

# The European Union and the (R)Evolution of its Strategy of Conflict Prevention

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## ABSTRACT

The paper explores the evolution of the European Communities'/the European Union's strategy and approach to conflict prevention. As it will be argued, the CSDP operations and missions are only one, though very important face of the EU's external (neighbourhood) policy, and should also be seen as such – by no means can the CSDP missions and operations “succeed” alone in stabilizing the conflict- or post-conflict areas, without the application of a wider set of conflict prevention initiatives and instruments. However, the emphasis on conflict prevention is a relatively recent phenomenon for the EU and has as such only recently become an integral part of its external (neighbourhood) policy. The paper builds on the findings of the H2020 project ‘Improving the effectiveness in EU conflict prevention’ (IECEU).

**KEY WORDS:** the European Union, conflict prevention, European Security Strategy, Common Security and Defence Policy

## POVZETEK

Članek raziskuje razvoj strategije in pristopa Evropskih skupnosti/Evropske unije (EU) k preprečevanju konfliktov. Prispevek zagovarja tezo, da so operacije in misije Skupne varnostne in obrambne politike (SVOP) le en, čeprav zelo pomemben del zunanje (sosedske) politike EU in bi jih bilo potrebno tudi na ta

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način obravnavati. Misije in operacije SVOP na konfliktnih in pokonfliktnih območjih ne bi bile uspešne brez uporabe širšega niza pobud in instrumentov za preprečevanje konfliktov. Kljub temu pa poudarek na preprečevanju konfliktov predstavlja relativno nov pojav za EU, saj je kot tak razmeroma nedavno postal sestavni del njene zunanje (sosedske) politike. Članek temelji na ugotovitvah projekta z naslovom »Izboljšanje učinkovitosti EU pri preprečevanju konfliktov« (IECEU), ki je financiran v okviru raziskovalnega programa Obzorje 2020.

**KLJUČNE BESEDE:** Evropska unija, preprečevanje konfliktov, Evropska varnostna strategija, Skupna varnostna in obrambna politika

## INTRODUCTION

The European Union (EU) has many faces: many see it primarily as an economic actor (EuroBroadMap 2016), others argue that its most important aspect is that of ‘a civilian power’ (Bull 1982), ‘a normative power actor’ (Manners 2002; Pace 2007), or even ‘an ethical actor’ in the international community (Aggestam 2008). As an actor of international relations aspiring for a greater say in the world, the EU does not hide its ambitions of becoming a global security actor, and this also implies taking an active role in security and defence challenges.

For the EU to become a global actor, the development of adequate capabilities for acting in security and defence realms is a precondition for two reasons: firstly, it is needed to guarantee its own (internal) security and repulsing eventual threats, and secondly, adequate capabilities are required to prevent violent conflicts and assist in the stabilization processes in volatile regions throughout the world. Also a precondition for becoming renowned as a global, or at least, regional security provider, is the outward orientation of the EU’s security compass. Namely, looking at the security challenges solely from an inward perspective cannot guarantee security in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, as most of the security threats nowadays are of a transnational character, looming regionally or even globally, irrespectively of state borders (Peterson and Geddes 2015).

The goal of this paper is to explore the evolution of the European Community's/EU's strategy of conflict prevention. The paper will discuss the topic from the perspective of the EU's shy attempts in conflict prevention from the early phases in the 1950s to the present day, when the EU has a more comprehensive and elaborated approach. The paper builds on the argumentation that the emphasis on conflict prevention is a relatively recent phenomenon in the EU, which has become an integral part of its external policy. As it will be argued in this paper, the CSDP operations and missions are only one, though very important face of the EU's external policy, and should also be seen as such – by no means can the CSDP missions and operations “succeed” alone in stabilizing the conflict- or post-conflict areas, without the application of a wider set of instruments.

The methodology, which was developed at the initial stage of the Horizon 2020 research project entitled *Improving the Effectiveness of the Capabilities in EU conflict prevention* (IECEU), is based on an analysis of primary and secondary sources.<sup>2</sup> The relevance of this paper lies in the fact that it is important to understand the evolution of the conflict prevention strategic thinking and conflict prevention action in the European Communities, and later, the EU, in order to establish a solid conceptual basis for the project IECEU, which aims at improving the capabilities of the EU in conflict prevention. From a wider perspective – given the turbulence in the EU's neighbourhood (the crisis in Ukraine, civil wars in Syria and Iraq, the rise of the so called Islamic state) – understanding the deliberations and concrete actions taken in the European Communities/the EU in the last decades, in the security domain with regard to conflict prevention, is of crucial importance to be able to put CSDP operations and missions in the wider context of the EU's conflict prevention strategy and approach.

## **EARLY ATTEMPTS OF THE EUROPEAN COMMUNITIES IN**

<sup>2</sup> The IECEU Consortium consists of a diverse group of civilian, research and military organizations. The IECEU analyses the best practices and lessons learned with a view to enhance the civilian conflict prevention and peace building capabilities of the EU with a catalogue of practices, new solutions and approaches. More about the project at [www.ieceu-project.com](http://www.ieceu-project.com) Accessed 5 September 2016.

## CONFLICT PREVENTION

The integration processes in Europe, which started after the Second World War and culminated in the foundation of the EU, are first and foremost a peace project, aiming at preventing another devastating war on the European continent. In 1951, the six High Contracting Parties to the Treaty establishing the European Coal and Steel Community – Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, Luxembourg and the Netherlands – stated that *‘world peace can be safe-guarded only by creative efforts commensurate with the dangers that threaten it’* (Treaty establishing the European Coal and Steel Community 1951).

At the beginning of European integration, the spirit of conflict prevention rested predominantly on an economic dimension, which was, of course, underpinned by political reasoning. Nevertheless, the thinking of the European politicians of that time was not limited to economic and political dimensions alone. There were ambitions and initiatives to establish a European Defence Community and a European Political Community already back in the 1950s, but they foundered quickly: firstly, because the French Assembly failed to ratify them, and secondly, because the president of France, Charles de Gaulle opposed any further supranational integration. Security and defence issues back then were therefore to remain predominantly in the domain of NATO and the Western European Union, an organization of states – Belgium, France, Luxembourg, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom – that signed the Brussels Pact in 1948, forged as an alliance against Germany (Stewart 2006, 44).

With the resignation of the French president de Gaulle in 1969, and the new president, Pompidou taking over, the political environment in Europe changed. The ambitions of the “European integrationists”, who favoured the supranational political ideas that would further integrate the Member States of the European Communities, again came to prominence. The Davignon Report (also known as the Luxembourg Report) established the European Political Cooperation in 1970, which aimed at entailing regular intergovernmental contact and dialogue between the foreign

ministers of the member states (Report by the Foreign Ministers of the Member States on the problems of political unification 1970). The officials from the member states' foreign ministries that drafted the report became the Political Committee – the main European Political Cooperation body.

From the early 1970s, the European Communities were gaining an international voice through Member State foreign policy cooperation and began practising quiet, long-term preventive diplomacy. With the adoption of the Single European Act in 1986, a rudimentary form of preventive diplomacy was also given a treaty basis, as it codified the so called European Political Cooperation, which is considered as the forerunner of the CSDP. However, the competence of the European Political Cooperation regarding (European) security questions was restricted to 'political and economic aspects of security', meaning that conflict prevention and crisis management conducted by other rather than by military means clearly fell within its scope (Wouters and Naert 2004). Looking back from today's perspective, this was a small, but necessary step in consolidating the common approach of the Member States to external relations, of which conflict prevention became one of the most vital aspects.

Before endorsing an explicit strategy for the prevention of violent conflicts – and turning conflict prevention into practice – the EC/EU's attempts to prevent conflicts rested on the export of the virtuous circle of political and economic stability to its closest neighbours. Although the European Communities (or later the EU) never included the prior solving of conflicts in the accession criteria for the countries aspiring to join, the European Communities (the EU) has, nevertheless, used its 'power of attraction' on several occasions, aiming at anchoring peace and freedom in the candidate states. This has happened in the cases of Greece (1982), Spain and Portugal (1986).

During the accession process of Central and Eastern European countries, the European Commission relied on the 'carrot and stick approach' as a powerful instrument to decrease tensions in some inter-state disputes. One of the most well-known examples

of the first attempts of the European Communities to mitigate conflicts was the dispute between Hungary and Czechoslovakia (later Slovakia) over the construction of the Gabčíkovo-Nagyymaros hydroelectric project on the Danube, which began back in the 1980s, when both countries were still members of the Warsaw Pact.

The European Communities observed the conflict for quite some time, and the significant attempts to find a suitable solution for both sides began in 1990 through the PHARE programme. In this dispute, the European Communities learned one of its first 'conflict prevention lessons' when acting as a mediator: the situation necessitated for the EU to change its initial perception of the inter-state problem from an inappropriately narrow (technical) view to the recognition that this dispute was a sensitive problem of a political nature. The success of the European Communities, including the strong diplomatic role of the European Parliament, to prevent further escalation of conflict was mixed: the conflict did not reach a violent phase, though, which could have happened had the countries not felt the decisive diplomatic pressure "from Europe". However, the long-term solution was not reached despite the fact that the parties had in 1993 signed a compromise agreement, which was in the end not observed by Slovakia. Hence, the case was submitted to the International Court of Justice (Fürst 2003). This example clearly shows that the first conflict prevention and crisis management attempts of the European Communities were of an explicitly structural conflict prevention character.

A similar approach, mostly relying on structural conflict prevention dimensions, was used by the European Communities in Estonia, where the international organization pressured the Estonian government to resolve the status of the Russian minority (Kronenberger and Wouters 2004, XVIII-XX). These conflict prevention activities were effective as they were mostly of a non-asymmetric character, in which a powerful actor (the European Communities) decides on the fate of a weaker actor (Estonia). With regard to the conflict prevention theory and its implementation in practice, the EU has learned that an actor willing to

prevent conflicts, or play a decisive role as a mediator, has to have credible sources of power (political, economic, military, normative etc.), which can be used to mitigate between the conflicting parties.

When it comes to third states that have not aspired for membership due to geographical or political reasons, as was the case in the Eastern and Central European countries mentioned above, the European Communities did not contribute significantly to the prevention of conflicts. The available conflict prevention instruments were mostly of a structural character, such as developmental policies. However, one should not underestimate these early attempts of the EC. For example, several African, Caribbean and Pacific states benefited from the EC's policies in this regard, and so some crises and inter- and intra-state wars were averted, as the people in need had benefited from the better economic opportunities (Stewart 2006, 43). Nevertheless, these policies of the EU focused mostly on trade and developmental aid until the early years of the 1990s, with no systematic emphasis on conflict prevention. Thus, the EU's conflict prevention of that time was mostly a result of fortunate events, and not a multi-faceted conflict prevention policy.

From the theoretical point of conflict prevention, one may rightly argue the first attempts of the European Communities/ the EU were mostly of a structural conflict prevention nature, while operational conflict prevention was not the norm. There are many reasons for that, among them the following seem to be the most important:

1) *the characteristics of the Cold War security environment*, in which the international actors (states and international organizations in particular) were rather reluctant to intervene directly in the 'sphere of influence' of the other superpower (Grizold *et al* 2016).

2) the European Communities at that time was mostly *occupied with its own integration and consolidation*, and thus far from

having neither capabilities nor ambitions to become a global security actor (Stewart 2006).

## THE 1990s AND THE GROWING AMBITIONS OF THE EU IN CONFLICT PREVENTION

The EU, like other actors in international relations, had to adapt to a new security environment that emerged after the Cold War. Not being internally endangered, the ambitions of the EU – aspiring to become a credible player in international relations – significantly increased. The goal to become a ‘force for good’ (Manners 2002) in international relations, which presupposes a commitment to conflict prevention throughout the world, became the *lingua franca* in European institutions. The following events, in particular, led the EU to embark on the path of conflict prevention:

- the powerful destabilization effect of the dissolution of the Soviet Union;
- the outbreak of deadly conflicts which devastated Yugoslavia and some African states;
- on-going conflicts in the Middle East and Asia;
- the lack of appropriate mechanisms for conflict prevention and conflict resolution at regional and international level.

The changed security paradigm, in which military security lost its dominance in the security/defence discourse at the expense of other emerging aspects of security (economic, political, societal, ecological etc.), and the above-mentioned events convinced the then UN Secretary General Boutros Boutros Ghali that more needed to be done for conflict prevention to become a norm of international relations.<sup>3</sup> Boutros Ghali introduced the concept of preventive diplomacy, with the final aim of promoting

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<sup>3</sup> During the Cold War, the term ‘security’ was used in Western Europe predominantly to denote military defence against the Soviet Union. Stemming from this understanding, it comes as no surprise that the state (and national security) was the central level of analysis (Stewart 2006).



the so called ‘culture of prevention’. This term has soon become a buzzword not only in the UN, but also in other international organizations (Zupančič 2015).

In the period when strategies for conflict prevention rose to prominence, the leaders of the states of the European communities swiftly embraced the idea that conflict prevention was not merely about the prevention of *imminent* crisis, and thus embarked upon a deeper coordination of their foreign, security and defence policies, which should ideally lead to the prevention of armed conflicts throughout the world, or, in other words, to long-term conflict prevention (*ibid.*).

The ambitions of the European integration process, which also began spreading in the realms of security and defence, and the optimism of the European leaders that the European Communities could have contributed more to world peace was clearly reflected in the Treaty on European Union, signed in Maastricht in February 1992. In the new political agreement, which is still today seen by many as a milestone in European integration, the new “European Union” proclaimed the establishment of the Common Foreign and Security Policy, including the possibility of a common defence, as one of its three main pillars (Treaty of Maastricht on European Union 1992).

Compared to the European Political Cooperation on the 1970s and the 1980s, which hardly dealt with conflict prevention in any significant manner, the Maastricht Treaty brought the European Political Cooperation – and conflict prevention indirectly – into the institutional framework of the EU (Wouters and Naert 2004, 34–35). Within this, the scope of the CFSP was comprehensive and was ‘covering all areas of foreign and security policy’. As rightly noted by Wouters and Naert (*ibid.*), the potential of conflict prevention under the CFSP was exposed quite soon at the highest levels. The Report to the European Council (1992, Annex 1, 29) on the possible ways of the development of the CFSP stated that:

“/.../ the CFSP should contribute to ensuring that the Union’s external actions are less reactive to events in the outside world, and more active in the pursuit of the interests of the Union and in the creation of a more favourable international environment. This will enable the European Union to have an improved capacity to tackle problems at their roots in order to anticipate the outbreak of crises.”

Possible objectives for the joint action of the EU, including the contribution to the prevention of conflicts or their settlement, were also specified in this document. Stemming from this report, the priority of the EU was to be attached to a number of regions, namely ‘Central and Eastern Europe’, in particular the Commonwealth of the Independent States and the Balkans, the Mediterranean, in particular the Maghreb and the Middle East’. Furthermore, a number of priority ‘horizontal issues’, in particular ‘domains within the security dimension’, were identified. It must be said that these included no direct or specific reference to conflict prevention, although conflict prevention was clearly an inherent ‘ingredient’ of the CFSP (Wouters and Naert 2004, 35–38).

The institutionalization of conflict prevention and putting it at the forefront of the EU’s external activities did not cease, in particular because it became evident that the EU at that time was not capable of dealing with the crises in its immediate neighbourhood (the war in Yugoslavia, for example). Aiming at preventing conflicts before they happened and “equipping” the EU with the necessary instruments, the European Parliament called for the establishment of a European Union Analyses Centre for Active Crisis Prevention in 1995. The unit as such was not formed, but in 2000 an important milestone in this regard was reached, when the European Commission Conflict Prevention and Crisis Management Unit was established inside the DG RELEX. The unit became the lead institution on conflict prevention within the European Commission, aiming at coordinating activities among various DGs involved with the Council and CSDP structures. As noted by Lavallée (2013, 376) and Nowak (2006, 15–37) the definition of conflict prevention and crisis management at that time remained quite disputed because of the institutional split be-

tween the civilian instruments created under the first and second pillars and the more complicated issue of competence-sharing in the civilian areas of crisis management between the Council and the Commission.

At the end of the 1990s, with the war in Kosovo (1998–99) looming in the EU’s immediate neighbourhood and the clear evidence of the EU’s impotence to intervene, the conflict prevention discourse in the EU gained another momentum with the birth of the European Security and Defence Policy, which was established as a policy of a strictly intergovernmental character. In the annex to the conclusions of the Cologne European Council, which went even a step further than the Saint Malo Declaration (Joint declaration issued at the British-French Summit, 1998), it was explicitly noted that the EU:

*“should have the ability to take decisions on the full range of conflict prevention and crisis management tasks defined in the Treaty on European Union”* (Cologne European Council 1999).

As rightly put in the forefront by Wouters and Naert (2004, 35–38), the efforts of the EU largely run in parallel with the conflict prevention activities of other organizations. Within the CFSP, conflict prevention as a policy was not an autonomous priority, but rather *one* of the aspects of the EU’s policy towards certain regions, or a consequence of specific but limited horizontal measures, which did not primarily envisage conflict prevention.

### **DECISIVE STEP ON THE STAGE OF CONFLICT PREVENTION: FROM THE GOTHENBURG PROGRAMME (2001) TO THE INSTRUMENT CONTRIBUTING TO STABILITY AND PEACE**

A major political milestone for the EU came in 2001, when *The European Union programme for the prevention of violent conflicts* was adopted in Gothenburg by the European Council. The highest political body of the EU decided that *‘conflict prevention is one of the main objectives of the Union’s external relations and should be integrated in all its relevant aspects, including the European Security and Defence Policy, development*

*policy and trade*” (EU Programme for the Prevention of Violent Conflicts 2001). In the same year, the European commission has, in its Communication on Conflict Prevention, reaffirmed that development cooperation provides one of the most powerful instruments available to the EU for treating the root causes of conflict over the longer term.

In this document, the Commission divided the EU instruments between a long-term perspective for ‘projecting stability’ and a short-term one for ‘reacting quickly to nascent conflicts’. This was also a first attempt to clarify this concept from a holistic approach, considering that the EU should ‘address cross-cutting issues, which may contribute to tensions and conflict’. This Communication, as argued by Keukeleire and MacNaughtan (2008, 90), contributed in terms of agenda setting, and putting “external policy” actions into a clear strategic foreign policy perspective.

Some concrete actions of capability building aimed at providing the EU with the instruments for effective conflict prevention and crisis management followed the political and normative commitments. In 2001, the *Rapid Reaction Mechanism* (RRM) was established. This was also an attempt by the EU to address various criticisms of being too reactive, and less proactive as a conflict prevention actor in global affairs. The RRM was ‘*designed to allow the Community to respond in a rapid, efficient and flexible manner, to situations of urgency or crisis or to the emergence of crisis.*’ (Council Regulation (EC) No 381/2001 2001).

The RRM offered some autonomy to the Commission even if its room for manoeuvre was clearly delimited by the member states. The external assistance instrument had a limited annual budget of only €30 million, which could be used only for an operation of up to six months. Furthermore, the mechanism did not include EU humanitarian aid which has been traditionally conceived as a neutral assistance tool rather than a crisis management instrument. Despite certain constraints, the mechanism gave an important degree of flexibility to the Commission, as it was equipped with a real conflict prevention and crisis manage-

ment instrument without any sectorial or geographical limitation (*ibid.*).

Around 50 projects in 25 countries and regions amounting roughly to €120 million were streamlined through the RRM (Keukeleire and MacNaughtan 2008). The RRM was undoubtedly a step forward in the EU's conflict prevention and crisis management activities, but it suffered from many constraints. As argued by Lavalée (2013), it was unable to ensure the long between the short-term crisis response and long-term development assistance. This was a serious deficiency, as the theory of conflict prevention vocally maintains that long-term assistance is needed in volatile regions or countries, if the root causes of the conflicts were to be addressed.

With the RRM in place, and more than a decade long debate on what are the most imminent threats the EU is facing, the EU adopted the European Security Strategy (ESS) in 2003 (*A secure Europe in a better world: European Security Strategy 2013*). With this document, the EU committed itself to using a wide range of instruments to prevent violent conflicts – conflict prevention remained at the heart of the strategy. After its adoption, the sceptics were afraid that the Member States 'will pay increasing attention to developing the military aspects of the Common Foreign and Security Policy, rather than civilian, and preventive responses, without which, military engagement is counter-productive'.

The ESS made the causal and direct link between 'new threats' (terrorism, weapons of mass destruction, state failure, organized crime) and the 'older' problems of regional conflicts. Furthermore, a human security approach has been brought forward; national security problems were not the only problems of 'security' anymore, as the ESS paid much greater attention to the security of individuals. In this regard, the strategy linked security closely to the development, noting that 'security is a precondition for development' (*ibid.*). Early action was again emphasized, as well as the need to address the challenges arising from conventional weapons. Working together with other actors engaged in conflict prevention (multilateral diplomacy) was strongly advocated. The

need to assist weak and failing states was clearly emphasized in the strategy as well as were the regional approaches to building peace (International Alert and Saferworld 2015).



Due to the imperfections of the then-conflict prevention performance of the EU, which were also exposed by certain lessons learned within the first ESDP missions, the Commission took the opportunity to reorganize the assistance and cooperation programmes, and for that reason proposed a new instrument, the Instrument for Stability (IfS), which entered into force in 2007 (Lavallée 2013, 377). The IfS was a substantial improvement to the Rapid Reaction Mechanism. The EC was given more resources, better control over the budget, the linkage between short- and long-term conflict prevention was better elaborated, and the duration of the projects became more flexible (Regulation (EC) No. 1717/2006 of the European Parliament and of the Council 2006). Overall, the room for manoeuvre was greater due to the flexibility and faster reaction times. Although some deficiencies were ingrained in the IfS since its birth, many scholars argue that the IfS measures adopted since 2007 reinforced the EU's comprehensive approach towards conflict prevention and peace-building, and have positioned the Commission more strategically in EU security governance.

## CONFLICT PREVENTION AFTER THE LISBON TREATY

The Lisbon Treaty placed conflict prevention formally to the EU institutions as part of the Petersberg Tasks, referring to the earlier tasks inherited from the Western European Union in the Amsterdam Treaty. The policy of conflict prevention is further integrated into the CSDP and is also referred to in the context of permanent structural cooperation. With an ambitious goal of ‘the eradication of poverty and the protection of human rights,’ the profile of conflict prevention in the EU’s external action was further strengthened.

From an institutional viewpoint, it became clearer with the Lisbon Treaty who the ‘people’ responsible for the implementation of conflict prevention were: the president of the European Council and the High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy were given the primary responsibility in this regard. The establishment of the European External Action Service (EEAS), which assists the High Representative, is of particular significance, particularly because – according to the treaty – it aims at bringing together different bodies/agencies dealing with conflict prevention issues in the Commission and the Council Secretariat.

As rightly emphasized by Duke (2001, 3-4), the greater involvement of national diplomats on temporary assignment with the EEAS could provide a better linkage between the nation capitals and Brussels. The EEAS, consisting of the experts of all member states, increased the synergies among the EU’s external instruments, moving further towards a strongly integrated approach in crisis response and conflict prevention. As pointed out by Lavalée (2013, 382), it was necessary for the DG RELEX to get integrated into the structure of the EEAS (in the geographical departments). Another issue pointed out by Boin and colleagues has to do with the rivalry between the Commission and the Council; both the Commission’s Crisis room and the Council’s Situation Centre been included in EEAS to increase the coherence and complementarity of information (Boin et al 2006, 490).

The capabilities (instruments) of the EU's conflict prevention, particularly what were the improvements of deploying the conflict prevention instruments in place, should also be explored, particularly from the aspect of the often troubled financing and speediness of the decision-making process. The EU has recently made another step forward in this regard. In 2014, with the regulation of the European Parliament and the Council of the European Union a remodelled instrument was established, named *Instrument contributing to Stability and Peace* (IcSP), which succeeded the Instrument for Stability (IfS) (Regulation (EU) No. 230/2014). The crisis response component of the Instrument has broadened, with an increased focus on conflict prevention. The management of the IcSP is now the shared responsibility of the EEAS and the Commission, under the authority of the High Representative (Official Journal of European Union 2010).

The IcSP has by far the highest budget so far, €2.3 billion for 2014–2020. In 2015, 292 projects in 80 countries throughout the world were funded by this instrument. The priority areas, defined in the Strategy Paper 2014–2020 and the Multi-Annual Indicative Programme 2014–2017, were clearly showing that the EU by no means relinquishes from its more than a decade long policy of addressing conflicts in a comprehensive and long-term (structural) manner:

- Promoting early warning and conflict-sensitive risk analysis in policy making and implementation;
- Facilitating and building capacity in confidence-building, mediation, dialogue and reconciliation, with particular regard to emerging inter-community tensions;
- Strengthening capacities for the participation and deployment in civilian stabilization missions;
- Improving post-conflict recovery, as well as post-disaster recovery with imminent threats to the political and security situation;



Assistance to curb the use of natural resources to finance conflicts and to support the compliance by stakeholders with initiative (European Commission 2015).

What does it mean in practice? Before the EEAS was created, the elaboration of the IfS process involved mainly CSDP actors (the Council and its structures). With the EEAS, daily contacts between the relevant stakeholders became more frequent and better coordinated, as they are physically located in the same building. From the human resource perspective, the coordination and the coherence of work is, at least theoretically, better, as many experts who have been working on conflict prevention and crisis management moved from the DG RELEX to EEAS (Lavallée 2013)

## CONCLUSION

In the last six decades, and especially after the end of the Cold War, the European “peace process” gained other dimensions and ambitions. Nowadays, there are only a few volatile regions in the world, in which the EU does not aim at playing the role of conflict preventer or crisis manager, often working alongside other international organizations, non-governmental organizations and other actors. Looking back over a good decade of the EU’s Gothenburg Programme and conflict prevention, the EU has had both evident successes and complete failures. The Gothenburg programme adopted in 2001 has raised awareness on the importance of conflict prevention not only in the Brussels-based institutions, but also in the member states, and has also triggered necessary actions for conflict prevention to be effective.

The conclusions from Gothenburg have also been bolstered by other policy documents, most importantly within the European Security Strategy (2003), the European Neighbourhood Policy (2003), the European Consensus on Development, the EC communication on security and development and some other documents. A clear line connecting all the documents undoubtedly shows the EU’s commitment to conflict prevention, and *an ambition to develop the capabilities for operational and structural con-*

*flict prevention* (humanitarian assistance, development aid, economic incentives, trade relations ...). A decade and a half after Gothenburg, structural conflict prevention is still perceived as being far less problematic for member states (as actors with a final say, although it does not mean they are eager to provide financial support for it), as it encompasses the actions, which, compared to more decisive and often disputed military operations, enjoy significantly higher approval of the European audience. This comes as no surprise, and the EU and its citizens are not a special case: sending humanitarian and development aid has always been less politically sensitive compared to “putting boots on the ground”.

Stemming from the theory of conflict prevention, it is more likely that conflict prevention is successful – meaning that the conflict is averted –, when the action is decisive and multifaceted. Using the terminology of Michael Lund, one of the leading scholars in the field, conflict prevention shall include active/passive, long/short-term, economic/legal/political/military, and internal/external aspects. It cannot be disputed that the EU has adopted such a notion of conflict prevention in its documents.

It is evident that the challenges of inter-institutional coordination concerning EU conflict prevention still exist. Many initiatives were proposed to address them, such as common structures, action plans and the civilian headline goals. However, the comprehensive approach is not easy to implement in practice, as there are different visions and understandings of the notion of security, different backgrounds, cultures, and consequently, different priorities and strategies within each institution.

But what has the implementation phase – the last and the only really meaningful indicator of conflict prevention of the EU – shown? Although it is driven by the EC, it became evident that conflict prevention then should also include the instruments that traditionally fall in the ‘second pillar’ (CFSP). The expansive nature of conflict prevention has led to concerns on the one hand that it is too all-enveloping, and is thus difficult to implement on a coherent basis, and on the other, it has also met criticism for not being expansive enough, most notably when it comes to gender

sensitivity and awareness. For this reason, IcSP as an improved mechanism was established in 2014 in order to reinforce the link between the short-term and long-term perspectives and to work across all phases of the conflict cycle (conflict prevention, crisis response, conflict resolution, post-conflict stabilization, and even reconciliation).

It is impossible to say one-sidedly, whether the EU is a successful conflict prevention actor or not. It certainly does not operate in a vacuum, and there are many causes and permissive conditions triggering violence. Looking at the EU's southern border, which has been under the heavy pressure of refugees from Africa and the Middle East, one may rightly say the EU is impotent. There are various conflict prevention and crisis management activities in several regions or countries, from where the refugees come from.

Has the EU done enough in this regard to prevent conflicts throughout the world? What is (not) enough has always been a political answer. And there are certain areas in the EU's immediate neighbourhood, which are not accessible neither to the EU's experts, development aid and humanitarian workers, nor anyone else with the goals of humanitarianism, despite the fact the structural and operational conflict prevention of not only the EU, but all other actors contributing to conflict prevention – international organizations, non-governmental organizations, educational institutions etc. – should be done *there*, if the EU is serious in contributing to stability in the world.

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gust 2016). The last phase of writing and editing the paper, however, took place in September and October 2016, when the author had already been working on another H2020 project at the University of Graz (*KOSNORTH – The European Union and its normative power in a post-conflict society: a case study of northern Kosovo*), which is in its essence significantly related to the project IECEU.

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