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PART ONE

INDICATORS TO PREVENT CONFLICTS: THE PRACTICE OF EU INSTITUTIONS

Chapter 1

CONFLICT INDICATORS DEVELOPED BY THE COMMISSION – THE CHECK-LIST FOR ROOT CAUSES OF CONFLICT/EARLY WARNING INDICATORS

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1. INTRODUCTION: THE EU AND CONFLICT PREVENTION

According to the new Draft Treaty establishing a Constitution for Europe, the European Union (EU) shall work towards preserving peace, *preventing conflicts* and strengthening international security, in conformity with the principles of the United Nations Charter.² The Draft Treaty also states that, when pursuing its foreign policy objectives, the EU may use civilian and military means, including joint disarmament operations, humanitarian and rescue tasks, military advice and assistance tasks, *conflict prevention* and peace-keeping tasks, tasks of combat forces in crisis management, including peacemaking and post-conflict stabilization.³

The explicit reference to conflict prevention as one of the objectives of the Union's external action constitutes a novelty in the legal framework of the EU. Indeed, although a number of foreign policy objectives are laid down in the Treaty on European Union and in the Treaty establishing the European Community such as the promotion of respect for human rights, democracy and the rule of law, to foster sustainable economic and social development, to campaign against poverty, to contribute to international peace and security and to foster the integration of developing countries into the world economy, etc., there had been no mention so far of conflict prevention policies and activities.

However, even if the issue, as such, had not been explicitly included among the objectives of the EU's external action, the EU has, since its origins, engaged

¹ Administrator, European Commission, DG External Relations, Conflict prevention, crisis management and ACP political issues. All views expressed are those of the author only.

² Articles I-40 (1) and III-193(2)(c) of the Draft Treaty establishing a Constitution for Europe of 18 July 2003 (CONV 850/03), available via <http://www.europa.eu.int/futurum/index_en.htm> and published at *OJEC* [2003] C 169/1.

³ Article III-210(1) of the Draft Treaty.

in conflict prevention through a number of instruments directly or indirectly relevant to this particular area of foreign policy.⁴

The very nature of the EU helps to explain the rationale behind this commitment to conflict prevention: the EU is in itself a peace project, and a supremely successful one. It has underpinned the reconciliation and peaceful development of Western Europe over the last half century, helping to consolidate democracy and to assure prosperity. Given the importance of the EU on the international scene, its interests and ambitions and the considerable resources it has committed to assistance and cooperation, there is no doubt that the EU should seek to project stability also beyond its own borders. This is above all a moral and political imperative, but it also makes economic sense. It is a lot cheaper to channel conflict into dialogue and constructive action than to deal with the consequences once it has degenerated into violent confrontation.

During the mid-1990s, in the context of the changing international environment after the end of the Cold War and of the change of the European integration process that resulted, *inter alia*, in the establishment of the CFSP as its second pillar, the EU issued a number of policy statements on conflict prevention that led to the definition of a conceptual and policy framework for addressing violent conflict. This framework combines sophisticated analyses of conflicts with a realistic acknowledgement of the concrete possibilities and limits of EU action.

The above cited framework contains three main elements regarding the objective, the approach as well as the definition itself of conflict prevention:⁵

Objective: When dealing with the issue of violent conflict, this policy framework defines structural stability as the overarching strategic objective which informs all levels of the EU's actions in relation to conflict-prone areas. Structural stability can be described as a situation characterized by sustainable economic development, democracy and respect for human rights, viable political structures and healthy social and environment conditions, with the capacity to manage change without resorting to violent conflict.

Approach: Although the means available to the European Union are limited compared to the magnitude of the task of effectively preventing, managing and resolving conflicts, the Union should aspire to maximize its leverage through an optimal use of its instruments and resources. Thus its approach should be (i) pro-

⁴ Among these are the following: development cooperation and external assistance, economic cooperation and trade policy instruments, humanitarian aid, social and environmental policies, diplomatic instruments such as political dialogue and mediation, as well as economic or other sanctions, and ultimately the new instruments of ESDP (including information gathering for anticipating potential conflict situations and monitoring international agreements). For a short historical overview, see the chapter by J. Wouters and F. Naert in this volume.

⁵ These elements are clearly defined in the Communication from the Commission on the European Union and the issue of Conflicts in Africa: peace-building, Conflict Prevention and Beyond, 6 March 1996, SEC (96) 332. It is worth noting that they have also been endorsed by the DAC guidelines (OECD) on the prevention of violent conflicts (1997 and 2001).

active because the European Union, without prejudging the basic principle that ultimately those directly concerned by violent conflict are primarily responsible for handling the issue of violent conflicts, has not only an important interest but also an important potential for actively addressing this issue and (ii) comprehensive in so far as the European Union, within its competencies, should address the entire cycle of conflict and peace.

Definition: In contrast to widespread international confusion on conflict-related terminology, the EU has constructed a set of working definitions for conflict prevention both in a narrow and in a wider sense:

In a narrow sense, conflict prevention relates to the activities undertaken over the short-term to reduce manifest tensions and/or to prevent the outbreak or recurrence of violent conflict. These activities will therefore apply mainly in a situation of tension, that is where conflict in society becomes apparent (e.g., when open fighting between organized or disorganized forces begins or extreme social unrest emerges) and whose gravity depends on certain events as well as existing political power.

In a wider sense, it can be defined as the activities undertaken over the medium and long-term to address root causes of violent conflict in a targeted manner. Thus, in this sense conflict prevention also applies to situations where a country is seemingly stable and largely quiet but where (structural) causes of potential conflict may be discerned. Thus, activities of conflict prevention in a wider sense could be summarized under the term peace-building.⁶

2. THE ROLE OF THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION

This wide definition of conflict prevention implies that conflict prevention can occur at two points in a typical conflict's life history: 1) when there has not been a violent conflict in recent years, and before significant violence signals possible escalation. In this case, conflict prevention aims to keep a conflict from escalating; and 2) when there has been a recent violent conflict but peace is being restored. Here conflict prevention aims to avoid 'a relapse or reigniting of violence'.⁷

This will have an impact in terms of both clarifying core issues and identifying instruments which could increase the EU's capacity to prevent and resolve violent conflicts. As regard the identification of instruments, conflict prevention offers a practical rationale for integrating all external functions of the EU which fall

⁶ See the Annex for a complete set of activities to be included under the term conflict prevention.

⁷ See Alex P. Schmid Poom's abridged version of his *Thesaurus and Glossary of Early Warning and Conflict Prevention Terms* (Erasmus University 1998), available at <<http://www.fewer.org/pubs/index.htm>>. who quotes Michael S. Lund.

under both the first and second pillar of the institutional framework of the EU where the European Commission has a very significant role to play.

The First Pillar of the European Union contains institutions, procedures and instruments assigned to the European Community (EC) by the Treaties. It covers the EC's original areas of competence, such as agriculture, industrial policy, and the common market. Also included in the EC portfolio are external policy areas connected to the common market, such as international trade and development where the EU can engage in conflict prevention through a wide range of external assistance policy frameworks (for ACP – Africa, Caribbean and Pacific, ALA – Asia/Latin America, MED – Mediterranean countries, PHARE and TACIS – Central and Eastern European countries and CARDS – Balkan countries), through targeted economic measures (regional integration, relief, rehabilitation and development), and through special programmes for human rights, gender and democratization.

The scope of the European Commission for engaging in conflict prevention through the EC Pillar is extensive as, in this context, it stands as a centralized, relatively autonomous body with the exclusive right of initiative and is primarily responsible for the definition and implementation of actions related to these previously cited instruments.

The EU's Second Pillar, the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP), was established in 1992 (Maastricht Treaty on European Union) in order to give expression to the EU's emerging international political identity and increased options for *de facto* engagement in international relations. It lays out the rules, means and mechanisms by which EU foreign policy is made and implemented. The link between the CFSP and conflict prevention policy and actions is self-evident.

The CFSP is not implemented in the same way as Community policies (e.g., the agricultural, environmental, transport and research policies). In view of the sensitive nature of questions affecting international relations, the Treaty naturally attaches great importance to the Member States and the bodies of the European Union in which they directly participate, i.e., the Council and its competent instances (committees, working parties). Nevertheless, the Commission also plays a treaty-specific role in CFSP. The Commission is fully associated with the work carried out in the field of CFSP. The Commission may, as may any Member State, refer to the Council any question relating to CFSP and may submit proposals to the Council – although it does not have the sole right to do so as in Community matters. The Commission may also, as well as the Member States, request the Presidency to convene an extraordinary Council meeting and implement the CFSP budget (under the EC budget) including through appropriate financial proposals.

Both within the framework of the first and the second pillars, the Commission already possesses a wide range of instruments to address various phases of the conflict cycle. The setting up in 2001 of a unit dealing with conflict prevention

and crisis management issues within the Directorate General for External Relations is a reflection of its determination to play a more proactive role and to enhance the impact and consistency of the different Commission's and in a larger context EU's initiatives in this area. The objective of the unit is to act as the main focal point and driving force within the Commission for conflict prevention activities.

3. CONFLICT PREVENTION/EARLY WARNING INDICATORS

One of the aims of policy-makers and decision-makers concerned with conflict resolution and prevention is to acquire the ability to anticipate the outbreak of violent conflicts before they occur. This early warning would help them to determine the best course of action and to prioritize resource allocation. Moreover, conflict management and humanitarian relief organizations can more effectively plan and target their activities.

Early warning can be defined as: 'the systematic collection and analysis of information coming from areas of crises for the purpose of: (a) anticipating the escalation of violent conflict; (b) development of strategic responses to these crises; and (c) the presentation of options to key decision makers'.⁸

The analysis of the information is not an end in itself but is rather intended for the development of early response such as the design of policies and/or interventions, including humanitarian, aimed at preventing violence and to help build sustainable peace and security.

Conflicts are rarely mono-causal and the most frequent underlying causes of post-1945 conflicts have been a combination of factors related to: ethnicity (disputes arising out of ethnic, religious or linguistic differences); governance (e.g., efforts to change the form of government or the party in power); independence (either in the form of decolonization or separatist state formation); control of natural resources (oil, water); strategic (to gain an economic or geopolitical advantage) and/or territorial. Studies carried out by the Clingendael Institute in the Netherlands show that, whereas military/political conditions serve as triggers for the outbreak of violent conflict, economic and social indicators are important for the structural background conditions within societies that provide a potential breeding ground for discontent.⁹ Thus, there is no clear-cut international understanding on what are the causes of violent conflict that should inform an analysis of potentially conflict-prone areas. The logical corollary to this is that there is no

⁸ See the definition given by Alex P. Schmid Poom, *op. cit.* n. 7.

⁹ K. van Walraven and J. van der Vlugt, *Conflict Prevention and Early Warning in the Political Practice of International Organizations* (The Hague, Clingendael Institute Research Essays 1996) and L. van de Goor and S. Verstegen, *Conflict Prognosis: Bridging the Gap from Early Warning to Early Response* (The Hague, Clingendael Institute 1999).

consensus as to what type of indicators most accurately predict the emergence of a conflict. Generally, early warning techniques are classified as either data-based (quantitative) or judgment-based (qualitative¹⁰) where the former includes the collection and analysis of large data sets and the latter is based on the subjective assessment of experts. There is an old-age battle over the merits of quantitative, qualitative or mixed-method approaches to conflict prevention and early warning mechanisms.

Notwithstanding the ongoing debate on the definition and nature of the most reliable early warning indicators, and since the mid-to-late 1990s, early warning research has progressed significantly both in terms of its ability to be accurate (as many disasters had already been preceded by warnings) and its potential to impose principles of cost-effectiveness in the resource allocation of external affairs departments. Thus, it could be argued that a consensus has been reached on:

a) the acknowledgement that effective early warning requires the use of a range of data sources and analytical methods:

- Local, e.g., events and perceptions not covered by the media;
- dynamic newswire reports (e.g., Reuters);
- structural data (e.g., World Bank) – these usually change very slowly and include political factors (regime type, democracy, military), economic factors (stability, inequality, security and environmental stress/resources), socio-cultural factors (media propaganda, institutional, religious). Early warning techniques are used to identify and analyze relevant early warning data from these sources;

b) the necessity for conflict/early warning indicators to cover four main areas:¹¹

- **Governance:** level of democracy, human rights violations (arbitrary arrests, failure of the rule of law, in particular, lack of judiciary and the police; weakness of state situations and repression of civil society organizations), corruption;
- **Economics/economic performance:** economic growth, per capita income, secondary education, dependency on primary commodities and natural re-

¹⁰ D.K. Gupta, 'An Early Warning About Forecasts: Oracle to Academics' in S. Schmeidl and H. Adelman (eds.), *Synergy in Early Warning. Conference Proceedings* (York University, York Center for International and Security Studies, 1997), pp. 375-397.

¹¹ See, e.g., M.P. Sirseloudi, *Conflict and Peace Indicators – Great Lakes*, November 2000 (FEWER 2000) available at <<http://www.reliefweb.int/w/rwb.nsf/0/c764c0220d1ae788c12569ba003a5601?OpenDocument>>.

sources, employment and social insecurity, prevalence of poverty, income disparities and land distribution, environmental degradation;

- **Socio-cultural/social cohesion:** levels of trust and association, ethnic dominance, ethno-linguistic fractionalization index, geographic concentration, lack of access to mass media; discrimination on racial or ethnic grounds; and
- **Security:** length of peacetime since last war, size of ethnic diasporas, political killings, disappearances; availability of arms; crime rates, inter-personal violence, geopolitical aspects.

4. THE COMMISSION'S CHECK-LIST FOR ROOT CAUSES OF CONFLICT

The EU has also acknowledged that a key to an effective policy in this area is the definition of a long-term approach to peace and security whose objective rests upon identifying and addressing the causes of violent conflicts in a targeted manner.

The corollary to this principle is the need to use early warning indicators signalling potential conflict as a way of assessing the need for early action, taking account of coherence and coordination. In order to achieve effective early action, there is a need to enhance capacity for political monitoring and analysis, early warning, the elaboration of scenarios and policy options and the careful scrutiny of the relevant EU policy-making mechanisms. The gap between analysis, early warning and action must be reduced, in particular by enhancing capacities for political analysis, through the elaboration of scenarios and policy options and the careful scrutiny of the relevant EU policy-making mechanisms.

The need to 'move the timescale for EU action forward, becoming progressively more pro-active and less reactive'¹² is reflected in the Communication from the Commission on conflict prevention¹³ which highlights the 'evident need for enhanced common analysis of root causes of conflict and of signs of emerging conflict' and suggests that 'an early identification of risk factors increases the chances of timely and effective action to address the underlying causes of conflict'. Equally, the EU programme for the prevention of violent conflicts¹⁴ highlights the need for the EU to improve its early warning capacities.

¹² Joint report presented by the High representative/Commission on improving the Coherence and Effectiveness of EU action in the field of conflict prevention, December 2000 <<http://register.consilium.eu.int/pdf/en/00/st14/14088en0.pdf>>.

¹³ COM (2001) 211 final, 11 April 2001, available at <europa.eu.int/comm/external_relations/cfsp/news/com2001_211_en.pdf>.

¹⁴ Göteborg, European Council, June 2001 available at <<http://ue.eu.int/en/Info/eurocouncil/index.htm>>.

It is in this context that the European Commission, in cooperation with the Conflict Prevention Network,¹⁵ and cognizant of the key role that it ought to play in this area, developed the check-list for root causes of conflict/early warning indicators in 2001.

Root causes of violent conflict refer to the characteristics of a country's historically dominant economic, political and social institutions, practices, and capacities (e.g., cultural norms and rules, government structure and processes, leadership make-up, public policies, etc.), which may create the preconditions for social conflict. In this sense, they may predispose, in a latent fashion, a particular area to conflict. Root causes are thus pervasive factors, which have become more or less built into the policies, structures and culture of a society. They can nonetheless be relatively influenced by human action, including social and political actors and government policies.

The list is only one of the tools that the Commission has at its disposal for monitoring and early warning. Others include regular reporting from Delegations and desk officers on issues related to the economic and political developments in concerned countries, open source information via the Commission's crisis room and the ECHO's disaster monitoring system ICONS (Impeding Crisis Online New System).

The Commission Crisis Room, in addition to tasks relating to information gathering, also serves as an Operation centre in crisis situations and provides Crisis management support, reacting to events such as acts of terrorism, non-military incidents, acts of war or emergencies (including the evacuation of staff in third countries). It is organized in two main sections, a conference room for audio/video conferences and multimedia briefings and a communications room which is designed to serve as the hub for all telecommunications and information resources for crisis managers.

4.1 Objectives of the check-list

The check-list should serve as a tool for generating political attention and facilitating pro-active agenda setting. Hence, its objective is twofold:

a) Awareness raising/early warning: to increase awareness within the EU decision-making forums of the problems of those countries/regions with the highest assessed risk of an outbreak, continuation or re-emergence of conflict.

As a framework for analysis, the list should help those concerned to structure their own thinking, encourage them to take a more comprehensive look at poten-

¹⁵ The Conflict Prevention Network (CPN) was a network of academic institutions, NGOs and independent experts, and was a project managed by the German Institute for International and Security Affairs. In 2000, it was mandated by the European Commission to prepare a document which could be used as a basis to prepare the check-list. The final list, elaborated by the Conflict Prevention Unit of the European Commission, benefited significantly from the work of the CPN.

tial conflict cases as well as sensitizing them to the interrelatedness of different areas of concern as well as areas of preventive action. Indicators do not lead directly to preventive measures and recommendations. Yet, an indicator-based analysis may sensitize different policy sectors which are affecting a certain area. The framework should additionally enhance in-house understanding of the need for conflict-sensitive policies in various sectors which may seem irrelevant for the conflict potential at first sight. Also, a number of areas that are of concern to different policy sectors will be linked by the different actors on the connections between indicator categories and problem areas. The analysis is to remain focused (cluster areas); yet it is to be placed in a context that makes it explicitly imperative to gear different policy areas more clearly towards conflict prevention.

b) Agenda setting/mainstreaming: to heighten the effort to ensure that EU policies (and in particular those managed by the European Commission) contribute to conflict prevention/resolution. This objective reflects the need to establish an in-house ‘culture of prevention’ and to provide appropriate means and procedures to effectively follow a policy of ‘mainstreaming’ conflict prevention. In other words, conflict prevention should thus systematically be incorporated in, and become an integral and equal part of, all essential areas of engagement, within the framework of the EU’s external relations. Regarding this objective, the list is a practical instrument which has been drawn up to help better identify the root causes of conflict and their manifestation, so as to reflect them in the Country or regional Strategy Papers. These documents constitute the guiding framework for political and economic cooperation between the European Commission and third countries. They normally have a five-year duration and undergo mid-term reviews. They are drafted by the geographical services of the Commission (both at headquarters and in the field) with the help of thematic units and other Directorates General concerned (trade, environment, ECHO). They define the Commission’s cooperation strategy and are co-signed by the recipient country target. Thus, in the context of the Strategy Papers, the list should assist in drawing attention to those areas where Community instruments might/should intervene, thus being a useful first step in preparing for programming activities.

These two objectives complement each other: conflict causes are often well known, yet a specific case frequently fails to receive adequate attention. This will not only raise awareness of the need to cooperate and further improve inner and interinstitutional coordination but will also facilitate an integrated approach to conflict prevention within and among these actors.

4.2 The indicators

Conflict indicators can be used for very different purposes. As indicated above, the indicators of the check-list were selected with a view to constituting an instrument for early warning and agenda setting as opposed, for instance, to conflict impact assessment.