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Early Warning and Conflict Prevention as Tasks of the European Union and EU-OSCE Co-operation

The European Union and Conflict Prevention

For quite some time now, conflict prevention, early warning and early action have become crucial elements of any proactive foreign policy. It has also been generally acknowledged that both the human and financial costs of crisis resolution and conflict management are far higher than the cost of effective conflict prevention. Yet the number of regional conflicts is still growing. Europe itself has not been spared: the ideology of ethnic cleansing, primitive nationalism, killings and expulsion of and brutality against whole populations have culminated recently in Kosovo, after having hit other parts of the former Yugoslavia. The damage done has far outweighed the cost of timely stabilization.

The conclusion to be drawn from this should be to reinforce efforts in conflict prevention. The European Union has a particular role to play in this context.

The European Union itself is a security community, based on the very idea that reconciliation, integration and the organization of interdependence are the best guarantees for ensuring peace and prosperity among nations. The enlargement process in which the Union is presently engaged has been the largest conflict prevention project in history (post-1989). The enlargement of the Union will be to the mutual benefit of all both politically and economically, but it is clear that one of the superordinate objectives of the enlargement process, including the very comprehensive pre-accession strategy, is to ensure peace, stability and economic development in Europe.

Over the past five decades, the European Union has also developed into a major player on the international stage. The European Union is engaged in international co-operation at many levels and is an important actor in international trade and economic relations, development co-operation and foreign policy in general.

In relation to the former USSR, the Union is contributing to the consolidation of democracy and a sound market economy through the TACIS programme and through partnership and co-operation agreements between the EU and Russia, Ukraine and the other successor states. The European Union has played a major role in implementing the Middle East peace process and the Dayton Agreement for Bosnia. It is active in the Balkans and in Kosovo through a process of association and stabilization. We have actively sup-

ported the South African transition to democracy. We have introduced conditionality clauses on fundamental human rights into our co-operation agreements with our third country partners, including the Lomé Agreement with African, Caribbean and Pacific nations. The list of elements of EU foreign policy which serve a conflict prevention or peace consolidation objective is long.

The European Union is very aware of its responsibility as a major player in international relations. Although initially conceived as a "civilian power", the EU is gradually developing foreign and security policy capacities under the Amsterdam Treaty. In this context civilian and military instruments will have to be applied in an increasingly complementary manner in crisis management.

In the vast field of conflict prevention, the political objectives of the EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) complement the external relations instruments of the European Community. In the Union, much attention has therefore been given to improving the Union's early warning capacities in order for the EU to engage in "early action" and become a proactive, rather than a reactive, player in international relations.

Experience shows, however, that it is more useful to talk about "timely action", instead of "early action", meaning that the most important conflict prevention challenge for the EU is to be able to identify the right instruments to apply at the right time at various stages in the development of an international crisis situation.

In a reasonably stable country or region, where there are serious and credible local interlocutors, the Union can contribute to a continued positive development through trade, economic assistance, institution-building, democracy programmes, environment projects, etc.

In a more acute crisis situation, such as the Kosovo crisis with large scale refugee problems, notably in Albania and Macedonia, the Commission is heavily engaged in humanitarian assistance and post-conflict rehabilitation right at the front line. These will in turn have to be accompanied by measures within the framework of the Common Foreign and Security Policy of the Union.

Finally, post-conflict reconstruction is also crisis prevention in as much as it serves the objective of consolidating peace and promoting stability. Here the European Union has again been able to make use of a series of Community instruments, and co-operate with other relevant bodies, such as the World Bank or various UN agencies.

The institutions of the European Union are under a great deal of pressure to react rapidly in dealing with current affairs, maybe at the expense of a more thorough analysis of structural conflict dynamics in the various geographical areas in the world and medium-term prospective scenarios. Against this

background, in combination with the recognition of early warning as a prerequisite for timely action, the Commission established in 1996 - upon an initiative by the European Parliament - the Conflict Prevention Network (CPN).

A wide ranging network of think tanks, experts and relevant NGOs has been developed, creating a pool of knowledge. The CPN provides analytical assessment and policy advice and by means of the Commission and the European Parliament makes it available to those actors who are responsible on the European level.

The CPN places a special emphasis on structural problems which are likely to provoke a crisis. Structural causes might consist of weak or discriminatory state institutions, ethnic tensions, exclusionary ideologies, severe economic problems, political, economic or cultural discrimination, etc. Furthermore, prospective scenarios are developed and, where possible, specific events are identified that could trigger the outbreak of a latent conflict.

A series of analysis, policy, and impact studies allows further development of EU concepts, instruments and procedures for proactive policy.

Furthermore a "lessons learned" exercise helps to draw methodological and institutional conclusions and to suggest improvements. The aim is to bring together, and to profit from, the joint communities of academics, practitioners, and policy makers.

A CPN board, "Group of Experts", meets at least three times a year. The Group of Experts consists of representatives from the Commission and from the European Parliament (Members of the EP Foreign Affairs and Development Committees). The principal task of the Group of Experts is to provide general guidelines for the CPN in the context of building up the network, establishing the CPN work plan, developing concepts and strategies and discussing the results of the projects undertaken.

On request from the Commission and the European Parliament, the CPN organizes and executes a series of projects of different kinds according to the analysis or advice requested. The projects are carried out in close co-operation with the requesting operational service in order to ensure that CPN input is policy relevant and operationally useful. To this end, a basic rule of confidentiality is generally applied, ensuring mutual trust among academics and practitioners.

CPN does, however, in many cases publish the finished products with the approval of the requesting service.

The principal activities of the Conflict Prevention Network are the following:

- in-depth studies, substantial background analysis set in a prospective policy context;
- *ad-hoc* briefings;

- seminars on specific horizontal conflict prevention topics;
- workshops, primarily used to prepare or follow-up on an in-depth study.

The CPN also takes into consideration possibilities for the European Union to co-operate at a practical and operational level with other relevant organizations in the field of conflict prevention, such as the OSCE, the various UN bodies, and the World Bank, in light of the role that these organizations can play and the instruments that are available to them.

Both the European Commission and the European Parliament have established internal structures to optimize the institutional benefit of the CPN facility. This means the channelling and co-ordination of requests to the Conflict Prevention Network for various activities, as well as the presentation and distribution of finalized products.

As to range of topics, the CPN not only analyses concrete regions or individual countries, but also examines thematic issues such as the role of media in conflict prevention, democracy-building, etc.

The CPN is an interesting project that reflects the European Commission's wish for the European Union to optimize its efforts in conflict prevention. It remains, however, a small project in comparison to the much larger objective of creating an effective and genuinely Common Foreign and Security Policy for the European Union.

Progress has been made and important experience gained since the Maastricht Treaty entered into force in 1993, providing a treaty framework and some new instruments for the Union in the field of CFSP. On the basis of these experiences, the Treaty of Amsterdam, which entered into force on 1 May 1999, constitutes yet another element of progress in establishing an efficient European CFSP.

Several new CFSP provisions are relevant to the Union's future as a major actor in conflict prevention. The quest for a sound analytical basis for decision making and for an early warning system is reflected, *inter alia*, by the creation of a Policy Planning and Early Warning Unit in the Council Secretariat. The nomination of a High Representative for CFSP and the possibility of appointing special envoys for specific tasks will provide the Union with a higher profile in many contexts. The decision-making system in the Council of Ministers has been made more flexible, introducing the concept of constructive abstention and qualified majority voting in the implementation of Common Strategies. The new instrument of Common Strategies will also contribute to achieving coherent and comprehensive EU policies towards specific countries or regions. The integration of the so-called Petersberg Tasks of the WEU (humanitarian and rescue tasks, peacekeeping tasks and tasks of combat forces in crisis management, including peacemaking) into

the Amsterdam Treaty will allow the Union to have recourse to military capacity when this is indispensable in backing up foreign policy decisions. Until the Union can make optimal use of the new opportunities under the Amsterdam Treaty, there will continue to be a noticeable discrepancy between the European Union's weight as an economic power in the world and its capacity to exercise a leading role in crisis prevention and crisis management. The gradual integration of WEU into the EU is part of the road map. Through the British-French initiative and the conclusions of the European Council in June 1999 in Cologne, a start has been made at developing a genuine capacity for the EU to deal with humanitarian and rescue tasks, peacekeeping tasks and tasks of combat forces in crisis management, including peacemaking.

Early Warning and Conflict Prevention: EU-OSCE Co-operation

One of the OSCE's main tasks is certainly that of conflict prevention and crisis management.

This has never been more evident than in the Balkans. Who would have thought that the nineties, ushered in with so much hope and promise after the fall of the Berlin Wall, would end with hundreds of thousands of refugees and displaced persons once again on the march - innocent victims of ethnic conflict and human rights atrocities within the OSCE region?

As if sensing the vulnerability of the transition to democracy in many of the participating States of the CSCE, as it was then called, and in order to better address the new risks and challenges to European security, successive Summits of CSCE participating States adopted a series of landmark decisions. Starting with the 1990 Charter of Paris and continuing with the 1992 Helsinki Document, and the subsequent Summit in Budapest, the CSCE gradually adapted and transformed itself into what it is now - a primary instrument in its region for early warning, conflict prevention, crisis management and post-conflict rehabilitation.

The OSCE spans the geographical area and embodies the shared common values of countries "from Vancouver to Vladivostok". Its approach to security is *comprehensive* and *co-operative*. Through its field missions and operational activities as well as through its myriad institutions, the OSCE addresses a wide range of security-related issues including arms control, preventive diplomacy, confidence- and security-building measures, human rights, election monitoring and economic and environmental security. It provides a forum for the participating States to hold a political dialogue and seek solutions together, on the basis of sovereign equality.

The OSCE has thus become a more operational institution, focusing on the process of political and economic reform necessary for consolidating democratic stability as well as the effective implementation of the OSCE's principles and commitments.

The early warning and conflict prevention roles are reflected in the mandates of several of the OSCE institutions. For example, the mandate of the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities states that he "will provide 'early warning' and, as appropriate, 'early action' at the earliest possible stage in regard to tensions involving national minority issues which have not yet developed beyond an early warning stage, but, in the judgement of the High Commissioner, have the potential to develop into a conflict within the CSCE area affecting peace, stability or relations between participating States (...)"¹. Recent crises demonstrate even more, however, the need for strengthening the mechanisms for dialogue and conflict prevention/resolution established within the OSCE.

It was precisely in the case of Kosovo in autumn 1998 with the establishment of the Kosovo Verification Mission that the response capacity of the OSCE to such challenges was put to the test. While the KVM gained the confidence of local communities, thus contributing to confidence-building, there were nevertheless a number of weaknesses in its structure. Hence the 1999 budget decision to increase the OSCE Secretariat permanent staff in the fields of planning, mission support, financial management and human resources is to be seen as a valuable asset.

The OSCE is of course not alone in addressing the security needs of the region.

The EU itself has played a significant role in the process of adaptation which the OSCE has embarked upon in response to the challenges of the post-Cold War period. Since 1989, the European Community and later the European Union has been represented first at CSCE and later OSCE meetings by a representative of the country holding the EU Council Presidency and a representative of the European Commission. The President of the Commission and the Commissioner responsible for external relations participate, with their Foreign Minister colleagues from the 55 OSCE participating States, at Summits and Ministerial Councils of the OSCE. In November 1990, President Jacques Delors and President of the Council Giulio Andreotti signed the Charter of Paris for a New Europe on behalf of the European Union. Indeed, the EU Member States contribute some two thirds of the OSCE budget and the EU also contributes substantially through the EU budget to additional calls for support - financial and in-kind.

1 CSCE Helsinki Document 1992: The Challenges of Change, Helsinki, 10 July 1992, in: Arie Bloed (Ed.), *The Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe. Analysis and Basic Documents, 1972-1993*, Dordrecht/Boston/London 1993, pp. 701-777, here: p. 716.

Examples of EU support for the OSCE include support for the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) in monitoring free elections and developing national electoral and human rights institutions in new democracies. This was the case with elections in Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1997 and 1998. In this last action, the EU financed over 60 per cent of the election observation, including the joint EU/OSCE Media Centre. It is also co-financing the programme for democracy-building in Central Asia developed by the ODIHR.

This co-operation has also led to several important activities in the field of conflict prevention and crisis management. The EU Troika and the Commission took part in the González mission to Belgrade in December 1996. OSCE experts took part in the EU mission to Belarus in January 1997. The Commission was also represented in the OSCE mission to the Caucasus in November 1998 led by the then Chairman-in-Office of the OSCE, Polish Foreign Minister Professor Bronisław Geremek. The EU and OSCE are also working together to assist Albania. They share the chair of the "Friends of Albania" group which is monitoring assistance in that country.

This interaction between the EU and the OSCE has underlined the significant contribution which the EU can make to the achievement of OSCE objectives. Indeed, because of the important role already played by the EU in many OSCE countries, through its association, partnership and co-operation agreements and through the PHARE, TACIS and MEDA assistance programmes, the OSCE has come to recognize the significant "added value" which the EU can bring to sustaining political stability and nation-building throughout the OSCE region. The EU agreements are based, *inter alia*, on the UN, OSCE and Council of Europe "*acquis*".

The EU has been developing a process of identifying specific actions in conflict areas which are aimed at promoting economic development and creating a climate conducive to reconciliation: the EU rehabilitation project in the Tskhinvali region, South Ossetia, is a noteworthy example which was highlighted during the visit of Professor Geremek to Georgia, mentioned above, and in his discussions with President Eduard Shevardnadze.

This work has also led to close co-operation in the field with the OSCE missions, which are encouraged to liaise and consult with the EU delegations, whether in Central Asia, the Caucasus or the Balkans.

The call for increased EU political and financial support to OSCE-led activities will expose both organizations to the need to reassess the current status of the EU in the OSCE context. The success of the EU and of other international institutions demonstrates that in this world of increasing globalization states are not the only significant actors on the international stage, especially when it comes to early warning and conflict prevention. On the other hand, a classic international organization of participating governments such as the

OSCE is dependent on collaboration and on the EU as an integrative community. Thus integration and co-operation are the complementing processes for whose reinforcement an intensive relationship between the EU and the OSCE is indispensable.