

Evidence for the Foreign Policy Report on the Balance of Competences between the United Kingdom and the European Union

Focus on Peacebuilding and Conflict Prevention

A Contribution by Conciliation Resources

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Conciliation Resources is an independent organisation working with people in conflict-affected areas to prevent violence and build peace. We take what we learn to decision-makers to improve peacebuilding policies and practice worldwide. In recent years Conciliation Resources has stepped up its engagement with EU partners and policymakers, including through our active participation in the network of European peacebuilding organisations, the European Peacebuilding Liaison Office (EPLO).

In this paper we comment on the balance of competences between the UK and the EU in the area of peacebuilding and conflict prevention. Please note that through BOND we have also contributed to the report on development cooperation and humanitarian aid.

Q1. In what areas of global affairs does the EU add value or deliver impact or not on behalf of the UK?

We would argue that over the last ten years the EU's contribution to peacebuilding and conflict prevention has increased significantly, and that this has brought added value and impact on behalf of the UK, but that there is potential for the EU to do more (see also questions 3 and 4).

The EU has significantly increased its focus on conflict prevention and peacebuilding. The related policy framework has been strengthened and a wide range (non-)financial tools has been developed to enable the EU to prevent conflict and build peace.

Moreover, the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty has helped improve coherence and capability in the area of external action, including through the creation of the post of High Representative / Vice President and the European External Action Service (EEAS) - and particularly its Division for Conflict Prevention, Peacebuilding and Mediation Instruments, K2 - and the greater political and coordinating role of EU Delegations.

The thematic evaluation of EC¹ support to conflict prevention and peacebuilding in the period 2001-2010 lists the EU's added value as:

- Its stronger political neutrality than that of Member States;
- Its reliability (continued presence and capacity to establish long-term partnerships);
- Its critical mass in terms of financial support;
- Its ability to draw on a wide array of instruments;
- Its long-term thematic experience in fields or sectors potentially impacting on conflict prevention and peacebuilding; and
- Its credibility in terms of promoting democracy, peace and human rights.

¹ While the evaluation looks at EC support provided pre-Lisbon, it provides a good baseline for assessing the EU's contributions and effectiveness. Its findings and recommendations remain valid post-Lisbon.

The same evaluation concludes that the EU has been able to make 'a positive contribution (...) to peace consolidation, stabilisation, reconstruction and rehabilitation' and has at various occasions been successful in 'mitigating the impact of the root causes of conflict'.

While acknowledging the added value and impact of the EU in the area of peacebuilding and conflict prevention, we would argue the EU could do more and better. Inter alia, it should shift its focus from response to prevention; better translate policy commitments into guidance for field staff, including through clarification of concepts such as peacebuilding and conflict prevention; integrate conflict analysis in all its external action; and develop integrated strategies. Furthermore, the review of the EEAS and the Joint Communication and Council Conclusions on the Comprehensive Approach (see Q3) offer the potential to further enhance the EU's peacebuilding impact. However, as long as Member States continue to prioritise national security objectives in peacebuilding and visibility of bilateral efforts over investment in EU action, the EU's potential in this field will remain unfulfilled.

Key references:

- Thematic Evaluation of European Commission Support to Conflict Prevention and Peace-building, Final Report, Volume 1: Main Report, October 2011
http://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/how/evaluation/evaluation_reports/reports/2011/1291_yq11_en.pdf
- EPLO, Review of the Gothenburg Programme, January 2011
http://www.eplo.org/assets/files/2.%20Activities/Working%20Groups/EEAS/EPLO_Review_Gothenburg_Programme.pdf
- EPLO, Written evidence to the EU Sub-Committee on External Affairs of the House of Lords' inquiry into the European External Action Service (EEAS), 8 February 2013
<http://www.parliament.uk/documents/lords-committees/eu-sub-com-c/EEAS/WrittenEvidenceVolumeEEASv1.pdf>

Q2. What are the comparative advantages/disadvantages of working through the EU in the area of peacebuilding and conflict prevention, rather than the UK working independently?

The comparative advantages of working through the EU in the area of peacebuilding and conflict prevention include:

- The 27 member countries carry greater political weight and influence when acting together. As the largest global trading bloc and biggest provider of development assistance, the EU has considerable leverage. Joint action is also important given the declining power of Europe in many areas of the world, with new actors (e.g. China, Brazil, India) 'competing' for involvement in peacebuilding and conflict prevention.
- Evidence (WDR 2011) shows that effective support for peace and development requires united action by external actors.
- More efficient use of resources – the financial crisis should give Member States additional incentives to work through the EU when it comes to engagement in third countries, as it offers scope for reduced transaction costs from multiple projects, economies in human resources and institutional infrastructure.
- Less risk of duplication or counter-productive action by different Member States.
- The EU itself is a peace project and thus an example - and one could add has experience to share.
- Democratic and human rights values have been at the EU's core since its inception. These values help to distinguish it from other new actors and donors in the peacebuilding field and provide some legitimacy to its actions.
- The EU is perceived as a norm-based actor less driven by a foreign policy agenda than Member States, i.e. in certain contexts the EU can operate precisely because it is not a Member State with former colonial ties.
- The EU is able to be active in certain conflict-affected areas where the UK is not actively present or able to act. The EU is represented through 140 EU Delegations and Offices around the world.

As for disadvantages, we would stress the tension between the current focus on crisis response within the EU and the EU's inability to react quickly to crisis situations due to the need to act by consensus. Member States retain a significant role in the formation of Common Foreign and Security Policy, making it difficult for the EU as a whole to reach a common position or to advance where no agreed line exists. This feature of EU decision-making argues for a stronger EU focus on long-term upstream conflict prevention and peacebuilding over crisis management and response.

Q3. How effective is the EU at combining its foreign, defence, economic and civil protection policy instruments? What should it do differently?

The EU has had mixed results in combining its foreign, defence, economic and civil protection policy instruments in relation to peacebuilding and conflict prevention.

Firstly, there is tension between political commitments (e.g. to peace and human rights) and economic, political and security interests. Trade policy, for example, has not been an effective instrument for advancing non-commercial policy objectives and there continues to be little attention to its potential impact (positive or negative) on i.e. conflict dynamics. (The recently concluded trade agreement with Colombia is a 'good example'.)

Secondly, fragmentation and competition across the EU – including at Brussels-level – continue post-Lisbon. This is partly because when the EEAS was established, several policy areas that are part of the EU's external affairs family (e.g. trade, development, neighbourhood and enlargement policies) were not included in the EEAS' mandate. Consequently, the EEAS has encountered coordination challenges and has been left to compete with European Commission services on several occasions. Moreover, proliferation of actors has led to confusion inside and outside the EU.

There is an opportunity to address (some of) these shortcomings with the upcoming Joint Communication and Council Conclusions on a Comprehensive Approach to the full conflict cycle. Rather than reiterating existing commitments – a pledge to an integrated approach was already included in the Gothenburg Programme for Conflict Prevention and the European Security Strategy – the Comprehensive Approach should enable joint analysis and other forms of closer coordination and cooperation by providing guidance on how this can be achieved. Inter alia it should help ensure that peacebuilding and conflict analysis become central to the EU's approach to third countries. This has not been the case generally speaking; see for example the recently developed approach to the MENA region. (The fact that the EEAS Division for Conflict Prevention, Peacebuilding and Mediation Instruments was not adequately staffed can be considered as one reason why the MENA communications from 2011 are weak from a peacebuilding perspective.)

Key references:

- EPLO, *Written evidence to the EU Sub-Committee on External Affairs of the House of Lords' inquiry into the European External Action Service (EEAS)*, 8 February 2013
<http://www.parliament.uk/documents/lords-committees/eu-sub-com-c/EEAS/WrittenevidencavolumeEEASv1.pdf>
- EPLO Briefing Paper on CFSP Post-Lisbon
http://eplo.org/assets/files/2.%20Activities/Working%20Groups/CSDP/EPLO_Briefing_Paper_1-2012_CFSP_After_Lisbon.pdf
- Catherine Woollard, 'The EU and the Comprehensive Approach', EPLO, 31 January 2013
http://eplo.org/assets/files/2.%20Activities/Civil%20Society%20Dialogue%20Network/Policy%20Meetings/Comprehensive%20Approach/EPLO_CSDN_ComprehensiveApproach_DiscussionPoints.pdf
- ECDPM, 'Time to clear the confusion around the Comprehensive Approach', Talking Points, 25 January 2013.
<http://www.ecdpm-talkingpoints.org/time-to-clear-the-confusion-around-the-comprehensive-approach/>
- CSDN meeting 'Private Sector and Conflict', 29 October 2012
http://www.eplo.org/assets/files/2.%20Activities/Civil%20Society%20Dialogue%20Network/Policy%20Meetings/Private%20Sector/CSDN_PrivateSectorConflict_Report.pdf

- EPLO Statement 'Using More for More: Incentivising Peace in the ENP', July 2011
http://eplo.org/assets/files/2.%20Activities/Working%20Groups/EEAS/EPLO_Statement_Incentivising_Peace_in_the_ENP.pdf

Q4. How effective are the EU's delivery mechanisms? Would any changes make them more effective, and if so, which ones and why?

The EC thematic evaluation on peacebuilding and conflict prevention (referred to earlier) stresses that the EU has become more committed to peacebuilding and conflict prevention, but that this pledge is not matched by actual implementation. Key concepts 'have generally not been appropriated at operational level' and are 'not always univocal and shared at strategic level', and the approach to conflict analysis, conflict sensitivity and mainstreaming is also not systematised or structured.

Peacebuilding and conflict prevention are also not fully integrated into the EU's external financing instruments. We see the current revision of the EU's external financing instruments as an opportunity to ensure that peacebuilding and conflict prevention become strategic objectives of EU external action – as set out in the Lisbon Treaty. This would not only strengthen the coherence of the EU's overall approach to its cooperation with third countries but also be in line with the recommendation from the recent EC evaluation to further consolidate and develop support for conflict prevention and peacebuilding. Furthermore, it would reflect the view expressed by 77% of respondents to the 2011 public consultation on the next EU Multi-annual Financial Framework that the impact of the EU's external assistance would be enhanced by investing in the EU's peacebuilding and crisis preparedness.²

A simplification of the rules and procedures for programming and delivery of EU assistance to partner countries would make the EU's delivery mechanisms more effective. The current obstacles to making EU funding instruments more flexible come from Member States.

Furthermore, it is worth noting that 63% of EC funding for conflict prevention and peacebuilding has gone to international organisations, the vast majority of that to UN agencies, including around 40% of Instrument for Stability funding.³ In a recent special report, the European Court of Auditors criticised the EC's decision to channel funds through the UN and the mechanisms in place to monitor the use of the money.⁴

For more detailed analysis of the legislative proposals for the next set of EU external financing instruments and recommendations, please see EPLO's paper 'EU funding for peacebuilding: EPLO's recommendations for reforming the EU's external co-operation programmes' (see below).

Key references:

- EPLO, EU Funding for Peacebuilding: EPLO's recommendations for reforming the EU's external cooperation programmes, April 2012
http://www.eplo.org/assets/files/2.%20Activities/Working%20Groups/FfP/EPLO_Statement_EU%20funding_for_peacebuilding.pdf
- Report of the Public Consultation: 'What Funding for EU external action after 2013?', http://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/how/public-consultations/5240_en.htm

² Report of the Public Consultation: 'What Funding for EU external action after 2013?', http://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/how/public-consultations/5240_en.htm

³ Figures from the EC evaluation of support to conflict prevention and peacebuilding.

⁴ European Court of Auditors (2010), Special Report No 15: EU assistance implemented through United Nations organisations: decision-making and monitoring.

Q5. Would a different vision of EU and Member State competence in a particular area produce more effective policies? If so, how and why?

We believe that the EU has proved its competence in the conflict prevention and peacebuilding field. The different vision we would see is one where the EU focuses more on long-term conflict prevention, less on crisis response, and one in which EU Member States redirect more of their national efforts through the EU to allow it to fulfil its potential in this field.

Q6. How might the national interest be served by action being taken in this field at a different level – either in addition or as an alternative to action at EU level?

Evidence (WDR 2011) shows that effective support for peace and development requires united action by external actors. The EU is a tool for collective action at European level. As Member States are co-decision makers in all policy areas, and in some even the only decision-makers, they shape what the EU is doing. The UK, being a member of different multilateral organisations, might want to make it one of its objectives to ensure greater complementarity of action between the EU, the UN and other multilaterals.

Q7. Are there any general points you wish to make, which are not captured above?

We do feel there is a continued need and a place for funding for peacebuilding and conflict prevention work by national governments. We benefit from strategic partnership funding mechanisms with the UK Government, which allow us to respond flexibly to conflict situations, take risks and innovate. The project-approach and structure of EU funding carries different benefits in terms of scale and length of commitment. So for us it is a question of defining the niche of each.

Given the EU's significant contribution to conflict prevention and peacebuilding, we also would like to express our concern over the fact that there is no explicit reference to peacebuilding in the foreign policy call for evidence, and that conflict prevention is listed jointly with peacekeeping under the heading of 'security and defence'. Yet the development cooperation and humanitarian aid call for evidence defers to the foreign policy report for coverage of the longer-term peacebuilding and conflict prevention activities supported through the Instrument for Stability. Structured this way, there is a risk that the EU's competence in the field of long-term conflict prevention and peacebuilding will get inadequate coverage in responses to the call. We feel peacebuilding and conflict prevention should have been explicitly and jointly mentioned under the heading of global issues.