood report that by supporting and engaging civil society on reforms and foreign policy issues, the EU has been instrumental in building interested constituencies and creating space for reconciliation (e.g. Nagorno-Karabakh). Engaging with NGOs, including INGOs, is also valuable for communications and advocacy purposes, as they are opinion formers and potential allies in messaging ENP priorities. Furthermore, it was reported that, in some instances, European actors' engagement (EU or INGOs) gives protection to civil society partners and helps raise international standards with government partners.

While there is already a focus on corruption in the ENP, more can be done to work with watchdogs to fight corruption domestically . in particular in the Eastern Partnership, where state programmes proved to be less effective and civil society monitoring more reliable. In Ukraine, during the presidency of Viktor Yanukovych, civil society organisations were able to document the extent of corruption in the government. However, participants expressed that while evidence was brought to Western leaders early on, the EU took steps to freeze assets only after the Euro-Maidan movement started.

Reflections on the inclusion of peacebuilding and conflict prevention in the revised ENP

All participants hailed the EU's efforts to include peacebuilding and conflict prevention in the ENP in order to address the root causes of conflict. Most civil society participants agreed that the ENP needs to be broadened to address crises and other challenges, however, bringing new themes into the ENP without a political vision and clear communication of its objectives is risky: the ENP would risk becoming a catch-all policy with a blanket and technocratic approach to political problems.

Conflict prevention and peacebuilding should be included in all sections of the ENP and EU external action as a whole. Participants have warned against organising conflict prevention and peacebuilding activities into disconnected siloes covering a limited set of areas (security sector reform, radicalisation, organised crime). Violent conflict is often driven by a diversity of factors, from economic marginalisation to lack of infrastructure to political exclusion, therefore conflict prevention and peacebuilding measures should be cross-cutting in order to be effective.

Participants highlighted that although each country has their own dynamics and interests, regional approaches are necessary because there are regional dynamics to conflicts.

- Conflict analysis and conflict-sensitivity

While participants recognised that introducing security issues and conflict prevention into the ENP is a sensitive issue for the institutions and the Member States, they urged the EU to clarify its 'security' objectives (human security, State security, EU security, partner security) and to use peacebuilding language in the revised policy. Participants opined that the EU has been reluctant to include risk assessment and conflict prevention in the ENP. However, with the majority of partner countries being in conflict or at risk of conflict, the ENP as a policy framework cannot ignore the consequences of conflict, among them two of the worst refugee and humanitarian crises in the world at present (Ukraine and Syria).

Based on the understanding that local context is essential and that ENP partners are currently prone to conflict escalation, participants stated that systematic use of conflict analysis at different levels of decision-making across the EU architecture is key to formulating and implementing the next phase of the ENP.

The implementation of the ENP should be conflict-sensitive to avoid exacerbating tensions and unintended consequences of EU engagement or lack of engagement. To foster a shared sense of stability, the ENP could focus on engaging or even supporting those agents of peace, including individuals, NGOs, non-state actors, who are opinion-formers and can mobilise constituencies.

- Security sector reform (SSR) and state-building

Some participants argued that the added value of the EU would be to focus on human security with 'soft power' means. According to a participant, there is no evidence that the EU has been a security provider both in the Eastern and Southern Neighbourhood (e.g. Ukraine and Russia; Syria) and that it is not likely to become one.

Other participants concurred that there are already many actors working on SSR in both regions (NATO, Member States, the US, regional organisations). Moreover, participants highlighted how authoritarian regimes have not been able to maintain stability, including protection against terrorism (e.g. Egypt . Sinai), and that engaging in security sector reform requires extreme caution. Focusing only on State security, i.e. supporting governments to provide security to their citizens, would be a missed opportunity for the ENP.

When supporting state-building and providing budget assistance to partner governments, the EU should identify, on the basis of thorough political, regional and conflict analysis, which part of the state it wants to focus on. It should also ask itself if it is reinforcing oligarchies and ruling elites.

- Radicalisation, organised crime and migration

Participants highlighted that there is a disproportionate emphasis on radicalisation in EU policies related to the Southern Neighbourhood, which do not reflect perspectives of partners on the issue (for example, the reasons why people join ISIS in the Middle East are not necessarily the same for EU citizens). The root causes of radicalisation differ from one country/group/individual to another and their relative importance in the face of violent conflicts is perceived differently. The future ENP should take into account the different lenses to this complex phenomenon to be able to contribute coherently to countering violent extremism within the EU's external action.

Organised crime and radicalisation are often addressed together in EU statements; however, it is over-simplistic to link the two. In addition, some governments have been using the correlation between

illegal activity and terrorism to shut down political opponents and consolidate power. It is not a given that communities involved in organised crime or illegal cross-border activity are involved in terrorism; rather, economic marginalisation is often found to be the main driving factor.

Similarly, even if unintended, the implicit association between migration and security threats in EU policy documents is problematic. For example, in the Joint Consultation Paper of March 2015: *These events have served to increase the challenges faced by both the EU and its partners, aggravating economic and social pressures, irregular migration and refugee flows, security threats and leading to diverging aspirations*. Participants highlighted that the current discourse on migration in Europe is counter-productive and ideological, and that migration flows towards the EU should be portrayed as a humanitarian issue. Others stressed that the level of resettlement of refugees in the EU is extremely low compared to partner countries. EU participants agreed that migration flows and security threats should not be mixed in policy.

Next steps

It is envisaged that the outcomes of the meeting will contribute to the overall review of the ENP. The formal consultation on the review ends on 30 June 2015 and a Communication on the revised policy is expected in October.