



Parliamentary Meeting
The Future of Europe: from reflection to action

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Background Note

THE ROLE OF THE EU IN CONFLICT PREVENTION

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

European integration and EU enlargement have been a contribution to conflict prevention in Europe over the past half century. The Union has successfully contributed to spreading democracy, prosperity, security and stability across most of the European continent. During the 1990s this peace project was transformed into the core of the EU's external policy under the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP). A decision to develop a distinct conflict prevention policy emerged from the 2000 Nice European Council, when the Secretary General/High Representative (SG/HR) for CFSP and the Commission submitted a joint report with concrete recommendations for developing the role of the Union on Conflict Prevention¹.

Initial progress in developing CFSP for conflict prevention was far from successful as highlighted by the absence of a coherent EU approach towards the Balkan Wars. The result was a distinct EU approach to adjust the treaties (1992 Maastricht, 1997 Amsterdam and 2000 Nice) and create new structures (such as the SG/HR for CFSP and the Political and Security Committee) and the development of a comprehensive policy framework based upon Conflict Prevention and Crisis Management.

The EU's present conflict prevention activities are linked to strengthened coordination with other international agencies acting to prevent conflicts, *in primis* the UN. Such coordination is evident in the field (DR of Congo, Lebanon etc) as well as at headquarters levels (with liaison officers and support to the UN Peace building Commission). The EU depends on strong partnerships with other actors in conflict prevention – including the Council of Europe, OSCE and NATO.

The EU's role in conflict prevention has matured in a relatively short period of time. With the support of National Parliaments and the European Parliament, the EU is an important international actor: its policy arsenal includes both civilian and military instruments, and its policies – be they trade, development or security – carry real weight in the world.

A key objective of the EU is to bridge the CFSP (pillar II) approaches with the Community's (pillar I) role. Indeed, both the European Council's "EU Programme for the Prevention of Violent Conflict" and the Commission's "Communication on Conflict Prevention"² place a

¹ See Annex (vi) to the Presidency Conclusions of the 2000 Nice European Council

² COM(2001) 211 final

strong emphasis on developing coherence across the “pillars” of the EU in order to improve its effectiveness as a conflict prevention actor.

The EU Programme for the Prevention of Violent Conflicts

1. In adopting this programme, the Gothenburg European Council of 2001 marked a new policy departure for the EU to make conflict prevention a central objective of its external relations. Not only was conflict prevention to be mainstreamed at the policy level and in agreements concluded with external countries (see for instance its inclusion in the Cotonou agreement) but it was also made operational and integrated into all external policies and activities, including the European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP), development cooperation and international trade³. The EU's approach to conflict prevention is characterised by a co-operative approach to facilitate peaceful solutions to disputes and implies addressing the root-causes of conflicts, drawing on all instruments at the EU's disposal, both community and intergovernmental.
2. Short term intervention in a crisis may be necessary to halt conflict escalation or to provide a stabilising presence for political, economic and development activities. Concrete examples for combining short term crisis management and longer term peace-building instruments, can be seen in Bosnia-Herzegovina and in the DR of Congo. In both cases military stabilisation forces (Operations Althea and EUFOR DRC) have been operating in parallel with traditional technical and development assistance as well as concrete support to Security Sector Reform (EU Police Mission in BiH, EUPOL Kinshasa and EUSEC DR Congo) to support effective conduct of policing and good governance.

The Communication on Conflict Prevention

3. The Communication emphasises the need to make more systematic and coordinated use of EU instruments to get at the root causes of conflict, to improve the EU capacity to react quickly to nascent conflicts, and to promote cooperation with all major international partners, including non-governmental organisations. How have these key objectives been implemented over the last 5 years?

Mainstreaming conflict prevention into EU policies and instruments

4. This approach builds on the Country Strategy Papers drawn up by the Commission, which develop specific development or economic assistance programmes based on a thorough economic, political and social analysis of the country in question. The mainstreaming of conflict prevention into such an exercise and the ensuing assistance programmes ensures that EU initiatives are designed to strengthen the country, or community (such as in BiH or Kosovo), or to reduce its institutions' vulnerability to conflict. They can include strengthening the rule of law, support to democratic institutions, the development of civil society and the reform of the security sector, amongst others.

³ Presidency Conclusions – Gothenburg, 15 and 16 June 2001.

Targeting specific cross-cutting conflict issues

5. Apart from specific initiatives implemented at the national level, the EU contributes to the prevention of conflict by addressing cross-cutting conflict issues. Some prominent examples include support to the international trade regime, known as the Kimberley Process, which aims to eliminate "conflict diamonds". Another example is the initiative against the exploitation of conflict timber and in support of forest governance under the EU Action Plan for Forest Law Enforcement, Governance and Trade. Another example is the Commission's EU Mine Action which supports the work under the international Mine Ban Treaty. The Commission has adopted a Multi-Annual Strategy for 2005-2007 that calls for a worldwide "Zero Victim Target".
6. Similarly, much attention has been focussed on the issue of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW) proliferation which fuel conflict and have a devastating socio-economic impact. The Commission and the Council developed a Strategy and specific programmes to tackle SALW proliferation, but all activities are currently frozen pending the outcome of legal proceedings on a specific Joint Action with the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS).⁴

Rapid Reaction

7. The Rapid Reaction Mechanism has existed since 2001 and is used to fund emergency projects in areas of conflict such as mine clearance, peace-building activities and reconstruction. The amount of funding has been relatively limited: approximately 25 million euros per year, but this will increase under the new Instrument for Stability. 2.35 billion euros over the period of the new Financial Perspectives (2007-2013) have been allocated for the Stability Instrument. This should be seen as complimentary to the CFSP budget which will be set at a minimum of 1.74 billion for the same period.
8. The Commission also draws upon its wide network of delegations and a "root causes check-list" which provides early warning indicators that feed into the political decision making both at Commission and Council levels. This can trigger a diplomatic response such as the deployment of Special Representatives or specific civilian or military crisis management initiatives. More recently such indicators feed into the process of "joint needs assessments" whereby Council and Commission are carrying joint analysis of conflict situations upon which they identify which EC or CFSP responses are the most appropriate.

International cooperation

9. Cooperation with the United Nations is paramount in order to strengthen the legal system underpinning international order. Details of the EU-UN relationship were set out in an annex to the Irish Presidency's June 2004 ESDP Report entitled 'EU-UN cooperation in military crisis management operations: elements of implementation of the EU-UN Joint Declaration'.

⁴ Action brought on 21 February 2005 by the European Commission against the Council of the European Union (Case C-91/05). Official Journal of the European Union 14.5.2005 (2005/C 115/19).

10. The follow up to this declaration includes "desk to desk" dialogues between EU and UN officials on cooperation in crisis management and conflict prevention policies, e.g. on the new UN Peacebuilding Commission. The EU and UN are also placing strong emphasis on cooperating with other international organisations on peace and security matters. Substantial progress was made, for instance, with African Union and African regional organisations.
11. Transatlantic efforts are also a key element for a coherent policy on conflict prevention. Coordination and cooperation with the Council of Europe and OSCE as well as NATO and third countries including the United States and Russia is important to achieve concrete and lasting results. For example, the status of Kosovo remains a key challenge and provides an excellent example of the necessity for close cooperation with the UN, other international organisations and key partners.

Development Policy

12. Development policy is a particularly important component of conflict prevention in the African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) countries. Political dialogue between the ACP countries and the EU is part of the Cotonou Agreement and is meant to prevent conflicts, especially internal and cross-border conflicts.
13. The EU Strategy for peace, security and development in the Horn of Africa is to provide support to regional conflict prevention mechanisms such as those developed by the African Union. The Strategy provides a framework for regional initiatives which should guide the implementation of Country and Regional Strategy Papers. On the other hand, development policy programmes are complementary to CFSP operations in post-conflict situations such as in DR Congo. Relevant peace-building and demobilisation programmes are managed by the European Commission (development programmes, pillar I) whilst disarmament operations fall under the Council's (CFSP, pillar II) remit.

Enlargement and Neighbourhood

14. The creation of the European Union has been central to the development of peace and stability in recent European history. The perspective of future membership, as stipulated in Article 49 TEU, has motivated and still motivates reforms in many other European countries. The EU's "gravitational pull" remains an important conflict prevention strategy. Successive enlargements are making a reality of the vision of a united and peaceful continent. In addition to current candidate countries for accession⁵ the other Western Balkan countries⁶ have already received an explicit future accession perspective at the 2003 Thessaloniki European Council.
15. The initial failure to respond to the wars in the former Yugoslavia had at the time forced the EU to develop more targeted and flexible responses to conflict prevention and crisis management. From the late 1990s this role was reinforced through the nomination of European Union Special Representatives (EUSR). Prominent EUSR's

⁵ Turkey, Croatia, Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia

⁶ Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia - including Kosovo, Montenegro

have been appointed for Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH)⁷, Kosovo⁸, and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia⁹. Furthermore, the EU deployed its first civilian and military crisis management missions in this region alongside its efforts under the Stabilisation and Association Process to prevent any re-emergence of conflict. This approach included the EU's first military mission, operation Concordia, in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia¹⁰, which was followed by the EU-led police mission Proxima. In BiH the European Union Police Mission was launched in January 2003 and the EU took over from NATO in December 2004 with its largest ever military operation ALTHEA.¹¹

16. As for Kosovo, planning is currently under way to allow for a transfer of selected tasks of UNMIK to a future EU crisis management operation in the field of Rule of Law and other areas that might be identified in the context of the future status.
17. Since 2004 the EU has developed the European Neighbourhood Policy. Its objective is to share the benefits of the EU's 2004 enlargement with neighbouring countries in Eastern Europe, South Caucasus and the South Mediterranean. Jointly agreed action plans cover a broad range of areas including specific conflict prevention activities.
18. Recent events have demonstrated the EU's commitment to conflict prevention in the Eastern neighbourhood. SG/HR Solana offered his good services to mediate between the domestic conflict parties in Ukraine at the moment of the "Orange Revolution" in November 2004. In addition, there have also been EUSR's in the South Caucasus¹² and the Transnistria conflict¹³. Where the EU saw an evident threat to security or basic standards of democracy and human rights, it also considered and introduced targeted sanctions like those on the leadership of Belarus and of the self-proclaimed Transnistrian republic.

Developing a more coherent approach to Conflict Prevention

19. Some weaknesses of the EU as a conflict prevention actor are inextricably linked to the broader limitations of the EU as an external relations actor. After the Balkan wars, this was highlighted again in 2003 in the EU's inability to find a common approach to the Iraq crisis.
20. Whilst the Iraq War exposed deep divisions within Europe, it also prompted a willingness to establish a common understanding on security policy matters and to

⁷ Double-headed as UN High Representative; since February 2006 German former Minister Christian Schwarz-Schilling

⁸ Since November 2005 Austrian diplomat Stefan Lehne is the EUSR for the "Kosovo future status process"

⁹ Since October 2005, European Commission official Erwan Fouéré

¹⁰ In March 2003, the EU launched the Concordia mission at the request of the government and with the backing of the UN Security Council. The mission took over from NATO which had been there since the signing of the Lake Ohrid Framework Agreement in 2001 that ended hostilities between ethnic Albanians and the country's security forces.

¹¹ 7.000 troops involving 33 countries - 22 EU Member States and 11 non-members

¹² Since February 2006 Swedish diplomat Peter Semneby

¹³ Since March 2005 Dutch diplomat Adriaan Jacobovits de Szeged

improve coherence and effectiveness of the EU in external affairs. One result was the agreement at the December 2003 European Council on a "European Security Strategy" (ESS), which pursues a comprehensive approach to security based upon strengthening the multilateral system. Key objectives are, specifically, to tackle new threats, to extend the zone of security around Europe, and to strengthen the international order.

The Constitutional Treaty

21. Whilst the ESS was partly developed in response to divisions over Iraq, the EU also improved its legal and institutional framework in response to the demands of enlargement and a changing international landscape. This led to the Constitutional Treaty which included important provisions, such as the elimination of the pillar structure. The Constitutional Treaty was rejected however in referenda in France and the Netherlands and is currently subject to discussion under what is referred to as the "period of reflection".
22. The Constitutional Treaty also included a provision for an EU Foreign Minister (Art. I-28) and an EU External Action Service (Art. III-296 (3)). It would have established new structures to underpin the EU and Member States ambitions in the area of CFSP/ESDP, in particular by integrating the external services of Commission, Council and Member States.
23. The mandate of the future EU Foreign Minister would encompass comprehensive rights of initiative, participation, representation and implementation in the field of CFSP. In addition s/he would also hold the position of Vice President of the Commission. However, s/he would not have autonomous decision making rights. The EU Foreign Minister would also be bound to consult and inform the European Parliament on the main aspects and basic choices of CFSP and ESDP (Art. III-304 (1)).

The Future Role of the EU in Conflict Prevention?

24. The rejection of the Constitutional Treaty has not reduced the Member States' and European citizens' desire for "more Europe" in the prevention of conflicts. The international security environment also demands a greater role for the EU. This can be seen in the prominent role given to the SG/HR Mr Solana in negotiating with Iran on behalf of the EU-3 and the UN Security Council.
25. The Finnish Presidency has started systematic coordination meetings between the Union's high-level troika, which is a much needed practical step. It has also instituted preparatory meetings between the Presidency, the Commission and the High Representative before all General Affairs and External Relations Councils. This is on top of ongoing efforts to improve the coordination of EU positions in international fora.
26. Furthermore, the Member States have launched new initiatives in the Council such as Comprehensive Planning, Security Sector Reform and Demobilisation, Disarmament and Reintegration. A new Civil-Military Planning Cell and Operations centre was created. This takes place in the framework of the European Security Strategy and its

Military and Civilian Headline Goals. A review mechanism for the European Security Strategy taking place once every 5 years could feed into future Conflict Prevention policies.

27. These developments contribute to overcoming the current pillar divisions and to improving the coherence of EC/EU policies on conflict prevention based upon the current treaties and the existing mechanisms. However, they are still far short of the proposals in the Constitutional Treaty. Most analysts agree that the measures in the Constitutional Treaty would have represented a further improvement of EC/EU role in conflict prevention and crisis management.

Although further work can be carried out to enhance conflict prevention policies by making the most of the existing treaty framework, in future greater use of majority voting in CFSP issues, further coordination of EU positions in international organisations would also be beneficial.

The EU's role in conflict prevention has matured in a relatively short period of time and has become more assertive. EU is uniquely equipped as a comprehensive international actor: its policy arsenal includes both civilian and military instruments, and its policies – be it on trade, development or security – carry real weight in the world. The EU's effectiveness in conflict prevention could benefit from better combining the efforts and resources of Community external relations and intergovernmental cooperation on foreign policy issues. With the support of National Parliaments and the European Parliament more can be done in close partnership with its Member States, the United Nations and other organisations and countries as well as civil society to prevent conflicts, foster reconciliation and strengthen peace processes.