

Opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee on 'The role of the European Union in peace building in external relations: best practice and perspectives'

(2012/C 68/04)

Rapporteur: **Ms MORRICE**

At its plenary session held on 19 and 20 January 2011 the European Economic and Social Committee, acting under Rule 29(2) of its Rules of Procedure, decided to draw up an own-initiative opinion on

The role of the European Union in peace building in external relations: best practice and perspectives.

The Section for External Relations, which was responsible for preparing the Committee's work on the subject, adopted its opinion on 15 December 2011.

At its 477th plenary session, held on 18 and 19 January 2012 (meeting of 19 January 2012), the European Economic and Social Committee adopted the following opinion by 190 votes to 1 with 3 abstentions.

1. Conclusions and recommendations

1.1 Peace-building is in the European Union's DNA. Its very creation, enlargement and survival in times of crisis are a testament to its peace-building prowess. As a community of nations promoting democracy, human rights, equality and tolerance, the EU has a moral obligation to support peace-building worldwide and it now has a Treaty mandate to do so. As the world's largest aid donor with years of experience in conflict zones and a vast array of tools at its disposal, it should be leading the way in international peace-building efforts. Yet it fails to make sufficient use of its potential in peace-building worldwide and the impact of its support for positive change is not as great as it should and could be. Despite efforts to improve coherence with the creation of the European External Action Service, an integrated 'whole of EU approach' has yet to be achieved. Without a clearly defined peace-building strategy, without greater sharing of experience between all EU peace-building actions and in the absence of genuine cooperation with Member States, international aid donors, NGOs and civil society organisations building peace on the ground, the EU potential to create a real and lasting difference in the world's most troubled regions will not be fully realised. The challenge may be great, but the reward is greater. A peaceful Europe sits better in a peaceful world.

1.2 On the basis of these conclusions, the EESC recommends the following:

With regard to strategy and policy

1.2.1 The EEAS should draw up a Peace-building Strategy to include civilian, military, diplomatic, political, rapid response and humanitarian actions, long term development assistance, short term aid, climate change, trade and investment policy and all other EU actions which have an impact on fragile zones.

1.2.2 It should create a Task Force, to include representatives from the EP, EC, CoR, EESC, EIB and peace-building NGOs to draw up the strategy.

1.2.3 EU policies and programmes, particularly those operating in conflict zones, should be liable to undergo a conflict sensitive impact assessment to ensure they are in line with EU norms and values and can guarantee the most cost effective use of EU aid.

With regard to operational matters

1.2.4 A Code of Principles should be established for all EU operations in conflict and conflict-prone zones.

1.2.5 All peace-building projects should include the promotion of good governance and democratic principles (human rights, freedom of speech, equality, political and trade union freedoms) as well as environmental protection norms.

1.2.6 Benchmarks should be established to monitor progress on reform and monitoring systems should be enhanced to include representatives from civil society, gender balance on monitoring bodies and to ensure commitment to reforms. Greater focus should be placed on conflict prevention, with particular emphasis on the role of education and the media, including social media, in fragile zones, and measures to promote reconciliation, including intercultural dialogue and mediation, should be actively encouraged and promoted.

1.2.7 EU engagement with organised civil society in fragile zones should be strengthened through increased support for organisations which share EU values promoting tolerance, pluralism and other peace-building actions and the work of the EESC in this area should be facilitated.

1.2.8 Adherence to UN Resolution 1325 on women in peace should be encouraged, greater support given to women's groups working on the ground and to the promotion of gender equality.

1.2.9 Victims of conflict, particularly children, should receive more sensitive targeted attention and greater EU recognition and support.

1.2.10 Programmes to support vulnerable youth, particularly boys, should be encouraged, facilitated and supported to enable them to play a full and constructive role in society.

1.2.11 Recruitment and training of civilian personnel for use on missions should be extended and improved and the focus of missions should shift from military to civilian crisis management.

1.2.12 A data-base of European peace-building experts and candidates for civilian missions from the judiciary, lawyers, police, peace-building NGOs, mediators, administrators and politicians experienced in the field should be drawn up.

With regard to best practice and exchange of experience

1.2.13 A sharing of key lessons should take place among EU institutions, Member States and international bodies facilitated by a compendium of peace-building best practice and further research into the use of the EESC conflict resolution toolkit⁽¹⁾.

1.2.14 Greater regard should be given to exchanging experience between EU internal peace-building work, such as the EU PEACE Programme in Northern Ireland, and its external actions.

1.2.15 Serious consideration should be given to creating a European Peace-Building Centre of Excellence/Institute which would tie into and build on existing structures and follow up on ideas and recommendation from other institutions and experts.

1.2.16 A major peace-building conference should be held to bring together all the strands of a new peace-building strategy and consolidate recommendations on how best to share the learning.

⁽¹⁾ See Opinion SC/029, *The role of the EU in the Northern Ireland peace process*, (rapporteur: Ms Morrice, 2009), OJ C 100, 30.4.2009, p. 100 - 108.

2. Context

2.1 This Opinion is a follow up to the Own-initiative Opinion on the EU Role in the Northern Ireland Peace Process, approved by the EESC in October 2008⁽²⁾, which calls on the EU to place peace-building at the core of its future strategic direction. It widens the scope of research beyond the EU borders, reviews the peace-building tools available, particularly since the creation of the EEAS, examines how far experience has been exchanged and puts forward recommendations for future work in this area.

3. Introduction

3.1 Often described as the world's most successful supra-national peace-building venture, the EU can be seen as a role model for others in this arena. Its own experience, bringing sworn enemies together in the aftermath of World War II must be its greatest ever achievement. Keeping them together in a union of nations, increasing their number and extending their influence worldwide is another peace-building triumph and sustaining that momentum in the face of financial crisis will be another major challenge.

3.2 However, the EU hasn't been properly equipped to carry the weight of its moral obligation as either a role model or a leader for peace-building in the world. In its operations in conflict zones it uses a variety of different tools at its disposal from crisis management, through humanitarian aid to military assistance and development aid. But its approach has lacked coherence, lacked coordination and lacked credible connection with grass roots civil society.

3.3 With the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty, the EU has a new peace-building mandate (Article 21), a new structure to support it (the EEAS) and a new leader (the High Representative, Catherine Ashton) to make it happen. There should therefore no longer be any reason why the EU cannot move into the driving seat and make a genuine impact on peace-building worldwide.

3.4 If ever there was a right time for the EU to show leadership that time is now. Its closest neighbours are in a state of political, economic and social upheaval. They need solid support at this crucial time in their history. In launching its 'new and ambitious' Neighbourhood Policy, the EU has shown it is ready and willing to lead by example. But in this, as in peace-building the world over, actions speak louder than words.

3.5 The EU has 'formidable potential' to link all the facets of its influence together to generate a coherent and comprehensive approach to peace-building and it has the resources to match. But success ultimately depends on the political will of EU Member States, their ability to speak with one voice and their

⁽²⁾ Ibid.

desire to give full backing to an ambitious joint peace-building strategy which will not only give the EU greater credibility on the international stage but will also serve to promote positive change in the world.

4. Background

4.1 The term 'peace-building' is relatively new in the lexicon of international diplomacy. It was first described by Boutros-Ghali, UN Secretary General, in his Agenda for Peace in 1992 as 'action to identify and support structures which will tend to strengthen and solidify peace in order to avoid a relapse into conflict'. In 2006, the UN set up a Peace-building Commission to support peace efforts in countries emerging from conflict and in 2009 the OECD established an International Network on Conflict and Fragility (INCAF).

4.2 In the European context, the first specific reference to peace-building in EU external relations was in the Gothenburg Programme for the Prevention of Violent Conflicts, adopted in 2001. The most recent reference is Article 21 of the Lisbon Treaty which lists as the core objectives of EU External Action the principle of human rights and democracy, conflict prevention and the preservation of peace.

4.3 The Lisbon Treaty also sets out a new framework for the EU in external relations. The High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy combines the competences previously divided between the Council and the European Commission. The HR, Catherine Ashton, is supported by the EEAS whose remit covers the '3Ds' - Diplomacy, Development and Defence - all of which can be deployed for peace-building.

4.4 Within the EEAS and the relevant EC directorates, the EU has a vast array of tools which can be used for peace-building. These include:

- **CSDP civilian and military missions** – focusing on police, the rule of law, civilian administration and civil protection - often constrained by lack of available trained personnel. The security and logistical dimension is seen as a prerequisite to a stable and safe environment for peace-building.

- **Instrument for Stability (IfS)** - the main source of EU funding for peace-building. More than 70 % of funds available (EUR 2 billion 2007-13) are used for crisis response to 'fill the gap' between short term humanitarian assistance and longer-term development aid.

- **Peace building Partnership (PbP)**, set up under the IfS, to improve communication with key partners in crisis response. It supports work with civil society organisations, assists in the dissemination of best practice and access to logistical and technical support.

4.5 There are many other EU instruments which are not peace-building specific but which can be used to support the EU in this role. These include Humanitarian Assistance (ECHO), the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights, Development Aid through the European Development Fund (ACP/OCTs) and the Development Cooperation Instrument (Latin America, Asia, the Gulf and South Africa).

4.6 EU Policies, such as Trade, EIB investment, Environment, Energy or Agriculture can also be used in a peace-building context and EU Enlargement Policy has a peace-building element in that it requires candidate countries to adhere to the EU's core values⁽³⁾. Also, the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) which covers 16 of the EU's closest neighbours, has been 'revitalised' following the 'Arab Spring' to include a peace-building aspect to help build 'deep and sustainable democracy' and the EU's new 'Agenda for Change' proposes strengthening the EU role in peace-building in a variety of ways.

4.7 While the majority of EU peace-building is carried out under its external relations policy, the EU has also been operating a unique peace initiative within its own borders. The Special EU Support Programme for Peace and Reconciliation in Northern Ireland and the border counties of Ireland was set up in 1996 and is currently in its third funding round⁽⁴⁾.

5. Peace-building - the challenges

5.1 Search for a definition and a strategy

5.1.1 Although peace-building is now widely accepted as a valuable new approach to intervention in conflict zones,

⁽³⁾ See paragraph 2 of the Council conclusions on enlargement and stabilisation and association process 3132nd GENERAL AFFAIRS Council meeting of 5 December 2011: 'The enlargement process continues to reinforce peace, democracy and stability in Europe and allows the EU to be better positioned to address global challenges. The transformative power of the enlargement process generates far-reaching political and economic reform in the enlargement countries which also benefits the EU as a whole. The successful completion of accession negotiations with Croatia is a strong testimony to this and sends a positive signal to the wider region'.

⁽⁴⁾ See Opinion CESE, 'Draft Notice to Member States laying down guidelines for an initiative in the framework of the special support programme for peace and reconciliation in Northern Ireland and the border counties of Ireland (SEC(95) 279 final)', OJ C 236/29, 11.9.1995, and opinion CESE 'Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council concerning European Union financial contributions to the International Fund for Ireland (2007-2010)', COM(2010) 12 – 2010/0004 (COD), OJ C 18/114, 19.1.2011.

the term has no precise definition. Some see it being applied only to a post conflict situation to stabilise and reconstruct. Others see it bridging the gap, between the policies of defence and development. Others describe it as 'a catalytic process deployed across the continuum from conflict prevention through crisis management, peace-making and peace-keeping to post-conflict stabilisation'.

5.1.2 Looking at the various strands, '**peace-keeping**' is about security and defence, '**peace-making**' is about using diplomacy for political agreement while '**peace-building**' encompasses both and more. Ideally, it is an action which begins before the peace-keepers or peace-makers arrive and, if successful and sustained, could mean they wouldn't be required. All inclusive, all embracing, fully consultative and long term, peace-building could perhaps be described as an open-ended process which serves to reconcile difference by opening doors and opening minds.

5.2 The need for joined-up thinking

5.2.1 Whatever the definition, experts agree that peace-building is a 'highly complex process involving a wide range of actors operating in the fields of military and civilian intervention, diplomacy and financial and technical support over short and long term at local, national and international levels'. The major challenge is to find a way to establish 'coherence, coordination and complementarity' between the extensive array of policies, players and instruments within and outside the EU all working in the same area. The main difficulty is that different Member States and different external donors have different priorities and tensions can arise when the needs and interests of each pull in different directions.

5.2.2 Within the EU, the complexity of structures across its institutions and directorates means practical coordination between those responsible is another significant challenge. Similarly, there exists an important need to ensure coherence between those policies which specifically target fragile zones, such as development aid, and those which can have a major impact on them, particularly trade, investment, climate change and energy policy. The creation of the EEAS is seen as a real opportunity to 'join the dots' of policy and practice between the EU institutions and between the EU, its Member States and other major donors, such as the United Nations, the US, China, and other stakeholders.

5.2.3 While the 'holy grail of a comprehensive approach' remains elusive, efforts have been made to use EU instruments in a more coherent manner. A recent example was the Foreign Affairs Council of June 2011 which agreed an inclusive

approach to Sudan and South Sudan ranging from political dialogue through civilian capacity-building to development aid and trade co-operation. The EU's recent 'Agenda for Change' re-prioritising its development policy, is another example of a new peace-building approach. The proposals include emphasis on human rights, democracy, equality, good governance and links with civil society. This is seen in some quarters as valuable new thinking while others believe it has not gone far enough.

5.3 Enhanced role for civil society in conflict transformation

5.3.1 The process of conflict transformation requires some fundamental changes in attitudes and behaviour. Inclusion, engagement, and dialogue are weapons that challenge fear, hatred intolerance and injustice and form the building blocks which create an environment for conflict prevention and peace-building. This work has to be carried out at grass roots and street level where peace-building matters most. Here, the involvement of civil society organisations which share the EU values of equality, human rights, inclusion and tolerance, can no longer be left to chance and support for those who are vulnerable, at risk or simply cannot get their voices heard must be given priority.

5.3.2 It is widely accepted that civil society organisations have a crucial role to play in ensuring the effectiveness and long-term sustainability of any peace-building strategy. Cooperation and consultation with local 'non-state actors' serves not only to increase EU understanding of a conflict situation from the bottom up, but also ensures grass roots 'ownership' of the process. It also helps promote more 'conflict-sensitive' peace-building and serves as positive reinforcement of their peace-building efforts.

5.3.3 Until now, the focus of peace-building, whether at policy or operational level, has tended to overlook those groups whose influence on the process can be crucial. Women, who often hold together the fabric of society in a conflict, are rarely represented in decision making. The 'back to business' approach used by local traders in conflict zones is an important demonstration of resilience which merits support. Trade union activity, such as the peace and solidarity demonstrations often seen on what are now EU streets, is another effective resource in support of peace-building. Young people need support to channel their energies in constructive ways and vulnerable groups, particularly victims, need expert focussed attention.

5.3.3.1 Conflict prevention and reconciliation between divided groups is increasingly recognised as meriting greater attention in peace-building efforts. Education plays a vitally important role in this regard, teaching young people not only to

accept but also to respect difference. The media is another significant player to consider particularly the role social media can play in influencing positive change. Promoting specific strategies to bring groups together, such as intercultural dialogue and mediation is another important part of this work.

5.3.4 'Structured dialogue' between the EU and civil society organisations in conflict zones can create lasting relationships and understanding at ground level. Because of its close connections with organised civil society, the EESC is well placed to play a greater role in EU engagement with grass roots organisations in these regions. It is already working with business, trade unions and others in places such as China, Tibet, Lebanon, North Africa and the ACP and is keen to step up this experience sharing to 'underpin and strengthen' the efforts of civil society organisations and work with the EU on peace building projects.

5.4 Greater recognition of the value of exchange of experience

5.4.1 As a community of 27 nations joined together for the common good, the EU is in a position to share its own distinct experience with others. From its decision-making process to its enlargement strategy, the EU offers examples of a practice which could be replicated by regional associations in other parts of the world. The African Union is one such organisation which is emulating the EU approach and others are keen to do likewise. There are other successful examples of countries and regions which have managed to bring about change without conflict and these are well worth highlighting in peace-building policy and practice.

5.4.2 Because it has been working on peace-building in external relations since its inception, the EU also has a vast amount of experience to share from areas such as South East Asia, the Middle East, Central America, the Balkans and Sub-Saharan Africa. Some of this work has been highly successful, some less so. Indeed, the EU's record in certain conflict zones has been the subject of severe criticism but even these experiences could serve to advise policy if the 'lessons learned' are properly passed on.

5.4.3 In terms of 'positive experience sharing', there is much to learn. The Aceh Peace Process in Indonesia, the re-connection of the sewage system in the divided city of Nicosia⁽⁵⁾ and EU support for peace in Northern Ireland are all examples which could be used more extensively in the EU tool kit of peace-building experience. While there is no 'one size fits all', there are core principles common to many conflict zones which cannot be ignored.

⁽⁵⁾ See Committee of the Regions Opinion on 'City diplomacy' of 12 February 2009 (OJ C 120/01, 28.5.2009).

5.4.4 Research shows, however, that this sharing of experience is not well established in EU policy particularly if it cuts across internal and external action. In the case of the Northern Ireland PEACE Programme there is a lack of any systematic approach to shared learning with other areas of conflict. Given that the EU is credited for helping contribute to peace in the region, that the Barroso Task Force on Northern Ireland recommended experience sharing with other conflict zones and that a 'Peace Network' has been set up to do exactly that, the apparent lack of read-across from this to external action is a missed opportunity and a major policy flaw.

5.5 Towards the creation of a Centre for Peace-building

5.5.1 A great deal therefore needs to be done for the EU to establish its credentials as a world leader in peace-building strategy and ensure its work has greater reach and impact. One proposal under discussion is the creation of a European Institute for Peace called for by the former President of Finland and the Swedish Minister for Foreign Affairs to ensure greater 'coherence, coordination and complementarity' in EU peace-building efforts. For their part, Northern Ireland leaders have proposed an International Centre of Excellence dedicated to peace-building outside Belfast, for which they have requested EU PEACE funds and the European Parliament has entered the debate and produced a policy document entitled 'a Blue Print for an Institute for Peace'.

5.5.2 The possibility of the creation of a new Institute/Centre linked with other bodies working in the field, such as the EUISS or the Agency for Fundamental Rights, is one worth serious consideration. If such an organisation could provide a focus for independent expert advice, dialogue, training, study and experience sharing between people working in the field, it may prove a valuable asset supporting the work of the EEAS in this crucial area of EU action.

5.6 An opportunity not to be missed

5.6.1 This Opinion focuses on how best the EU could organise itself to play a more constructive role in what has become the greatest challenge facing the world today – conflict resolution. The fact that there is no definition of peace-building and the EU has not yet formulated a peace-building strategy means there is virtually a blank sheet from which to work. This is a rare opportunity for the EU in the area of international relations which may not come again.

5.6.2 The creation of the EEAS should allow the EU to seize that opportunity and move into the driving seat of international peace-building. The challenge now is to design a distinct peace-building strategy which not only achieves coherence between

EU programmes and policies but also between the values and interests of the EU and its Member States. This may prove difficult without a common foreign policy setting out accepted principles for intervention or non-intervention in areas of conflict, but there are those who believe that a 'whole of EU approach' is the only way to ensure peace-building has a real impact on the ground.

5.6.3 History has taught the EU the value of democracy over dictatorship, the importance of justice, equality and human rights and the dangers of intolerance, xenophobia, discrimination and prejudice. From world war to the fall of the Berlin Wall, the EU is constantly moving along a peace-building path, consolidating its achievements and paving the way for others to follow. It has faced many testing times, not least the current

financial crisis, but its fundamental values serve as a touchstone for EU action at home and abroad from which it must never deviate.

5.6.4 In this time of internal crisis and introspection the EU must not lose sight of the bigger picture and its global responsibilities. It must not abandon external policies and commitments and needs to carve out a distinct role for itself which no other nation or group of nations can match. As a peace-builder, the EU brings its history, its ethos and its unique brand of 'bottom-up' intervention to an arena where reputation, understanding, experience, generosity and trust are the most valued actors. As a world leader in peace-building the EU also needs the confidence, the conviction and the courage to step forward.

Brussels, 19 January 2012.

*The President
of the European Economic and Social Committee*
Staffan NILSSON

APPENDIX

Persons interviewed during the preparation of this opinion:

1. Mr Gerrard Quille (Policy Adviser on Security and Defence Policy, Policy Department, DG External Policies, European Parliament).
 2. Ms Franziska Katharina Brantner (MEP) - Member of the Greens /European Free Alliance Group; Member of the Committee on Foreign Affairs; Rapporteur on the Proposal for a Regulation Establishing an Instrument for Stability and Member of the Delegation for Relations with Israel.
 3. Marc Van Bellinghen, Acting Head of Division and Andrew Byrne, Administrator: Policy Board Global and Multi-lateral Issues, Direction C, Conflict Prevention & Security Policy, Division for Peacebuilding, Conflict Prevention & Mediation, European External Action Service.
 4. Mr Kyriacos Charalambous, Programme officer - EU policies, DG REGIO D1, Unit Programme Coordination, Relations with Other Institutions and NGOs, Simplification, Solidarity Fund, and Ms Tamara Pavlin, Programme Manager – EU Policies, DG REGIO D4, Unit Ireland, United Kingdom.
 5. Ms Catherine Woollard, Executive Director, EPLO (European Peacebuilding Liaison Office).
 6. Ms Olga Baus Gibert (International Relations Officer – Peacebuilding – Crisis Response Planner, Service for Foreign Policy Instruments, Unit Stability Instrument Operations.
 7. Mr David O'Sullivan, Chief Operating Officer, European External Action Service.
 8. Prof. Dr Joachim Koops, Academic Director, European Peace and Security Studies, Vesalius College, Brussels, and Director of the Global Governance Institute.
 9. Ms Danuta Hübner (MEP) - Member of the European People's Party Group - Chair of the Regional Development Committee, Member of the Special Committee on the Financial, Economic and Social Crisis, Member of the Delegation for Relations with the United States and Substitute Member of the Committee on Economic and Monetary Affairs.
 10. Mr Van den Brande, President of CIVEX Committee, Committee of the Regions.
 11. Ms Mireia Villar Forner, Senior Policy Adviser, Crisis Prevention and Recovery, UN/UNDP.
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