EU-CIVCAP

Preventing and Responding to Conflict: Developing EU CiVilian CAPabilities for a sustainable peace

Report on the EU’s Capabilities for Conflict Prevention

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Preventing conflicts and relapses into conflict, in accordance with international law, is (...) a primary objective of the EU’s external action.

Council of the European Union, Council conclusions on conflict prevention, 3101st Foreign Affairs Council meeting (Luxembourg, 20 June 2011)

The notion of the EU as a peace process is an important strand in the EU’s identity in dealing with the rest of the world. The European Council has declared that conflict prevention is a primary objective of the EU’s external action. This report analyses what that means in practice and recommends ways in which the EU may strengthen its capacity to prevent conflicts worldwide. The first observation is that ‘conflict prevention’ is used in different ways by different actors within the EU’s external action machinery, notably to cover both conflict prevention as a way in which the EU acts in and engages with the rest of the world, and as a set of distinct activities, particularly, for this report, conflict analysis, early warning and mediation. This multiple usage of the same term presents real policy challenges, which should be addressed by way of greater conceptual clarity – ensuring that all actors attach the same meaning to these terms.

This report starts by analysing what ‘conflict prevention’ means for the EU. It then considers how the intention of preventing conflict and relapses into conflict – as “a primary objective of the EU’s external action” – is translated into policy and put into practice in order to assess the EU’s capacities for conflict prevention and to recommend ways in which these may be strengthened.

The report examines how conflict prevention is understood and implemented – both as a way of acting in the world and as a set of distinct activities. The capacity of the EU to implement conflict prevention, in both these senses, is examined through the lens of component capabilities: the capabilities to engage, capabilities to fund, and the capability to coordinate and cooperate with third parties. These three capabilities contribute to the capability to lead, which in turn feeds the capability to act – that is, to prevent conflict (see Figure 1 in section 4.1).

Political leadership is crucial at each stage of putting conflict prevention into practice. Prioritisation is a key part of leadership, as this report considers leadership to comprise:

- establishing priorities among competing needs;
- prioritising the important as well as the urgent;
- focusing on prevention, not only on response; and
- integrating conflict prevention into decision-making at the most strategic levels.

1 Future EU-CIVCAP papers will address conflict prevention in relation to the Common Security and Defence Policy, development and trade; these areas are therefore not addressed in this paper.
3 Drawing on the framework developed in L. Davis, EU foreign policy, transitional justice and mediation (London: Routledge 2014).
This study shows that the EU largely has the **capabilities to engage**. There is considerable pressure on time and personnel, yet the EU has a wide array of policies, institutions and instruments that enable intervention. Some of these, however, such as EU Special Representatives (EUSRs) and European Parliament election observation missions, could be used to greater effect, and the EU should also develop its capabilities further for preventive diplomacy. There are additionally the **capabilities to fund** conflict prevention, with a certain amount of financial resources available in the long and the short term, the issue being whether and how they are used.

The EU also has the **capabilities to coordinate and cooperate**, particularly with third parties due to the multilateral nature of the EU as an actor. Coordination and cooperation within the EU present perhaps greater challenges that are intimately connected to the question of leadership. The challenges of the EU-28 in agreeing common policy in a given situation are a fact of EU foreign policy, yet an EU official interviewed for this paper believes that the necessary spirit of coordination and cooperation exists across the EU machinery when it comes to conflict prevention.\(^5\) This study has found that, to date, the SECPOL.2 Division\(^6\) of the European External Action Service (EEAS) and the B.7 Unit\(^7\) in the Commission’s Directorate-General for International Cooperation and Development (DG DEVCO) have played important roles in providing technical assistance for conflict prevention across the EU’s external action and in facilitating coordination and cooperation among different parts of the machinery for conflict prevention.

**Recommendations**

1. **As a first step in strengthening EU capabilities to prevent conflict**, EPLO recommends that the EEAS and the Commission jointly **clarify** in internal documents how the EU promotes conflict prevention as a way of acting in the world, how it can support and be supported by stabilisation, and how specific distinct activities (particularly conflict analysis, early warning and mediation) contribute differently to conflict prevention, and the differences and synergies between them.

2. **Senior management in the EEAS and the European Commission should mainstream conflict prevention** as a matter of policy and practice across the EU external action machinery (the DG for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations, DG DEVCO, DG Energy, DG Trade, as well as the EEAS)\(^8\) and **prioritise prevention as well as response**.

3. The EU’s Global Strategy implementation plans should ensure that conflict prevention is prioritised across all the thematic areas identified, not only for the implementation of the section on “an integrated approach to conflict”. It should also be prioritised in the preparation of the action plan on security and defence, the initiative on public diplomacy and other follow-up actions to the Global Strategy. Implementation and action plans should address these concerns directly and **clearly identify resources**, including institutional

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\(^5\) Interview with an official from the European Commission, September 2016.

\(^6\) The Conflict Prevention, Peacebuilding and Mediation Division in the EEAS is also called SECPOL.2 and was previously K2. At the time of writing, it was expected that this division would merge with the CSDP.1 division (Coordination and Support) and be further renamed, due to the ongoing restructuring of the EEAS security and crisis management structures.

\(^7\) That is, the Unit for Fragility and Resilience.

\(^8\) Recommendations on mainstreaming or integrating conflict prevention into all relevant EU policies and instruments can be found in EPLO, Letter to HR/VP Mogherini on “An EU Global Strategy for Peace” (Brussels, 2016a), available at [www.eplo.org](http://www.eplo.org).
expertise and leadership, for preventing conflict as well as responding to it and addressing the important as well as the urgent.

*Senior management in the EEAS and the Commission should ensure that*

4. SECPOL.2 and DEVCO B.7 continue to **provide leadership, technical support and expertise** within the EEAS, DG DEVCO and across the EU’s external action machinery;

5. SECPOL.2 and DEVCO B.7 are **adequately resourced** in terms of personnel, expertise and access to high-level decision-making so that the EU prevents important conflicts as well as responds to urgent crises;

6. SECPOL.2 and DEVCO B.7 continue to work in **innovative partnerships** in conflict situations worldwide, including with civil society organisations and other external expertise;

7. **time** is available for personnel to generate and implement conflict analysis across the EU’s external action, supported by SECPOL.2 and DEVCO B.7;

8. previous EU experiences and lessons identified in conflict zones are captured by an adequate knowledge management system that strengthens the evidence base for future conflict prevention work; and

9. the EU further develops its capacities for **preventive diplomacy** in situations at risk of escalating conflict, for example, by reinforcing and tailoring the support provided to EUSRs and heads of delegations in charge of carrying out dialogue in conflict-affected countries (e.g. mediation and analysis training, support staff) and by including conflict expertise in their job descriptions.
### LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

<table>
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<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<td>DEVCO B.7</td>
<td>Fragility and Resilience Unit, European Commission Directorate-General for International Cooperation and Development</td>
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<td>CSAP</td>
<td>Country Situational Awareness Platform</td>
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<td>CFSP</td>
<td>Common Foreign and Security Policy</td>
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<td>CSDP</td>
<td>Common Security and Defence Policy</td>
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<tr>
<td>DG DEVCO</td>
<td>Directorate-General for International Cooperation and Development</td>
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<td>DG HOME</td>
<td>Directorate-General for Migration and Home Affairs</td>
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<td>DG NEAR</td>
<td>Directorate-General for European Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations</td>
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<td>EC</td>
<td>European Commission</td>
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<tr>
<td>EEAS</td>
<td>European External Action Service</td>
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<td>EP</td>
<td>European Parliament</td>
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<tr>
<td>EUSR</td>
<td>EU Special Representative</td>
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<tr>
<td>lCSP</td>
<td>Instrument contributing to Stability and Peace</td>
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<td>SEPCOL.2</td>
<td>Conflict Prevention, Peacebuilding and Mediation Division, European External Action Service</td>
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1. INTRODUCTION

The EU’s role in preventing conflict worldwide has been the subject of practitioner and scholarly attention since at least the 1970s. These debates are not repeated here.

This report assesses the policies and tools currently available for EU conflict prevention, including conflict analysis, early warning and mediation, in order to provide recommendations for how the EU may strengthen its conflict prevention capabilities in the future.

EU documents, analysts and scholars use a range of terms to refer to related issues – conflict prevention, resolution or management, crisis management, peacebuilding – any of which may be located within discussions of the EU as an international security provider or actor, or as a global actor. This paper focuses on conflict prevention. As ‘conflict prevention’ is firmly limited to external action by the EU, although the EU may have significant influence on intra-EU conflicts, this paper only addresses conflict prevention in relation to the EU’s external action. Future EU-CIVCAP papers will address conflict prevention in relation to specific policy areas, including the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP), development and trade.

Methodology

The research that informs this report draws on scholarly and practitioner literature and anonymised interviews with key informants working in and with EU institutions conducted by Laura Davis, the lead author, and Nabila Habbida between July and September 2016. No opinion expressed in this report may be attributed to any individual or institution unless directly referenced.

2. THE EUROPEAN UNION AND CONFLICT PREVENTION

In 2011, the Council of the European Union declared that “[p]reventing conflicts and relapses into conflict, in accordance with international law, is therefore a primary objective of the EU’s external action, in which it could take a leading role acting in conjunction with its global, regional, national and local partners”. 10

The role that principles play in the EU’s relations with the wider world is the subject of extensive scholarship, including on civilian power Europe, a European civilising process, normative power Europe, and the current ‘third wave’ of normative theorising. 11 A critical assessment of whether the EU does or does not pursue these normative objectives is important to avoid complacency. 12

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9 The contributions to this report by Anna Penfrat and Nabila Habbida, both of the European Peacebuilding Liaison Office, are gratefully acknowledged.


report focuses on the capabilities that form the power the EU wields in relation to conflict prevention rather than debating what kind of power the EU is.  

This report starts by analysing what ‘conflict prevention’ means, or may mean, for the EU. It then considers how the intention of preventing conflict and relapses into conflict – as “a primary objective of the EU’s external action” – is translated into policy and put into practice to assess the EU’s capacities for conflict prevention and to recommend ways in which these may be strengthened.

3. UNDERSTANDING ‘CONFLICT PREVENTION’

‘Conflict prevention’ presents numerous challenges to policy-makers, practitioners and advocates. The first is a question of definition. Discussions on defining conflict and peace span millennia and the wide range of human endeavour and thought. Johan Galtung’s definition of “positive peace” is perhaps the most commonly referred to, where peace is more than the absence of war and supposes an inclusive society. Yet, as Oliver Richmond and others have discussed, ‘liberal’ peace can be seen as a Western-led attempt to impose a hegemonic system throughout the world that replicates certain social, political and economic institutions, norms and systems. Although these discussions cannot be summarised here, they provide the backdrop to this section, which situates how the EU understands conflict prevention, as this will influence policy and practice.

Conflict prevention can be understood – seemingly most simply – as the prevention of conflict, taking steps to ensure that conflict does not happen. This, however, leads to the next question of what kind of conflict is the EU trying to prevent? EU documents focus on preventing violent conflict and also list a range of ‘root causes’: issues that may often be considered to be structural conflicts, which may culminate in violent conflict. Structural conflicts typically include poverty, marginalisation, and abuse of human and civil rights, and may also include gender inequality and/or the exclusion of particular groups on grounds of ethnicity, religion or age, particularly children and young people. Preventing violent conflict therefore requires addressing structural conflict too.

The focus on violent conflict in EU policy discourse deserves some reflection. If we accept that conflict is normal in any human society and is even necessary for all societies to transform in line with the universal values presented in the EU Treaties (such as racial and sexual equality) as the EU ideal, then distinguishing ‘peaceful’ or non-violent conflict (such as demonstrations and advocacy to

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15 Drawing on the framework developed in Davis (2014), op. cit.  
change discriminatory laws) from violent conflict (such as rebellion) is perhaps a useful shorthand, but is nonetheless problematic: violence is, after all, only one way of dealing with conflict. What causes violence in a particular time and place in a particular context where the ‘root causes’ may have remained unchanged and largely unchallenged for some time, and whether that violence then escalates to involve more people and more issues, or whether it dies down again, is difficult to predict.19 It is worth noting at this point that how ‘root causes’ are understood will likely shape how a conflict is understood: an observer looking for evidence of tension between ethnic groups, for example, is more likely to then understand the conflict as an ‘ethnic conflict’, perhaps to the exclusion of other equally or more plausible causes.

An important note here is that ‘mainstreaming gender equality’ sometimes appears alongside ‘root causes’ in few EU documents, but it is absent from the Communication on Conflict Prevention (the Gothenburg programme) and the Communication on the Comprehensive Approach.20 For its part, the EU Global Strategy makes references to women in peace-making rather than gender equality. Structural violence against women and girls is not considered a root cause, despite its prevalence, revealing perhaps a critical blind spot in EU understanding of conflict that will influence significantly any EU intervention in a given situation.

There are conflicts contained by geopolitics – such as the so-called ‘frozen’ conflicts in the former Soviet space – which may not be particularly violent (yet) but which are generally believed to be at risk of eruption or escalation and which are a present as well as potential future threat to EU interests, such as regional stability. Preventing the escalation of these crises is clearly in the EU’s interests and is not the same as resolving them, even if resolving them might be more in line with the EU’s much-vaunted identity as a peace-maker around the world.

Besides the comparative ease of identifying a violent rather than a latent or structural conflict, the distinction of ‘violent’ may be useful shorthand to transmit the meaning of ‘negative’ conflict.21 In other words, since violence harms people, human suffering should be limited as much as possible. But conflict has driven many positive social movements across the world, including during the so-called Arab Spring. Preventing (violent) conflict should not be synonymous with stabilisation – and the consequences of the EU’s past equation of stabilising regions with stabilising authoritarian regimes are clear.22 Conflict prevention may contribute to stabilisation, and stabilisation may contribute to preventing conflict, but these connections are not automatic: stabilisation may postpone or even exacerbate the potential for future violent conflict by reinforcing structural violence and/or autocratic rule in societies, for example.

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19 See for example T. Diez, S. Stetter and M. Albert (eds), The European Union and border conflicts: The power of integration and association (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008); L. Bossi, N. Ó Dochartaigh and D. Pisoiu (eds), Political Violence in Context: Time, Space and Milieu (Colchester: ECPR Press, 2015). This point is well made by the Early Warning System.


21 Galtung (1969), op. cit.

The distinction between ‘good’ conflict and ‘bad’ conflict (and its near relation, terrorism) is therefore a political one reflecting EU interests, which should be based on deep knowledge of the context and should not be hidden behind more apparently neutral, even if inaccurate, adjectives like ‘violent’. Conflict prevention is political: it is based on understanding the power relations between different actors and stakeholders in a conflict and on prioritising EU intervention in some form, or not, in relation to the EU’s interests.

Beyond the complexities of defining which conflicts the EU wishes to prevent lies one of the key challenges at the heart of conflict prevention policy and practice: the combination of addressing macro-level issues such as poverty and exclusion with the objective of structural transformation in the long term, and the need to identify and address specific events and actors that may (or may not) resort to violence in a particular place and time.

One of the key problems with conflict prevention, however, refers to the lack of conceptual clarity at the EU level. This is reflected in interviews with key informants. For instance, for some interviewees, conflict prevention is understood as the way in which the EU engages with and acts in relation to the outside world. For others, conflict prevention could be seen as a set of distinct activities – conflict analysis, early warning and mediation, for the purposes of this report – intended to defuse escalation in a given situation. Others see it as a combination of both. As this report shows, this conceptual ambiguity is thus translated directly into the challenges of the EU’s institutional set-up and of mainstreaming and responsibility, which are discussed in the capabilities section below.

A related challenge is that while there is evidence of the effectiveness of EU support for certain conflict prevention activities, it is more difficult to demonstrate the impact of ‘conflict prevention’, when understood as a way of acting, rather than a set of activities or tools. Successful conflict prevention by definition results in an absence of the expected event or process: the (violent) conflict does not erupt or escalate, although other positive proxy indicators, such as more resilient communities or more responsive institutions may be used. Given the complexity of conflict and the unpredictability of eruption of violence, this challenge is exacerbated by the near impossibility of tracing how the EU’s specific contribution(s) can be plausibly said to have played a part in preventing a particular outbreak of violence. Understanding the EU’s contributions – positive or negative – to preventing conflict worldwide suffers from a general lack of evidence on the EU’s impact on populations in non-EU countries. The proof therefore is counterfactual, and conflict prevention as a way of acting in the world becomes ‘a matter of faith’ and ‘fuzzy’.

23 Interview with an official from a Member State Permanent Representation, 23 August 2016.
24 Interview with a non-governmental organisation, 4 August 2016.
25 Interview with an official from the EEAS, 10 August 2016.
27 The EU can of course make a situation worse. Albert et al. characterise the EU in some situations as a “perturbator”, a worrying disturbance for the conflict” (see M. Albert, T. Diez and S. Stetter, “The transformative power of integration: Conceptualizing border conflicts” in Diez et al. (2008), op. cit., p. 23).
29 Interview with an official from the EEAS, 10 August 2016.
While EU Member States are supportive of conflict prevention and the interviewees agree that there is a positive trend within the EU institutions to mainstream conflict prevention, this is not necessarily reflected in a shared view on what conflict prevention is, and what should be done and by whom. To conclude, conflict prevention is not something that policy-makers are against, but it does not automatically follow that policy-makers have a common understanding of what it entails in practice or a shared willingness to allocate resources to it, especially in the absence of evidence demonstrating its effectiveness.

This sense of a dual meaning of the term – a way of acting in the world, and a set of distinct activities – poses challenges for analysis, as well as for policy and practice.

4. CONFLICT PREVENTION CAPABILITIES: POLICY AND PRACTICE

There is considerable literature on how to determine the EU’s capabilities, or capacities, for external action, much of which has developed from the ‘actorness’ literature and is often focused mainly on the CSDP. This paper adapts and adopts the model put forward by Richard Whitman and Stefan Wolff, which includes on one level the capabilities to engage, capabilities to fund and capabilities to coordinate and cooperate with third parties; on the next level the capability to lead; and at the highest level, the capability to act.

4.1. CAPABILITY TO LEAD

As discussed above, conflict is political, conflict prevention is political and all decisions on whether and how to act in a given situation are also political. The interests of the EU and its Member States determine the priorities of its external action and the ways in which the EU acts. Leadership is crucial to successful conflict prevention. Leadership at all levels of the bureaucracy is critical both for stimulating the development of capabilities — that is, the tools are there if leaders decide to use them — and for deciding that the tools be used, or not, for this specific objective. Leadership should therefore be considered a capability in its own right, and a component of the capability to act.

A key challenge is the question of political priority-setting. Conflict prevention by its very nature seeks to prevent conflicts over the horizon: responses are pre-emptive, not reactive. Success does not lead to headlines in national newspapers. The EU, like any other actor, has limited resources (political, technical, financial and human) that must be prioritised. The risk is that the urgent

30 Interview with an official from a Member State Permanent Representation, 23 August 2016.
31 Interview with an official from the EEAS, 10 August 2016.
32 The EU-CIVCAP project has its own conceptual framework on capabilities: see EU-CIVCAP, EU Capabilities for Conflict Prevention and Peacebuilding: A Capabilities-Based Assessment (2016), internal document.
34 Adapted from R.G. Whitman and S. Wolff (eds), The European Union as a Global Conflict Manager (London: Routledge, 2012).
35 Although sometimes also referred to as ‘political will’ (see Whitman and Wolff, 2012, p. 11), leadership better reflects the extent to which individual decisions create an environment in which something happens or does not happen. ‘Political will’ on the other hand tends to add distance, as though ‘political will’ somehow exists independently from decision-making processes.
36 Interviews with a non-governmental organisation, 4 August 2016; with an official from the EEAS, 10 August 2016; and with an official from a Member State Permanent Representation, 23 August 2016.
overshadows the important – that responding to (visible) crises takes the lion’s share of resources, and therefore de-prioritises preventive action. Preventing the urgent from squeezing out the important requires political leadership.

The presumed likelihood of success of any intervention is also another factor that will contribute to decisions to intervene in certain cases, which is in turn influenced by how well the various capabilities are perceived to be able to meet the challenges of a particular situation (the red arrows in Figure 1).\(^\text{37}\) This presents a notable challenge when, as discussed above, it is difficult to prove the effectiveness of EU conflict prevention interventions in given situations and conflict prevention may often be seen as a matter of faith.

This diagram demonstrates clearly how problematic it is that conflict prevention is understood both as a way of acting in external action and as a set of discrete activities: mediation, conflict analysis and early warning, as these latter will form a potentially small sub-set of the broader conflict prevention field.

\textbf{Figure 1: The necessary capabilities for conflict prevention}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{figure1}
\caption{The necessary capabilities for conflict prevention}
\end{figure}

\textit{Note:} The presumed likelihood of success is shown in red.

\textit{Source:} Whitman and Wolff (2012), op. cit.

The following sections will analyse EU capabilities for conflict prevention, first as a cross-cutting way of acting in the world, and then in relation to the specific conflict prevention activities that are the focus of this report.

\section*{4.2 CAPABILITIES TO ENGAGE}

\(^{37}\) Whitman and Wolff (2012), op. cit.
Capabilities to engage include the architecture – the policies, institutional set-up and instruments – that enables the EU to act, should decision-makers decide to do so. Having the capabilities is likely to generate more desire to act, as intervention is more likely to succeed. This section briefly traces the policies, institutions and instruments at the EU’s disposal that enable action.  

The Lisbon Treaty (2007) in Art. 21 states that “[t]he Union shall define and pursue common policies and actions, and shall work for a high degree of cooperation in all fields of international relations, in order to (...) (c) preserve peace, prevent conflicts and strengthen international security”. This is the first time that conflict prevention is explicitly mentioned in the Treaties, although the first policies on conflict prevention were developed in 2001 with the Gothenburg programme and the Communication from the Commission on Conflict Prevention, and the Gothenburg programme remains the basis for EU policy in this field.  

The Council conclusions on conflict prevention of 2011 then flesh out Art. 21(c), defining conflict prevention as “a primary objective of the EU’s external action”. These conclusions list areas of progress, including particular policies: the European Security Strategy and its implementation report, the Commission Communication on Conflict Prevention, policies on dialogue and mediation, security sector reform, the security and development nexus and situations of fragility. As conflict prevention instruments, the conclusions cite strengthening civilian and military CSDP, establishing the Instrument for Stability and EU Special Representatives (EUSRs). They also note that while there has been progress in early warning, these capabilities need to be strengthened, and early action – including through mediation – improved. The document also notes how the formation of the European External Action Service (EEAS) will enable more comprehensive approaches to conflict.  

The 2011 conclusions recognise the Gothenburg programme as the basis of future policy development, yet it is noticeable how the conclusions do not address the first point made by the Gothenburg programme, and which is directly connected to both questions of leadership and capability to act: the political priorities for conflict prevention. The Gothenburg programme, which predates the Lisbon Treaty and the creation of the EEAS, saw a central role for the Council in conflict prevention in providing political leadership. This role has been significantly diminished with the creation of the EEAS: “conflict prevention does not surface often within Council formations, so the work of the EEAS within its mandate and with Commission resources is often below Member States’ radar”. Yet while the Council conclusions describe the “renewed impetus” the EEAS can bring to conflict prevention, they do not explicitly transfer the political leadership described in the Gothenburg programme to the EEAS, reflecting unease among (some) Member States that the EEAS is taking too strong a political leadership role. This may represent an important capability gap for conflict prevention.  

The question of political leadership and institutional set-up are central to discussing capabilities for conflict prevention. If Lisbon partially passed the mantel of political leadership to the EEAS from the  

38 See also EPLO, Power Analysis: The EU and Peacebuilding after Lisbon (Brussels, updated in June 2016(b)), available at www.eplo.org.  
40 Ibid.  
41 Ibid.  
42 Gothenburg programme (European Commission, 2001).  
43 Interview with an official from a Member State Permanent Representation, 23 August 2016.
Council, and if conflict prevention is understood as a way in which the EU acts in the world, then most of the conflict prevention resources – the budgets, personnel, expertise of the context and influence over third parties – lies with the Commission, and not just those parts of the Commission (such as the Directorate-General for International Cooperation and Development, DG DEVCO) traditionally associated with conflict-prevention-as-activities but also Directorate-Generals for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations (DG NEAR), Energy (DG Energy), Trade (DG Trade) and Migration and Home Affairs (DG HOME) at the least. This brings us back to the ongoing discussion since Lisbon about the status and roles of the EEAS and the Commission. Interviewees stated clearly that they felt that institutions and individuals across the EU are willing to work together on conflict prevention, “there is a positive trajectory”. This willingness is a form of capability to act that both creates and demands political leadership, and which overcomes the challenge of institutional fragmentation.

The EU Global Strategy may provide useful insights here. The Council has not formally adopted the document so its status is unclear, especially as the political balance between Member States regarding EU external action, including conflict prevention, is changing with the UK’s Brexit vote. The document does not represent a change in policy but does provide some insight into the High Representative’s priorities. It is more a sum of earlier Communications and concepts, and it does not allocate resources.

“An Integrated Approach to Conflict” is the third priority, after “The Security of our Union” and “State and Societal Resilience to our East and South”. This integrated approach to conflict includes “coherent use of all policies at the EU’s disposal”: “The EU will act at all stages of the conflict cycle, acting promptly on prevention.” Although this language is generally welcome, the use of “promptly” is some cause for concern as it does not suggest prioritising intervention to prevent important (violent) conflict over the horizon, but suggests a far more reactive understanding of conflict prevention, a point reinforced by the emphasis in the text on the situations in Syria and Libya. This is not to argue that the EU should not respond to crisis: it is to underscore the importance of setting political priorities to prevent conflict, and not only respond to it.

The inclusion of an integrated approach to conflict as a priority in the Global Strategy is welcome yet should not be considered in isolation from the other two priorities. The first priority is the security of the Union, including strengthening the EU as a security community and counter-terrorism, and the second, resilience, includes addressing migration. Conflict prevention approaches are – and should be – central to all these policies, both in terms of their impact on third countries and in terms of their likely success in their own regard. Recent developments in EU responses to migration give rise to concern that the causes and drivers of conflict have not been adequately taken into account and

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44 Interview with an official from a Member State Permanent Representation, 23 August 2016.
45 At the time of this research, the European Council had only “welcome(d) the presentation of the strategy”, European Council conclusions (Brussels, 28 June 2016).
46 Global Strategy (2016), op. cit.
48 Ibid., p. 13.
so EU interventions risk doing harm and increasing the likelihood of forced displacement (and therefore of ‘irregular migration’ from the EU’s perspective).

When it comes to conflict prevention activities, the EU has a range of supplementary resources in the form of personnel and analysis at its disposal. Personnel and time are scarce resources: the EU is one of the donors with the lowest staff-to-budget ratio and there will be no staff increases in the foreseeable future. This has significant implications for the extent to which conflict analysis can be generated and integrated into programming across the board and for how funding is allocated, as staff can devote less time and creativity to the way in which the budget is spent. This is despite the fact that the integration of conflict analysis into the EU’s external action has been identified as a key priority. For instance, SECPOL.2 and DG DEVCO’s Fragility and Resilience Unit (DEVCO B.7) have developed a joint guidance note on the use of conflict analysis in support of EU external action to help increase the conflict sensitivity of all EU funding instruments. The EU Global Strategy also calls for making “all our external engagement conflict- and rights-sensitive”. Yet, officials, particularly those working on geographical instruments, are under pressure to spend substantial funding envelopes and the extent to which conflict sensitivity, or even Do No Harm, is sufficiently integrated remains unclear. Some geographical teams, however, have specific personnel dedicated to supporting conflict-related activities, such as the technical support team on crisis reaction and security sector reform (SSR) in DG NEAR B.2 Regional Programmes South.

In the EEAS, the specialist division SECPOL.2 provides support to the rest of the EU machinery as well as implementing and managing specialist interventions. Its sister unit, DEVCO B.7, is in charge of defining the policy framework, mainstreaming conflict-sensitive approaches to fragility and crisis, and coordinating the activities of DG DEVCO with the rest of the EU’s institutions on matters related to conflict prevention and crisis management. These units therefore are important capabilities for EU conflict prevention, both as a way of acting in the world and as a set of distinct activities.

Supporting the range of EU actors in integrating conflict analysis across the board is a specialist field supported by SECPOL.2 and DEVCO B.7. The latter is much less visible and has the potential to integrate conflict analysis in to DEVCO’s work and across the European Commission’s external action more largely. The conflict Early Warning System is designed to enable staff across the EU (the EEAS, Commission and Member States), with input from civil society, in headquarters and in-country to identify and communicate where they see long-term risks for violent conflict and/or deterioration in

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50 EPLO, Report of the CSDN meeting ‘Peacebuilding in the EU Global Strategy: Gathering civil society input’ (Brussels, 2016c).

51 Interview with an official from DG NEAR, 16 September 2016.

52 Ibid.


54 Interview with an official from DG NEAR, 16 September 2016.

55 A future EU-CIVCAP paper will address conflict prevention in relation to EU development and trade policies – this area is therefore not further developed in this paper.
a country or region and to stimulate early preventive actions to address those risks. External observers note that the analysis it generates is interesting and that while it includes proactive work in-country, it is not only a desk exercise. The challenge for the conflict Early Warning System is not the quality of the analysis, but the relationship between early warning and early action – a concern that repeatedly surfaces in EU documents as well as among analysts. This brings us back to the question of priority-setting and political decision-making: how (finite) resources are distributed among a long list of ‘at-risk’ situations, and the risk that the urgent overshadow the important.

The EU has developed capacity for conflict analysis, although there is scope to increase the range of actors involved, particularly in-country. Insiders note that there is considerable appetite within parts of the Commission for conflict analysis, which, when done well, brings real value to the work particularly of DG DEVCO and DG NEAR. In the future, extending the use of conflict analysis to other policy instruments such as those of DG Trade would strengthen considerably the EU’s potential for conflict prevention as a way of acting in the world.

The light-touch analysis workshops seem to have been useful, especially when the facilitator has been an expert in the situation and not only the methodology, as these provide a useful basis for conversation between officials from different parts of the EU machinery and there are reportedly instances where the workshops have led to a useful exchange between the EEAS, Commission geographical experts and EU delegations. A key challenge to boosting the impact of the workshops is time and resourcing, as discussed below.

In certain situations, where civilian CSDP missions are present, it is foreseen that a Country Situational Awareness Platform (CSAP) will complement the Early Warning System. The CSAP will be chaired by the head of the delegation, and its objective is to strengthen the ties between CSDP and Freedom, Security and Justice to “potentially facilitate sharing a common understanding of the situation at country level, and improve the combined situational awareness and analysis capacity by better linking up the dedicated facilities in the EU”. The extent to which this is used, and whether it affects how the Early Warning System works in places where there is no CSDP, mission remains to be seen.

EU delegations throughout the world play important roles in contributing to analysis and in implementing interventions, whether directly (through political dialogue, for example) or through managing processes undertaken by others, and in developing and maintaining relationships with third parties. The sense that the delegations are not being used to their full potential and that the EU...
could ‘make better use’ of them is reflected in the EU’s Comprehensive Approach, its Action Plan and the Global Strategy.62

### 4.2.1 MEDIATION AND DIALOGUE

The EU has enjoyed some notable mediation successes in recent years, such as the Iran deal and the Belgrade/Pristina processes. Unlike conflict analysis and early warning, the development of the EU’s mediation capacity has been accompanied by specific policy. Following references to the EU’s need to “expand [its] dialogue and mediation capacities”,63 the Swedish presidency then led the development of the Concept on Strengthening EU Mediation and Dialogue Capacities.64 Still, analysis of the concept reveals gaps: it is descriptive rather than providing guidance for EU mediators, and it prioritises mediation as a crisis management rather than a conflict prevention approach.65

SECPOL.2’s Mediation Support Team provided the EU machinery with important resources, including expert staff members tasked with mediation support initiatives and external expertise for mediation support within the EEAS. The Division is able to make innovative use of service contracts to work with third parties, which observers identify as an important asset in certain situations, because it allows the EU to be engaged with non-governmental organisation partners to support processes on the ground, rather than to be in a more hands-off donor/grant recipient relationship.

Despite the progress in supporting mediation, the EEAS (and EU more generally) is still too little engaged in preventive diplomacy,66 which limits the EU’s ability to prevent conflict. This can sometimes be attributed to the difficulty Member States have in coming to an agreed position, which is a necessary prerequisite for the EU to engage in preventive diplomacy, as in the case of Chad.67

### 4.2.2 OTHER CONFLICT PREVENTION INSTRUMENTS

Beyond the EEAS, the EU has a range of other instruments, including military and civilian CSDP missions,68 and in some conflict-affected regions, EUSRs are potentially very useful in a range of conflict prevention interventions. EUSRs report to both the EEAS and Member States – and so are an anomaly after Lisbon – yet they are probably not used to their full potential. European Parliament election observation missions are another underused tool, with great potential for preventive diplomacy in relation to election-related violence.69

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62 Ibid., p. 4.
64 Council of the European Union, “Concept on Strengthening EU Mediation and Dialogue Capacities”, “I/A” Item Note 15779/09 (Brussels, 2009).
67 Interview with a non-governmental organisation, 4 August 2016.
68 A future EU-CIVCAP paper will address conflict prevention in relation to CSDP – this area is therefore not further developed in this paper.
69 Interview with a non-governmental organisation, 4 August 2016.
In addition to EU resources, the EU institutions can also call on the expertise and skills of its Member States. The UK is a major contributor to EU conflict prevention undertakings, but as one respondent pointed out, these resources are not a “horn of plenty for EU use. The UK was always careful that its resources were used by the EU to further the UK’s foreign policy objectives.” Member State interests may be particularly served by the EU in states where there is little Member State presence, especially where the state concerned is not a key geopolitical interest. In these kinds of states, such as Chad, Central African Republic, Cameroon and South Sudan, it is in the Member States’ interest that the EU takes a more leading role, than in countries of more geopolitical importance, like Sudan.

This review suggests that the EU has by and large the capabilities to engage. It also suggests, however, that the key role played by SECPOL.2 and the EEAS in ensuring that conflict prevention is situated high up and strategically in the decision-making process, so that prevention receives adequate resourcing and is not overshadowed by response. It furthermore suggests that SECPOL.2 and the EEAS have an important role in providing technical support to the Commission and other parts of the EU machinery. The EU nonetheless should develop greater capabilities in preventive diplomacy, and could make much better use of key instruments, EUSRs and European Parliament election observation missions.

4.3 CAPABILITY TO FUND

If we understand conflict prevention as a way the EU acts in the world, then potentially all of its externally-oriented budget, including the budget for the Common Foreign and Security Policy as well as the European Development Fund, could fund conflict prevention, especially in the long term.

When it comes to conflict prevention as a set of specific activities, which are by their nature usually more short term, the main sources of funding are the Instrument contributing to Stability and Peace (IcSP) along with other thematic instruments, such as the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights or the thematic programme for Civil Society Organisations and Local Authorities of the Development Cooperation.

The geographical instruments and the European Development Fund can also support long-term and short-term conflict prevention activities in different parts of the world. The legal basis of these funding instruments provides for this option but this does not mean that EU officials will necessarily use these funds to support conflict prevention activities, as it is one option among others. 70

Additionally, Member States may also provide significant funding for conflict prevention.

As with capabilities to engage, there is no apparent lack of potential funding for conflict prevention, although smaller non-state actors have difficulty accessing EU funding. 71 Existing conflict prevention funds, however, are coming under pressure: the European Commission proposed that for the 2017 budget, parts of the IcSP crisis response component would fund the EU–Turkey agreement. The European Commission, on the initiative of several Member States, published a legislative proposal to amend the IcSP so that it can also fund non-lethal equipment for the militaries of partner countries. The source of funding for such additional (and costly) activities has not been identified yet.

70 See the EPLO briefing paper, Support for peacebuilding and conflict prevention in the EU’s external financing instruments 2014-2020 (Brussels, 2014).

71 There are attempts to fix this with a sub-granting scheme through international organisations but it could be further improved.
The challenges may well be how finite funding is allocated among competing priorities and whether officials choose to use the available funding in a conflict-sensitive way and/or to support conflict prevention activities (see below).

4.4 CAPABILITY FOR COOPERATION AND COORDINATION

The EU is by nature a multilateral actor: unilateral activity by the EU is the exception rather than the rule, and conflict prevention is also a field of activity, or a way of acting, that favours multilateralism over unilateralism. The EU engages with third parties from the UN and regional organisations, with non-EU states, and with local authorities, non-governmental organisations and other non-state actors, on the international stage, in the EU, outside the EU in regional and national capitals as well as locally. This multilateralism is arguably a source of strength for the EU as a foreign policy actor in general, and particularly when it comes to conflict prevention.  

Coordination and cooperation within the EU presents perhaps more of a challenge, and is intimately connected to the question of leadership discussed earlier. The challenges of the EU-28 in agreeing common policy in a given situation are not new, and are a fact of EU foreign policy life that the machinery has to cope with. The intra-institutional tussles that dominate scholarship on coherence, for example, may not have been solved with the creation of the EEAS, but some observers believe there is the necessary spirit of coordination and cooperation across the EU machinery when it comes to conflict prevention.

The SECPOL.2 Division has developed and provided key resources for other parts of the EEAS and European Commission, and has created demand for their services, which in turn has enabled greater cooperation and coordination across relevant parts of the system. The fact that early warning, conflict analysis and process design have been located in the same department has not only favoured coordination but may also have helped policy-makers to balance the urgent and the important. As the EEAS develops and its organigramme is revised, it will be important to assess past successes in these areas. Given the interconnectedness of these tools, it will also be important to anticipate the effects on coordination and cooperation for prevention – if, for instance, the current functions of SECPOL.2 were to be divided between different divisions.

A different aspect of internal coordination and cooperation, again closely linked to the question of leadership, is where ‘conflict prevention’ is situated within the EEAS and the Commission. If conflict prevention expertise is situated close to the most senior decision-making levels, there is more chance that it will become a strategic approach rather than a set of responsive activities. The institutions also need mechanisms to facilitate exchange between different parts of the system. Previous initiatives, such as the Conflict Prevention Group, did not work well enough, perhaps partly because the Group struggled to find the right way to balance the important and the urgent.

72 Davis (2014), op. cit.
73 The Conflict Prevention Group was convened by SECPOL.2 and brought together representatives of the relevant geographical and thematic directorates as well as the crisis management bodies, the chairs of the Committee for Civilian Aspects of Crisis Management (CivCom) and Politico-Military Group (PMG) as well as representatives from the Service for Foreign Policy Instruments (FPI) and DG DEVCO (the Fragility and Crisis Management Unit). The Conflict Prevention Group was to gather and review early warning information, identify early response options, develop conflict risk analysis and mainstream conflict prevention in EU external action. It reported to the Crisis Management Board.
However, there should be a process by which the Secretary General, political directors and geographical managing directors can discuss key issues – and particularly those situations that are currently ‘over the horizon’ and where early intervention could prevent conflict – rather than focus only on responding to crises that have already erupted.

This review suggests that the EU’s modus operandi of operating multilaterally is well established in practice and is arguably a source of strength. The greater challenge is internal coordination, and here the EEAS and Commission’s senior management have a pivotal role to play in requiring and supporting different parts of the EU machinery to adopt conflict prevention practices and also in gathering and sharing expertise from different EU organs.

5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This analysis of the EU’s capabilities for conflict prevention has demonstrated the challenge posed by the term, as it denotes both a way of acting in the world and a set of distinct activities. This lack of clarity is exacerbated by the counterfactual nature of much of the evidence that conflict prevention works. Greater clarity in terms and therefore in policy might help establish conflict prevention as a way of acting in the world as part of the EU’s external action culture.

This study has demonstrated the importance of political leadership at each stage of putting conflict prevention into practice, in establishing priorities among competing needs, prioritising the important as well as the urgent, focusing on prevention, not only response, and in integrating conflict prevention into decision-making at the most strategic levels.

This study has demonstrated that the EU largely has the capabilities to engage: although there is pressure on time and personnel, it has a wide array of policies, institutions and instruments that enable intervention. Some of these, however, such as EUSRs and European Parliament election observation missions, could be used to greater effect. The EU should also develop its capabilities further for preventive diplomacy. Similarly, the potential funding for conflict prevention, in the long and short term, is present, the issue being whether and how this funding is used.

Finally, this review has demonstrated the importance of the SECPOL.2 Division and DECVO B.7 Unit in providing technical assistance for conflict prevention across the EU’s external action and in facilitating coordination and cooperation among different parts of the machinery for conflict prevention.

Recommendations

4. As a first step in strengthening EU capabilities to prevent conflict, EPLO recommends that the EEAS and the Commission jointly clarify in internal documents how the EU promotes conflict prevention as a way of acting in the world, how it can support and be supported by stabilisation, and how specific distinct activities (particularly conflict analysis, early warning and mediation) contribute differently to conflict prevention, and the differences and synergies between them.

5. Senior management in the EEAS and the European Commission should mainstream conflict prevention as a matter of policy and practice across the EU external action machinery (the
DG for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations, DG DEVCO, DG Energy, DG Trade, as well as the EEAS)⁷⁴ and prioritise prevention as well as response.

6. The EU’s Global Strategy implementation plans should ensure that conflict prevention is prioritised across all the thematic areas identified, not only for the implementation of the section on “an integrated approach to conflict”. It should also be prioritised in the preparation of the action plan on security and defence, the initiative on public diplomacy and other follow-up actions to the Global Strategy. Implementation and action plans should address these concerns directly and clearly identify resources, including institutional expertise and leadership, for preventing conflict as well as responding to it and addressing the important as well as the urgent.

Senior management in the EEAS and the Commission should ensure that

10. SECPOL.2 and DEVCO B.7 continue to provide leadership, technical support and expertise within the EEAS, DG DEVCO and across the EU’s external action machinery;

11. SECPOL.2 and DEVCO B.7 are adequately resourced in terms of personnel, expertise and access to high-level decision-making so that the EU prevents important conflicts as well as responds to urgent crises;

12. SECPOL.2 and DEVCO B.7 continue to work in innovative partnerships in conflict situations worldwide, including with civil society organisations and other external expertise;

13. time is available for personnel to generate and implement conflict analysis across the EU’s external action, supported by SECPOL.2 and DEVCO B.7;

14. previous EU experiences and lessons identified in conflict zones are captured by an adequate knowledge management system that strengthens the evidence base for future conflict prevention work; and

15. the EU further develops its capacities for preventive diplomacy in situations at risk of escalating conflict, for example, by reinforcing and tailoring the support provided to EUSRs and heads of delegations in charge of carrying out dialogue in conflict-affected countries (e.g. mediation and analysis training, support staff) and by including conflict expertise in their job descriptions.

⁷⁴ Recommendations on mainstreaming or integrating conflict prevention into all relevant EU policies and instruments can be found in EPLO, Letter to HR/VP Mogherini on “An EU Global Strategy for Peace” (Brussels, 2016a), available at www.eplo.org.
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## ANNEX 1 – LIST OF INTERVIEWS

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