

Europe

Regional perspectives for the White Paper on Peacebuilding

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Introduction

The 2014 Global Peace Index ranks Europe as the world's most peaceful region. But despite this ranking, Europe is not devoid of conflict and risks to peace. From Europe's fragile peace processes to 'frozen conflicts', from the role of the European Union (EU) to the active peacebuilding role of European actors (both governmental and non-governmental) outside Europe, there are challenges and opportunities to consider that are in or emanating from this continent. The current crisis in Ukraine has brought the need for peacebuilding closer to the heart of Europe. The paper also highlights that the extent to which Europe-based actors are affecting the dynamics of conflicts outside Europe should also be a greater concern for peacebuilders.

Challenges to building peace in Europe

Fragile Peace Processes. Post-conflict transitions are underway in several regions of Europe, including the Western Balkans, Northern Ireland and arguably the Basque region of Spain, as well as with respect to the conflict between the Turkish government and the Kurdish population of Turkey. In these regions, multi-faceted peacebuilding efforts involve local and international actors. Despite positive developments, and even the dissemination of 'lessons' and 'good practice', peacebuilders warn against complacency and emphasise the remaining challenges, including reconciliation, justice and institutional reform. Recent reminders of these challenges include the conflicts over displaying flags in Northern Ireland, 2012-2013, and protests in Bosnia and Herzegovina during 2013. Key challenges for peacebuilding in Europe include the risks of institutionalisation of conflict dynamics in power-sharing arrangements and the competition, inefficiencies and resentment generated by the presence of many international organisations.

'Frozen conflicts'. 'Frozen conflicts' are situations where there are unresolved issues related to past violent conflict, especially with respect to contested borders and often involving breakaway entities. Many of these conflicts remain in a state of suspended animation, with little progress in tackling the causes of

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conflict (such as identity questions or the absence of minority rights) or in managing its immediate manifestations (such as border disputes). Cases include conflicts over Moldova and Transnistria, Cyprus and Northern Cyprus, Nagorno Karabakh, Abkhazia, and South Ossetia.

Many peacebuilders do not like the label 'frozen conflict' in part because, although these are situations where violence is contained, there is a risk that it re-emerges. Peacebuilding initiatives continue in these areas, often focusing on confidence-building measures to facilitate dialogue and contact among affected communities and conflict parties.

Conflicts related to independence and autonomy. There are risks of violence where separatists seeking independence or greater autonomy and rights have used violence or have been met with violence by states. There are also separatist conflicts in European countries that have been managed non-violently, including in Belgium, the United Kingdom (UK) and the recent stages of Kosovo's independence. Increasingly complex constitutional settlements are being negotiated to prevent the break-up of nations.

The crisis in Ukraine. The unfolding crisis in Ukraine is the most obvious current challenge in Europe. A key concern for peacebuilders is developing peaceful responses to the crisis in the short-term – and peaceful responses that abide by peacebuilding principles, e.g. supporting local actors to resolve their own conflicts – and then advocating for these peaceful responses to be adopted. It is also imperative to tackle the underlying causes of the conflict, be they poor governance, identity clashes or the geostrategic competition of external actors. Finally, there is a challenge related to interpretations of the crisis, as those arguing for increases in military spending in Europe are using the crisis to argue their case; the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation's (NATO) Secretary-General, for example, has repeatedly argued that defence cuts in Europe were a cause of the crisis.

In addition, the crises highlight Europe's responsibility for exacerbating conflict risks, including the need to explore complicity in poor governance and corruption, for conflict sensitivity in trade relations, and to integrate peacebuilding into the EU's approach to neighbouring countries.

The EU as a peace process. One of the reasons for the creation of the European Economic Community (EEC) was to promote peace in Europe following a series of devastating wars. The EU is thus in part a peace project – or more properly an ongoing peace process, at the heart of which is conflict transformation through economic and cultural integration. Recent challenges to the EU and a lack of popular support for it could undermine peace in Europe. Criticism of the EU is caused in part by the financial crisis and is linked to wider disillusionment with political leadership. Inequality and dissatisfaction have led to social unrest in Europe, but that has tended to remain peaceful, taking the form of large demonstrations and strikes across the continent.

Nationalism and a crisis of political legitimacy in Europe. Extremist nationalist forces in Europe have risen in prominence and, in some countries, in popularity in the last twenty years. They generate social tensions and violence either directly or through incitement of racial hatred. These parties and movements have certain differences; however, there is a common core to all – anti-immigration and anti-EU policies. They remain a minority, albeit a visible and troubling one. These movements should be seen as part of a wider crisis of political legitimacy in Europe. There is a widespread lack of public support for and public approval of political parties, individual politicians and political leaders.

Building peace in Europe's cities. Peacebuilders talk increasingly about violence rather than conflict, as more deaths are caused outside traditional conflict situations. Within Europe, types of violence where a peacebuilding approach could be applied include urban, criminal and gang violence in European cities. Several years of economic crises, rising economic inequality and high levels of youth unemployment have made many European cities a new focus for peacebuilding efforts, especially with respect to social integration and violence reduction efforts.

Europe in the world: building peace and generating conflict at the same time. Many European actors are engaged in peacebuilding elsewhere in the world. At the governmental and inter-governmental levels, there has been an increase in the use of peacebuilding approaches, including an increase in the number and size of European peacebuilding organisations, as well as a new focus on peacebuilding by development organisations. This boom might be ending due to the continuing cuts in development assistance which are one of the knock-on effects of the financial crisis.

In contrast, Europe also generates conflict elsewhere in the world, including continued arms exports, complicity in poor governance and human rights abuses, political and economic support for abusive governments, increased demand for trafficked goods and people, and through the facilitation of illicit financial flows, including money-laundering and hosting stolen state assets. While work is taking place to tackle these causes of conflict, it is not always prioritised by peacebuilding actors or directly linked to efforts to address conflict. In addition, the legacies of the military interventions in Iraq, Afghanistan and Libya, and continued application of counter-terrorism policies, are contributing to conflict and instability in these countries and neighbouring regions.

Opportunities for building peace in Europe

Conflict analysis. Support to efforts to build peace in the situations of ongoing violence and risk of conflict is important, given that in all cases there are also opportunities, from the changing stance of the government in Georgia, to the revival of peace negotiations in Cyprus, to the use of the EU enlargement framework in the Western Balkans. A detailed analysis of the conflict risks and elaboration of possible peacebuilding responses would be a logical next step in tackling conflict risk in Europe. If the post-2015 Sustainable Development Goals both include peace and are universal, they could also be used as a framework for addressing conflict risks in Europe.

A common agenda for prevention. There is widespread support for preventive action, especially given the prevailing evidence about cost effectiveness. In practice, however, a key challenge is the operationalisation of prevention, i.e. moving from policy commitments and platitudes to ensure that preventive action takes place and then demonstrating results. In the related fields of prevention of genocide and mass atrocities and humanitarian work discussions on preventive action are taking place, such as in the debate on resilience. There may be scope for collective action and the development of a common agenda on prevention. Collective action is more feasible when the focus is on activities rather than on concepts or principles, discussion of which tends to lead to an emphasis on differences rather than similarities. Opportunities for collective activities could include: development of integrated early warning systems and integrated risk analysis; jointly publicising examples of successful prevention; preventive diplomacy, including

mediation and political crisis management missions; and measuring, comparing and campaigning for preventive capacity.

European foreign policies. The EU is described as a normative power, meaning variously that it is a model for others to follow, a community that other nations aspire to join or that it is a promoter of norms elsewhere in the world through a (to some extent) ethical foreign policy. The role of the EU in promoting peace may be threatened by the campaign to increase military power of the EU that was prominent in the run up to the Summit in December 2013. There will be a change in leadership in all the main EU institutions during 2014. Influencing the people and their policies is an opportunity for European peacebuilding organisations, but given the continued – and indeed increased – role of the Member States, targeting them is a means to this end. Influencing European states' bilateral action is also crucial, with peacebuilding integrated to a very limited extent in most cases, and challenges posed by the rise of commercial diplomacy and likely cuts in development assistance.

The EU's Enlargement and Neighbourhood Policies. The EU's enlargement policy is considered a success in general and in terms of promoting peace, including through institutional reform, an emphasis on minority protection and the engagement of elites. With the prospect of membership, that provides considerable economic and political benefits, the EU is able to combine an important incentive with tough conditions in a managed process to support peaceful development. The success of the enlargement policy stands in contrast to the EU's European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP), which frames its approach in its eastern and southern 'neighbourhoods'. A key task of the next leadership of EU external affairs will be to reform the ENP, including better integration of peace and conflict. The EU's role in supporting peace elsewhere in the world is hampered by the complexity of its funding mechanisms, which means that many peacebuilding organisations struggle to apply for and manage the funds. Although the problem is well known, the EU decision makers in question (the Member States and the European Parliament, rather than the European Commission) have not demonstrated a commitment to reform.

Peace in European development assistance. Europe remains a major provider of development assistance, through European countries' bilateral agencies and collectively through the EU. While not wishing to overstate the role of development assistance, in countries where it makes up a large proportion of gross domestic product (GDP) it still has the potential to contribute to positive change. The extent to which European development assistance is supporting peace is hard to measure comprehensively. Evaluations indicate this is happening but that it could be improved. Peacebuilding organisations argue for the reform of development assistance to integrate peace through conflict sensitivity based on analysis to identify conflict risks and ensuring that assistance is focused on having a positive impact on conflict, or at least on not doing harm; on using development assistance to support peacebuilding activities; and on taking a political rather than technical approach to development, such as analysing and addressing power dynamics, supporting reform to improve accountability of state institutions, including the security sector, and focusing on state-society relations.

There is also an opportunity to engage in the current review of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development's (OECD) Development Assistance Committee (DAC) criteria that determine eligible uses of development assistance, with some European governments pushing for changes that would allow for a wider range of security and defence activities, including currently excluded military expenditure to be funded by development assistance.

From a peacebuilding perspective, the current criteria are adequate because as they allow inclusion of civilian peacebuilding activities as part of development policy and practice.

Returning fighters. A prominent issue in the European media is the security risk posed by the return of fighters from the conflict in Syria. According to the European Police Office (EUROPOL), up to 2000 EU citizens are involved. This is another issue on which a peacebuilding response could highlight the need to address the root causes of the problem, such as disaffection, social exclusion and Islamophobia, which are among the factors leading to the recruitment of young people into the fighting.

Required support for building peace and the role of the UN

Tackling the mismatch in supply of and demand for peacebuilding. For a variety of political and financial reasons, peacebuilding activities do not always fit the need. There is a concentration of peacebuilding in certain geographic areas and a concentration on certain types of activity. For example, while there are conflict risks across Central Asia, activities focus on Kyrgyzstan, largely for operational reasons, with the UN, the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and the EU active, and an increase in the efforts of international non-governmental organisations (INGOs). After violence or during high-profile transitions there might be an influx of peacebuilding actors, for example, in Tunisia, Myanmar or Mali (yet four years ago few peacebuilding activities were carried out in the Sahel region despite the conflict risks). Finding support for long-term preventive work remains difficult.

Financial support. Limited resources are available for peacebuilding activities in Europe, which is one of the reasons why many civil society organisations have focused their attention on other regions. Where funds are available, the range of funding sources is not as wide as it was. For example, most European bilateral donors have ended their direct funding of activities in the Western Balkans; EU member states work through the EU. While this improves 'coordination', the complexity of EU funding mechanisms also leads to problems in accessing the funds for many organisations in the region. As well as a lack of funding for peace programme work in Europe, funding for advocacy work to influence European policy-makers is scarce. While peace work can and does of course continue without funding – for example, through the use of volunteers and activists – the consequences continue to be a certain distortion when it comes to the work of higher profile peacebuilding organisations that focus on regions other than Europe. In contrast, human rights organisations and indeed humanitarian organisations are increasingly active in Europe, both in response to need and because they have unrestricted funding.

The role of the UN. Despite the number of regional inter-governmental bodies working on peace and security within Europe, there is still a role for the UN. First, the UN as a neutral player has a role to play in conflict prevention and supporting peace processes. There may be situations in which it would be the preferred mediator and/or facilitator of dialogue among conflict parties, in peacekeeping and peacebuilding activities. Indeed, the UN still has missions in Europe and it is playing a part in the crisis in Ukraine. Secondly, the norm-setting and enforcing role of the UN is also relevant in Europe. The implementation of international legal standards within Europe and elsewhere in the world by Europe should be monitored by the UN as for any other region. The role of the UN is perhaps complicated by the fact that European countries are its biggest donors.

Europe strengthening UN peacebuilding and vice versa. The relationship between the EU and the UN is multi-faceted and there are many ways in which peacebuilding could be better

integrated. While the UN has previously viewed the EU primarily as a donor the relationship is taking on a more political dimension through regular contact between staff at all levels and through the creation of political posts at the UN office in Brussels.

In the area of peacebuilding, as the EU continues to grow its capacity, the two may struggle to avoid competition for resources (human and financial) and for roles in conflict-affected countries. It depends in part on the relationship between the EU and its own Member States: if the EU is present in a conflict in addition to a range of EU Member States then it is more likely to enter into competition with the UN – they become two multilaterals in the same territory. However, if the EU is present instead of EU Member States, it has a different role – it is a regional actor, a vehicle for collective action on behalf of European nations.

While the EU itself and individual countries remain major donors to the UN, they have leverage to support reform of the UN system and to improve its effectiveness at building peace. On the other hand, the UN can also support peacebuilding in Europe by ensuring that normative standards are upheld in Europe as well as other regions and by European actors when they are engaged in conflict elsewhere. The UN's work to support regional bodies' efforts in peacebuilding should also include the EU as a target, rather than viewing it solely as a vehicle for 'capacity-building' exercises directed at other regional organisations.

About the author: Catherine Woollard has been Executive Director of the European Peacebuilding Liaison Office (EPLO) since 2008. She is writing here in a personal capacity. She previously worked as an advisor on anti-corruption and governance reform in transition countries and held the positions of Director of Policy and Communications at Conciliation Resources, Senior Programme Coordinator at Transparency International and Europe/Central Asia Programme Coordinator at Minority Rights Group International. She has also worked as a lecturer in political science, teaching and researching on international politics, and for the UK civil service.

About this Paper: This paper is part of a series providing regional peacebuilding perspectives for the White Paper on Peacebuilding. The authors' task was to provide an authentic, original and honest analysis about three questions: (1) What are the main challenges for building peace in your region? (2) What are the key opportunities for building peace in your region over the next one or two years? (3) What would be the key support necessary to build peace in your region over the next one or two years? Is there any specific role for the UN?

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About the White Paper on Peacebuilding: The White Paper on Peacebuilding is a collaborative, multi-stakeholder process initiated by the Geneva Peacebuilding Platform and supported by the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs. It has the objective to situate UN peacebuilding within the broader peacebuilding universe and to articulate visions for the future for building peace in violent and fragile contexts. The White Paper places peacebuilding within the changing characteristics of armed violence and security, and within the practical evidence of engagements in peacebuilding contexts emanating from a diversity of fields. Ensuring a better relationship between UN peacebuilding and the broader peacebuilding field is a complementary effort to the existing work surrounding the 10-year review of the UN peacebuilding architecture and an effort to take stock of the nature and evolution of the broader peacebuilding universe.

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