

Benita Ferrero-Waldner

European Commissioner for External Relations and European Neighbourhood Policy

Conflict Prevention – looking to the future

*Check Against Delivery
Seul le texte prononcé fait foi
Es gilt das gesprochene Wort*

Conflict Prevention Partnership dialogue on “Five years after Göteborg: the European Union and its conflict prevention potential”

Brussels, 12 September 2006

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I will break with keynote speaker tradition by not launching into a meta-analysis of conflict prevention challenges, after all, as one of my hosts put it in a recent article "big overarching theories about conflict may be good for keynote speeches, and certainly good for royalties ... but they never seem to work very well in practice."

So I will stick to practicalities.

As you know, the report being presented today is one of the last in the series by the Conflict Prevention Partnership (CPP). We in the Commission are pleased with our support for the CPP. It has been a successful part of our pilot project for a Conflict Prevention Network, an important step to achieving the Göteborg objective of improving our cooperation with civil society actors.

The CPP has provided us with valuable opportunities for dialogue and analytical input to the process of developing the Commission's policy and strategies.

Now we want to build on this experience and continue our work with civil society actors in the future. So let me preface my remarks by congratulating all the participants in CPP, and thank you for contributing to our common goal: a more effective EU approach to conflict prevention.

The report on "Five years after Göteborg", which Dr Begeer will present to you in a moment, is a very interesting assessment of the EU's achievements and defects since 2001. I don't want to pre-empt his remarks by going into detail, let me just say that the report makes some very valid and insightful comments, which we will study carefully.

Instead let me give you my own perspective on achievements since Göteborg.

I remember clearly the importance we attached to the Göteborg programme when we adopted it. We regarded it as a milestone in the development of coherent EU action on the international stage. Although, as CPP's report rightly points out, the long-term approach involved in conflict prevention is frequently knocked off course by the imperatives of short-term crisis management, Göteborg did mark a new departure in a more rigorous and effective approach to conflict prevention. Crisis management and conflict prevention are in any case complementary activities, and both deserve our full political commitment.

This audience will be familiar with the role the EU has been playing in tackling some of the more high-profile conflicts around the world, such as Sudan and Lebanon. But let me illustrate how our conflict prevention activities have evolved since Göteborg with our work on conflicts that don't always get the media attention they deserve.

1) Aceh

Effective conflict prevention requires close coordination between the short-term crisis management instruments and the longer term measures to tackle the root causes and prevent the re-emergence of conflict. In our work to support peace and reconstruction in **Aceh** we have made great strides in achieving that coordination.

The Commission financed President Ahtisaari's peace negotiations using our Rapid Reaction Mechanism. The EU launched the Aceh Monitoring Mission to monitor compliance with the Peace Agreement. And at the same time the Commission and Member States, working with the international community, put in place a package of long term measures to support the peace process. This addresses the structural issues: reintegration of Free Aceh Movement combatants and prisoners; reforms of the local administration and promoting the rule of law, human rights and democracy.

2) Transnistria

Speed is of the essence in conflict prevention, yet it has traditionally not been the Commission's strong point. Now however, with the introduction of the Rapid Reaction Mechanism (RRM), we are able to react speedily and bridge the gap between crisis and long-term peacebuilding.

Thanks to RRM we were able to respond quickly to a political opening between **Moldova and Ukraine** and mobilise a monitoring mission to their border late last year. By helping prevent trafficking of people, smuggling of goods, proliferation of weapons and customs fraud we expect the mission will contribute to a peaceful resolution of the Transnistrian conflict.

3) DRC

Our skill in using the EU's different conflict prevention instruments to complement each other is increasing. In the **Democratic Republic of Congo** we are financing security sector reform, an essential prerequisite for both the internal and external security of a state and its people; we are also supporting the demobilisation and reintegration of former combatants; and we helped prepare the path for the country's elections last summer. The Commission is working together the ESDP Missions on the ground, for example, just last week the Commission made funds available to the EUFOR military mission for community outreach projects in Kinshasa. And we're also targeting judicial reform and sustainable governance.

Another important element of our conflict prevention work of direct relevance to DRC is our focus on the role natural resources play in igniting and sustaining conflict. We support the Kimberley Process on conflict diamonds, and will take over the Chairmanship of the Process in 2007. We are also working on conflict timber and implementing our EU action plan for Forest Law Enforcement, Governance and Trade in a number of countries. And we are supporting better regional management of shared water resources.

I do not want to sound complacent or self-congratulatory. We know that there is still work to be done to optimise our work on conflict prevention. Conflict is not inevitable and we should never lose heart or accept that some conflicts are too intractable to be averted. Before I close, let me share with you some of the priorities we're pursuing in our quest for ever-more effective intervention.

1) Coherence and Coordination

Although we've made progress in improving the coherence and coordination of the EU's different conflict prevention instruments, there's still room for progress. You may be familiar with the concept paper which the Commission published in June, containing some practical proposals for greater coherence, effectiveness and visibility of the EU's external action.

We've already begun putting these into effect, last weekend saw the first of the proposed six-monthly meetings between the Presidency, Commission and High Representative for CFSP, at which we reviewed the EU's external actions and discussed priorities. We are making progress on simplifying procedures to allow us to respond more flexibly. And we are beginning to implement the exchange programme between Commission, Council and Member States, and utilise our extensive network of delegations more strategically.

2) European Neighbourhood Policy

We are also extending the range of our conflict prevention tools. The European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) is designed to promote stability, security and prosperity, thus mitigating potential conflicts. And the ENP Action Plans list specific conflict prevention activities. We put great emphasis on governance issues, including security sector reform, which makes a vital contribution to preventing conflict.

I want to fully exploit ENP's potential to contribute to conflict prevention in Moldova, the South Caucasus, and around the Mediterranean. That will mean encouraging links between civil society and government, and promoting local ownership.

This is also an important contribution to conflict sensitivity, namely ensuring that all our policies and programmes take into account their possible impact on conflict.

3) Human Security

The Commission is a strong supporter of the concept of human security – putting individuals at the heart of security concerns. The Finnish Presidency is taking steps to bolster the EU's commitment to this approach, and we will be working actively with them in the coming months to translate this into practice.

We have already done a great deal through our activities on landmines, security sector reform, gender issues and management of natural resources. Our task for the future is to build on these efforts.

We will be working on a cross-pillar concept on EU support for Demobilisation, Disarmament and Reintegration and implementing our May proposals on security sector reform.

And I will be looking in particular at how we can boost our work on **gender** issues. Although we have some experience of supporting women's participation in peacebuilding in countries like Afghanistan and Colombia, we could do much more. I see the need for further policy and operational work in this area in the coming year.

4) Contact with civil society

Finally, as I mentioned at the beginning, we want to go further in deepening our contacts with civil society, building on this experience with the CPP.

In the short term we will continue our Conflict Prevention Network funding to strengthen networks among civil society actors, and will be launching a call for proposals later this year.

In the future we hope this will be integrated into the peacebuilding partnership we are planning to set up under the new Stability Instrument, whose objective will be to enable a closer and more operational partnership with specialized European NGOs.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

As you can see, we have plenty of work to keep us busy. Which is as it should be – preventing violent conflict is one of the most important challenges of our time. As today's report points out "The EU has the potential to be a crucial player in conflict prevention...[with] the largest aid budget, the worlds' biggest market, historical and cultural ties with most of the sensitive regions and political presence in most economic fora".

It is my job to move us closer to fulfilling that potential. We need to have the courage to break new ground and try new approaches.

So let me thank the CPP once again for its contribution and wish you productive discussions this afternoon.