

# EU conflict prevention 10 years after Göteborg

## Front-runner or lame duck? 10 years on from the EU Programme for Conflict Prevention

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**The EU has done much since adopting the Göteborg Programme for the Prevention of Violent Conflicts in 2001. However, institutional stumbling blocks, insufficient prioritisation and unclear political commitment have remained key impediments to realising the EU's ambitions of becoming a more effective global actor in conflict prevention and peacebuilding. Actual EU practice still reflects an overly reactive crisis-management approach rather than a genuine conflict prevention perspective. This policy paper, which is primarily targeted at EU and EU Member States policy- and decision-makers, argues that the EU needs to shift from crisis management towards conflict prevention, thereby maximising its comparative advantage. This requires clear priorities and improving the EU's early warning system. Conflict prevention needs to be fully mainstreamed into all EU external policies and must be at the heart of the European External Action Service (EEAS). The Lisbon Treaty and the EEAS apparently present a unique opportunity to enhance European external action's coherence and effectiveness, but is this fleeting opportunity being seized?**

### Context

A significant number of the EU's partner countries and regions are either at risk of violent conflict, conflict-affected or facing post-conflict situations. Conflict prevention is an explicit objective of the EU's external action and the adoption of the Göteborg Programme for the Prevention of Violent Conflicts in 2001 represents a landmark. However, implementation has lagged behind progress on the strategic policy level in the field of conflict prevention. Right now, the EU has two choices: maximising its comparative advantage thereby increasing its relevance on the international stage or risk relegation to a peripheral role behind key global actors in crisis management.

### Conflict prevention as a priority for the EU's external relations

The adoption of the Göteborg Programme reflects the growing recognition within the EU that effective conflict prevention requires addressing the root-causes of conflict and instability early on and in a comprehensive way rather than through a reactive ad hoc approach. Particularly the failure of the international community to prevent and then resolve the conflict in the former Yugoslavia and the genocide in Rwanda in 1994 further prompted such thinking.

Conflict prevention refers to a variety of short- and long-term activities aimed at anticipating and averting the outbreak or recurrence of violent conflict. It is staggeringly more cost-effective than crisis management and more likely to have a sustainable

impact (Brown & Rosecrance 1999, Lund 1996). However, most international involvement, including the EU's, has often come at a stage when conflict has already unfolded and military, economic and political costs are high. The EU's comparative advantage with regards to other actors, including the United States (US), the United Nations (UN), or even certain EU Member States, lies in its capacity for conflict prevention, civilian crisis management and peacebuilding. As the world's largest provider of development aid, with delegations worldwide, the Union has a unique reach into many conflict-affected and fragile countries and regions. Also, in some cases, the EU's perceived low political profile lends itself better to conflict prevention in sensitive contexts.

Article 21 of the Treaty on the European Union (TEU) states the EU shall "preserve peace, prevent conflicts and strengthen international security" through its external action.<sup>1</sup> Consistently, the Göteborg Programme gives highest political priority to improving the EU's capacity, effectiveness and coherence in the field of conflict prevention, identifying the following key challenges:

- Set clear political priorities for preventive actions;
- Improve its early warning, action and policy coherence;
- Enhance its instruments for long- and short-term prevention; and
- Build effective partnerships for prevention.

The EU has advanced in all of the afore-mentioned priority areas over the last decade, although not performing consistently across them. Still, the overall approach remains too reactive, focusing on crisis management rather than on conflict prevention. EU staff working on crisis management by far outnumber staff concerned with conflict prevention. Clear political priorities for conflict prevention and preventive action are yet to be defined; and so are responsibilities and accountability for inaction. This calls for more pronounced leadership from the top. The EU's early warning capacity has been improved but the system remains disjointed, and the notorious warning-response gap is still too big. The management of information and analysis on conflicts is suboptimal, and available early warning tools are currently not used to their full potential (Montanaro & Schünemann 2011). The EU has enhanced existing instruments and developed new ones for long- and short-term prevention, but these rather exist in parallel instead of responding to one strategic rationale.

<sup>1</sup> See also Article 10 A, General Provisions on the Union's External Action, Treaty of Lisbon.

## Analysis

### Substantial progress on the policy level

Although not providing a guarantee for coherent action, substantial progress has been made on the policy level - not a minor achievement against the background of the international shift towards a narrower understanding of security after the terrorist attacks of 9/11. Nonetheless, the European Security Strategy from 2003 and its 2008 review underlined the EU's commitment to conflict prevention. A series of Commission Communications, Council Conclusions and EU Concepts reflect the centrality of conflict prevention for EU external action. This applies to situations of fragility, the link between security and development, Security Sector Reform (SSR), Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration (DDR), children and armed conflict, small arms and light weapons (SALW), mediation and dialogue as well as women, peace and security, etc.. Questions of transitional justice have also gained ground over the last years.

Conflict prevention as a concept and a guiding principle is thus widely present in the EU's policy framework, which has been matched with a series of new instruments, procedures and structures. Yet, shortcomings remain on both the strategic policy and the implementation level. The EU does not have a definition of conflict prevention let alone a conflict prevention strategy with clear political priorities and practical guidelines how to articulate and implement all the different policies and instruments in a coherent way. Thus, the implementation of the Göteborg Programme remains fragmentary.

### Enhanced flexibility through the Instrument for Stability

The most significant innovation since Göteborg has been the launch of the Instrument for Stability (IfS) in 2007. Through its non-programmable and rapid short-term component, the EU has significantly increased its flexibility and promptness to engage in conflict prevention, post-conflict political stabilisation and early recovery after natural disasters. The IfS is generally considered a success, although its potential impact is limited by its relatively small budget of €2.06 billion (2007-2013). More than two thirds go to its short-term component covering activities, including mediation, facilitation and dialogue activities; support to electoral processes and transitional justice; early recovery; support to civilian components of integrated

peacekeeping missions as well as stabilisation and monitoring missions.

The EU's timely engagement in the resolution of the political crisis in Kyrgyzstan in April 2010 is an example of the potential added value of its IfS. Only one day after the popular uprising and ousting of the former Kyrgyzstani President Kurmanbek Bakiev, the EU in coordination with the UN and the Organisation for Security and Co-operation (OSCE) stood ready to effectively support the Provisional Government in its efforts to establish a democratic system. Early activities comprised constitution drafting and assisting the constitutional reform process. The latter culminated in the approval of the new Constitution at a national referendum in June 2010, which in turn allowed for transparent and fair parliamentary elections held in October 2010, as well as for the restoration of legitimate state institutions.

## **Indeed, all external EU policies and activities need to be informed by solid conflict analysis and be constantly reassessed for potential trade-offs**

Mainstreaming conflict prevention into EU development cooperation has only partly been achieved over the last decade. Neither the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR) nor the Development Cooperation Instrument (DCI) make any clear reference to conflict prevention while the Cotonou agreement with the African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) countries does. In Uganda, for example, this has translated into conflict-sensitive programming, but in other cases it remains little more than lip service. By far not all Country Strategy Papers (CSPs) –the crucial tool for strategic programming– include a comprehensive conflict assessment. Furthermore, CSPs often lack a thorough security analysis including on transnational and trans-regional threats. Given that the adoption of CSPs requires agreement between the EU and the respective governments, sensitive issues are not addressed.

The potential impact of trade agreements between the EU and third countries on conflict dynamics remains largely under-examined. More independent research is needed here. Indeed, all external EU policies and activities need to be informed by solid conflict analysis and be constantly reassessed for potential trade-offs.

In this regard, the EU's strong commitment to the Kimberly Process is an example for good practice, which also demonstrates what can be achieved when civil society, the public and the private sector pull in the same direction.

## **Institutional stumbling blocks**

Not speaking with one voice shows the EU's lack of coherence, which has been a significant impediment for it to develop as a global actor. For effective conflict prevention the available EU instruments, including political, diplomatic, development, humanitarian, crisis response, economic and trade, civilian and military crisis management need to be used in a coherent manner. But under the EU's pre-Lisbon institutional setup these instruments were housed across poorly coordinated institutions, which pursued different objectives. The separation between Common Foreign and Security Policy/European Security and Defence Policy (CFSP/ESDP) and Community competences hampered joint programming. While the Commission was more proactive towards conflict prevention and peacebuilding, the Member States dominated Council remained sceptical strongly leaning towards crisis response. In the case of Somalia, for example, anti piracy measures and training for Somali security forces are completely de-linked from political aspects of the EU's engagement in development. Certain Member State's fishery interests compromised a more holistic approach. The predominance of the minimum common denominator is certainly not conducive to effective preventive action as cases like Sudan, Democratic Republic of Congo or Kenya show. Libya is the most recent example of the EU's lack of unity in the domain of foreign policy. On the other hand, when interests coalesce, the EU can act effectively. In its response to the Georgia crisis in 2008, it successfully combined diplomatic action at the top political level facilitating a ceasefire with the quick deploy of a civilian monitoring mission. Through the IfS, the EU set up rehabilitation programmes for displaced persons and supported civil society. A EU Special Representative oversaw the subsequent peace talks. However, once more it took a serious crisis for the EU to get its act together: in 2005/2006, the Union had failed to support the Russia-Georgia dialogue missing the opportunity for preventive action in the neighbourhood.

Many Member States are inclined to crisis response; both for political visibility but also the pressure to act generated by acute crisis. A resource competition exists between prevention-oriented and crisis response actions. In general, decision-makers don't feel pressured to act on latent conflicts, only mobilising

little resource for prevention. In decision-making, given the uncertain outcome of preventive action, immediate political risks calculations often outweigh the blurry longer-term risk of inaction. Hence, multiple and potentially much higher costs will be generated by the future outbreak of violent conflict. The cost-benefit analysis is irrational and misaligned with the objective of conflict prevention: the short-term cost dimension receives disproportionate attention while the potentially long-term costs are relegated or neglected for purely power-political considerations. At the same time, the apparent short-term benefits of hasty, poorly thought-through involvement often trump the long-term benefits of prevention. It is necessary to better spell out and communicate the costs of inaction in case prevention fails as well as the concrete benefits of successful prevention in terms of avoided costs.

## Early warning: the missing link<sup>2</sup>

The Göteborg Programme acknowledges that effective early warning is crucial for preventing conflict. It alerts decision-makers to the potential outbreak, escalation and resurgence of violent conflict, and can be a tool to manage political priorities and objectives. Informed decision-making on early action is impossible without early warning. Ten years ago, the EU had no in-house system dedicated to early detection of violent conflict. Since then, both the Council and the Commission have developed new mechanisms and tools, which however do not operate to their full potential, or even connect and function in a complementary manner. In general, existing tools suffer from structurally weak sourcing; lack of forecast risk analysis and scenario development; insufficient integration of political, security, social, ethnic and economic factors, etc. Furthermore, mechanisms for reporting and communicating warnings are inadequate.

The Joint Situation Centre (SITCEN), an EU intelligence body, relies on input from Member States. These -contrary to the spirit of an intelligence community- tend to hold back the most whilst sharing the less relevant information. This compromises the quality of SITCEN outputs. The "Watch List", for example, a global six-monthly overview on a flexible number of countries and regions agreed by the Political and Security Committee (PSC), is heavily politicised, essentially reflecting the minimum common denominator of the 27 Member States. It principally draws on the threats defined by the EU's Security Strategy, but they are far too broadly indicated as to serve as a basis for effective planning and decision-making. In conjuncture with the lack of forecasting,

scenario planning and prioritisation, this explains the Watch List's limited utility as an early warning-tool. The Commission developed its own infrastructure, in particular the creation of the Crisis Room. There, analysts produce warnings on the basis of input from EU delegations, Regional Crisis Response Planning Officers (RCRPOs) and open source intelligence (OSINT). Tariqa, a sophisticated qualitative and quantitative early warning support tool, allows for undertaking cluster analysis and scenario drawing. However, the Crisis Room has always been notoriously understaffed (at the time of writing it only has six staff members).

In order to build effective partnerships for conflict prevention, the EU has reinforced so-called "desk to desk" dialogues between EU and UN officials, for example on the UN Peacebuilding Commission. It has equally enhanced cooperation with other international organisations on peace and security matters, especially with the African Union (AU) and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). This comprises capacity building for crisis preparedness of implementing partners, such including the AU or the Arab League (LAS) or civil society actors. The EU has created the African Peace Facility (APF), which mainly funds African military peacekeeping operations. A stronger focus on the existing components of civilian peacekeeping and capacity building of the African institutions would be appropriate. Given the EU's limited financial and human resources, capacity building is a cost-effective way to be present all over the world. Capacity building should also be undertaken at the local and community level.

## Lisbon and the EEAS: the golden opportunity?

The coming into force of the Lisbon Treaty in December 2009 and the EEAS apparently swept away the main legal and institutional stumbling blocks to the EU becoming a more effective global actor in conflict prevention and peacebuilding. Yet, important roadblocks remain. Essentially, these include lack of political will, commitment and leadership, clear priorities, accountability, and inadequate resourcing. In fact, the recent setup of the EEAS highlights a continuing gap. The EU's High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy (HR), Catherine Ashton, emphasizes her commitment to conflict prevention, even though bureaucratic jockeying for control and influence holds up concrete progress. In April 2011, she halted the Göteborg Programme review: a multi-stakeholder exercise initiated in January 2010 with the objective to generate an updated policy document on conflict prevention by June 2011. The HR's explanation that the EEAS would

<sup>2</sup> This section is based on Montanaro & Schünemann 2011.

concentrate on practical, action-oriented work in areas of on-going or impending crises seemed to reveal a continuing preference for crisis management over conflict prevention. Also, it remained unclear how these concrete actions could be effectively implemented without high-level policy guidance. Ashton's approach drew criticism from several stakeholders, including the European Parliament, several Member States and the peacebuilding community. At the time of writing, mounting criticisms have apparently led to discussions within the EEAS on working towards some sort of practical guidelines for the operationalisation of the EU's conflict prevention policy framework, although this remains unconfirmed. On a similar note, Ashton has decided to freeze the Action Plan on fragility and security and development, prepared by the Commission in 2009/2010. Regardless of the final outcome, the ongoing uncertainty would seem to be harming an incipient move away from crisis management towards conflict prevention.

## Policy recommendations

### ***1. Conflict prevention needs to be at the heart of the EEAS's work***

Resources need to be bolstered and not cut. The European Parliament should exercise its full budgetary control powers in this regard. The Directorate for Conflict Prevention and Security Policy relies on adequate staffing in order to function as the hub of conflict expertise with the EEAS. The creation of conflict advisor positions is recommended (Woollard 2001). The current staffing of the Peacebuilding, Conflict Prevention and Mediation Unit (at the time of writing made up of four officials) is inadequate. More RCRPO posts in selected fragile and conflict-affected countries and regions should be created. RCRPOs should be vested with a concrete conflict prevention mandate.

### ***2. All EU external action needs to be informed by conflict analysis***

Conflict prevention should continue to be undertaken through both specific actions and general multi-annual development programmes. All external EU policies and activities need to be informed by solid conflict analysis and be constantly reassessed for potential trade-offs. Under Lisbon, joint strategic programming for CSPs will be a reality. They need to include a comprehensive conflict assessment. Politically sensitive issues could be addressed in confidential annexes, in which Head of

Delegations include information and analysis on drivers of conflict and fragility.

### ***3. Efforts to increase the flexibility of EU instruments must continue***

Within the next multiannual financial framework (2014-2019), the budget of the IfS should be increased, in particular for its non-programmable, short-term component. The EU still needs to enhance the flexibility of its long-term development instruments in order to effectively respond to rapidly changing circumstances in fragile and conflict-affected settings. Root causes must remain at the centre of conflict prevention and peacebuilding activities. SSR and DDR programmes require particularly high levels of local ownership in order to promote structural reform and proof sustainable. Effective local ownership calls for engaging more closely with local civil society and local populations.

### ***4. Improving the EU's early warning system is key***

Early warning is key to preventing conflict; it is the basis for evidence-based analysis, effective planning and decision-making. The EU needs to use the existing early warning tools to their full potential, improve their quality and weave together all the different strands of information and analysis. Current intentions within the EEAS to reform the "Watch List" can only be welcomed. The intended fusion between the SITCEN and the Crisis Room should no longer be postponed.

### ***5. The Göteborg Programme needs to be updated***

The Göteborg Programme remains valid, but needs to be updated to be relevant and actionable for the EU, and the EEAS in particular. The update should incorporate innovations in the EU policy framework, as well as high-level political priorities and practical guidelines for the operationalisation of the EU's policy framework for conflict prevention under the post-Lisbon institutional structure. In addition, clear timelines and benchmarks for evaluation should be adopted.

## Conclusion

The EU has the policy framework and the necessary instruments to match its commitment of building a safer and more peaceful world. Ten years after Göteborg, the EU needs to engage in an honest debate on threats, interests and priorities against a background of scarce resources. Prioritisation should rely on evidence-based, contextualised information and analysis. The EU needs to shift from crisis management towards conflict prevention. This is where its comparative advantage lies. But the political case for prevention has yet to be made. Missing the opportunity for increased coherence and effectiveness generated by the Lisbon Treaty and the setup of the EEAS, for the EU means risking relegation to a peripheral role on the international stage and ultimately losing credibility.

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