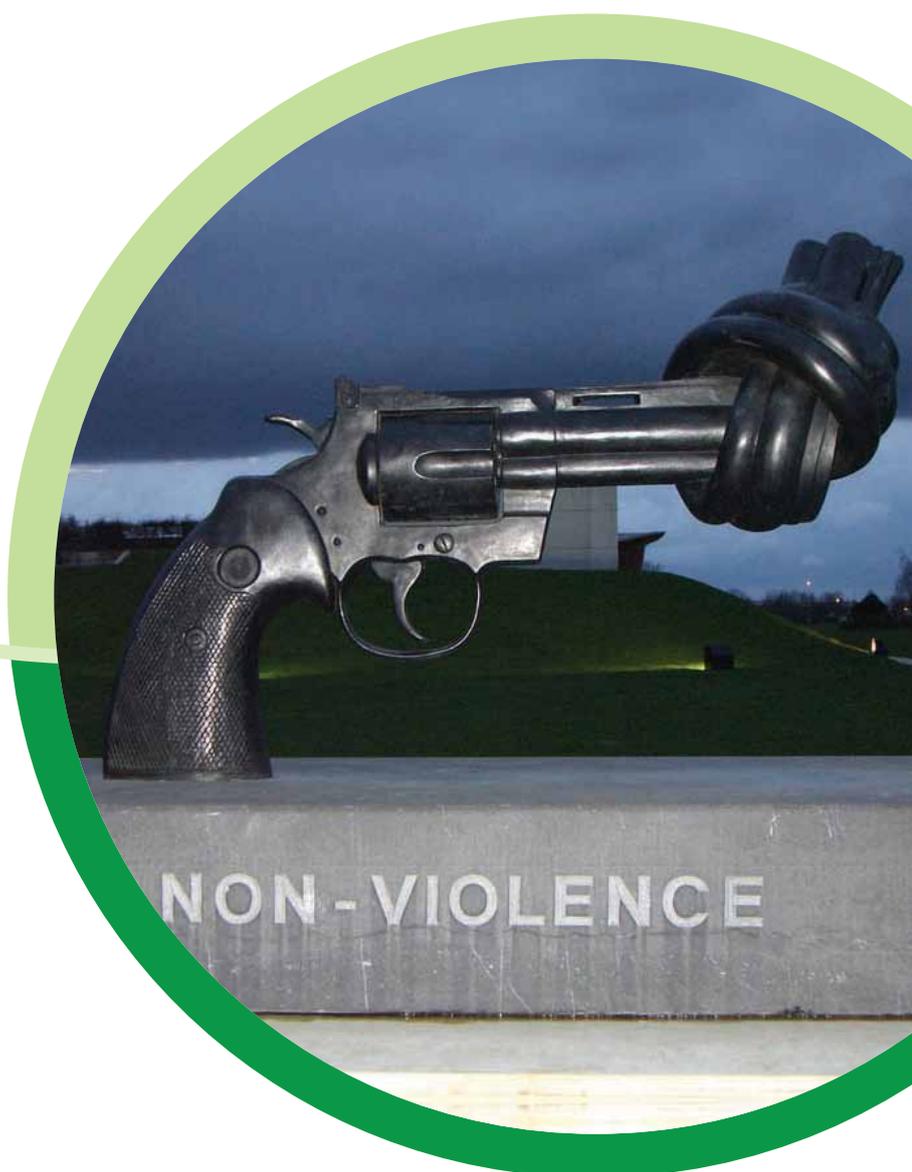


# THE EU'S POTENTIAL AND LIMITS FOR EARLY WARNING IN BOLIVIA, COLOMBIA AND VENEZUELA

Comparative case study of Bolivia, Colombia and Venezuela

Susanne Gratius

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<sup>1</sup> Available at <http://www.ifp-ew.eu/resource.php>

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## ACRONYMS

<b>AUC</b>	Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia [United Self-Defence of Colombia]
<b>EIDHR</b>	European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights
<b>ELN</b>	Ejército de Liberación Nacional [Army of National Liberation]
<b>EU</b>	European Union
<b>EWS</b>	Early Warning System
<b>FARC</b>	Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia [Armed Revolutionary Forces of Colombia]
<b>GDP</b>	Gross Domestic Product
<b>IFS</b>	Instrument for Stability
<b>MAS</b>	Movimiento al Socialismo [Movement for Socialism]
<b>OSCE</b>	Organization for Cooperation and Security in Europe
<b>UN</b>	United Nations
<b>UNODC</b>	United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime
<b>USAID</b>	United States Agency for International Development

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Although all three are Andean countries, conflicts in Bolivia, Colombia and Venezuela do not follow similar logic and require different responses from the EU. While tensions in Bolivia are part of a social conflict based on internal divisions, Colombia has still not resolved its armed conflict and Venezuela's widespread violence is the result of de-institutionalisation and political polarisation. Due to its long-term engagement, strong presence and multiple contacts, the EU has an acknowledged and broad capacity for conflict analysis, prevention and resolution in Bolivia and Colombia. The EU's engagement in those two countries contrasts with low visibility and a practical absence of security-related projects in Venezuela. This report stresses the need to improve early warning and conflict-prevention capacities in Bolivia and Colombia and calls for a European response on increasing violence in Venezuela.

## KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

### BOLIVIA:

- Increase efforts to strengthen state institutions and promote national dialogue;
- Stress local ownership of projects and include civil society in the design and evaluation of IfS and other conflict related projects;
- Intensify coordination between the European Commission and EU Member States, and include the EU in the informal donor coordination group on conflict prevention;
- Offer technical and financial support (in the framework of the IfS) to Bolivia's national EWS which might also be a useful tool for the EU itself to increase understanding of local conflict.

### COLOMBIA:

- Increase capacity for early warning and conflict prevention;
- Recover the (deactivated) national early warning system of the Ombudsman's office and improve local knowledge on local conflict drivers;
- Increase coordination efforts with the United States on this and other projects;
- Revise the strategy of "alternative development" (replacing coca plants with other agricultural products) and adapt it to Colombian necessities.

### VENEZUELA:

- Make a decision towards a more proactive policy on political violence and public security, broadening existing channels of communication (on socio-economic affairs);
- Revise current tools and projects, and adopt a more strategic vision on Venezuela;
- Establish closer contacts with both governmental and non-governmental actors to increase capacity for conflict assessment;
- Activate early warning mechanisms on fragile states within the European Commission (DEVCO A.5), with special attention to de-institutionalisation, impunity, prisons, repression, police corruption and political violence against non-governmental actors;
- Adapt the security concept to new challenges beyond traditional conflict patterns;
- Combine early warning mechanisms with conflict-prevention strategies and include Venezuela in the IfS;
- Promote national dialogue fora and build confidence between the government and civil society;
- Increase support for NGOs working on human rights and public security;
- Strengthen democratic institutions and state building (judicial, police, public administration and penal systems);
- Promote disarmament through public diplomacy.

# 1. INTRODUCTION

Compared to other multilateral actors, like the OSCE or the UN, the EU is a newcomer on Early Warning and conflict prevention. The development of proper instruments has been a relatively recent process which is already under evaluation and has to be adapted to the new requirements of the Lisbon Treaty<sup>2</sup>. Mechanisms are particularly sophisticated in preventing natural disasters, yet are underdeveloped when it comes to early warning on an upcoming conflict and/or humanitarian emergencies in different parts of the world.

There are clear institutional and financial restrictions on early warning systems (EWS). In general, their design is complex and multidimensional, evaluation is difficult and efficient early warning systems are expensive. Moreover, in many cases, even the best early warning system might fail because it does not reach the real decision makers or there is no response. To guarantee a fluent and regular exchange of information is one of the most challenging questions related to early warning systems. Thus, creating an early warning system means making a strategic choice, including interagency coordination, regular investment and long-term follow up.

While successes are invisible in nature (the absence of conflict), the examples for failed early “alerts” are numerous: neither was the genocide in Rwanda nor the recent humanitarian catastrophe in Kenya avoided. There are many other cases where massive human rights abuses or violent conflicts have not been communicated in advance. Further constraints are subjectivity, due to the selection of information, and the large number of indicators which has to be taken into account. However, even if early warning has been started by sounding the alert, proper responses are made in only very few cases.

In principle, different types of early warning can be distinguished. According to their purposes, there are early warning systems for human rights, political or ethnic conflicts, and natural disasters (the most sophisticated within the EU). They serve very different ends: early warning systems on conflict can be used to design a list of fragile or failed states or to detect human rights abuses or other conflicts/crises which might occur in partner countries. In this sense, the motivations for early warning vary from humanitarian and human rights concerns to hard security or economic interests.

With regard to the three countries analysed in this report, the reasons to relate them to the EU’s early warning “system” are very different: to foresee and prevent violent political and social confrontations in Bolivia; to detect human rights abuses and displacement in Colombia; to prevent a fragile state in Venezuela. National early warning systems on conflicts have emerged in Bolivia and Colombia. In these two cases, the EWS is still incipient in Bolivia and in clear decline in Colombia, where it was created to avoid human rights abuses and massacres.

The EU has neither supported national EWSs nor has it applied its own early warning system to prevent conflicts in Bolivia, Colombia and Venezuela, despite the fact that Bolivia and Colombia have been included in the Instrument for Stability (IfS). In the case of Venezuela, despite the low political will of the government, some Member States maintain security projects. Meanwhile, the European Commission has tried to get involved but has not taken any concrete actions to prevent or reverse widespread violence in Venezuela.

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2 See other reports published by International Alert, available at <http://www.initiativeforpeacebuilding.eu/publications/index.php>

## 2. CONFLICT PATTERNS AND NATIONAL RESPONSES

Although all three are Andean countries, conflicts in Bolivia, Colombia and Venezuela do not follow similar logic and require different responses. The main drivers of social conflict in Bolivia<sup>3</sup> are ethnic, political, social, institutional and territorial cleavages. The distribution of natural and strategic resources like natural gas are an essential part of confrontations between government, social movements and political opposition. High levels of social mobilisation indicate a conflict from below.

In contrast, an armed conflict between state, paramilitary groups and guerrillas has traditionally characterised the situation in Colombia<sup>4</sup>. Different to Bolivia and Venezuela, the violent actors, as well as the roots of the conflict (drugs trafficking, land disputes, and social and territorial cleavages), can be clearly identified, although recent demobilisations of warlords indicate a new and more diffuse conflict pattern based on the link between drugs trafficking and new criminal gangs called *bacrim*.

More complex is the picture in Venezuela. Widespread violence is the result of an explosive mix between political polarisation, the concentration of power, increasing de-institutionalisation, the violent resolution of personal conflicts, the circulation of arms and high levels of impunity<sup>5</sup>. Weak governmental responses and the lack of political will to increase public security in Venezuela contrast with the serious efforts of the governments in Bolivia and Colombia on early warning, conflict prevention and resolution.

While the United States is the main external actor in Colombia, due to diplomatic tensions between the Bolivian and Venezuelan governments and Washington, the EU has become a major external actor. Nonetheless, the EU's political profile and recognition as a liable partner of development in Bolivia and Colombia contrast with its low visibility, scarcer resources and smaller staff in Venezuela.

### 2.1. SOCIAL CONFLICTS AND ETHNIC DIVISIONS IN BOLIVIA

With 30.3 percent of the population living under the poverty line, Bolivia is the least developed of the three Andean countries; indigenous peoples represent 55 percent of the population and constitute a clear majority<sup>6</sup>. Since 2005 Bolivia's first indigenous president, Evo Morales, and his Movimiento al Socialismo (MAS) has ruled the country. For the moment, conflicts are under control, although there are many tensions which could result in open confrontation:

- ethnic divisions between indigenous and non-indigenous peoples;

3 For the definition of social conflict patterns see L. Telleria (2011). *La cooperación europea frente a los cambios y continuidades del conflicto social en Bolivia* [European cooperation with views to changes and continuities of the social conflict in Bolivia]. La Paz. Available at <http://www.ifp-ew.eu/pdf/201111fPEWFRIDECooperacionEuropeaEnBolivia.pdf>. Figures on Bolivia in this report which have not been externally referenced have been sourced from the Telleria publication.

4 See S. Ramirez (2011). *El conflicto colombiano y las respuestas de la UE* [The Colombian conflict and the responses of the EU]. Bogotá. Available at <http://www.ifp-ew.eu/pdf/201111fPEWFRIDEConflictoColombianoUE.pdf>. Figures on Colombia in this report which have not been externally referenced have been sourced from the Ramirez publication.

5 See F. Jácome (2011). *Violencia, inseguridad y polarización política en Venezuela* [Violence, insecurity and political polarisation in Venezuela]. Caracas. Available at <http://www.ifp-ew.eu/pdf/201111fPEWFRIDEViolenciaInseguridadEnVenezuela.pdf>. Figures on Venezuela in this report which have not been externally referenced have been sourced from the Jácome publication.

6 CIA World Factbook (2011). 'South America :: Bolivia', accessed 22nd November 2011. Available at <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/bl.html>

- political polarisation between government and opposition;
- conflict for resources (concentrated in the non-indigenous east of the country);
- conflict between development and protection of the environment and indigenous peoples;
- territorial divisions (east-west conflict) and separatism in the four departments of the so-called “half moon”<sup>7</sup>;
- conflicts over the role and model of the state (the Morales government is clearly state interventionist and the opposition liberal);
- the role and the independence of the judiciary.

Traditionally, social conflicts are the dominant pattern of political instability in Bolivia. The reasons are multiple, related to a dysfunctional state and the former model of an exclusive, élitist democracy. Among other factors, the main drivers of conflict are a weak democracy (from élite pacts to political polarisation), combined with a high degree of political demands and social mobilisation, a dysfunctional institutional system (parliament, justice, the armed forces and the police), social inequity and ethnic exclusion, and neoliberal economic reforms in the pre-Morales years. The results were political instability and high levels of violent conflict in the 1984-2008 period, particularly in 1984 and 2003. Previous to Evo Morales's mandate, social mobilisations forced several Presidents (among them Gonzalo Sánchez Lozada and Carlos Mesa) to resign. High social demands contrasted with low response capacity from governments. Three periods of conflicts can be distinguished:

- 1) 1985-2003. More than 200 victims of violent confrontations over economic and social policies. The government's responses focused on repression and the use of the police.
- 2) 2003-2005. Social demands, separatism of four departments in the eastern part of the country and political instability. Integrated in the Ministry of Presidency, the government of Carlos Mesa created a department for the prevention and resolution of conflicts including an **early warning** office. The initiative has been maintained and supported by the Morales Government; however, due to the lack of resources and expertise, no alerts or conflict-prevention measures have been adopted. The national early warning “system” serves to recompile information and is designed to anticipate and prevent conflicts and human rights abuses (lessons learned from violent conflicts) in the future. It does not receive any external support and is still at an initial stage. There is an urgent need for training, staff and intelligence gathering.
- 3) 2006-2011. Stable political leadership but with polarisation, separatism and continuity of social (violent pre-2008) mobilisations in different regions, as well as diplomatic tensions with Washington over drugs policy. Judicial conflict resolution by the Morales government, combined with visible improvements to social and economic indicators, led to lower levels of violence after 2008. In 2009 a new Constitution was approved, which combines indigenous visions with the Republican tradition, resulting in Morales's re-election. More recently, tensions have again increased due to strong internal opposition to government projects (the failed plan to build a motorway through the TIPNIS indigenous zone or the weak response to the popular election of judges in October 2011). Former channels of mediation (the Ombudsman and the Catholic Church) are no longer relevant and have not been replaced.

**Key conflict issues/key issues for early warning:** Popular mobilisation serves as an instrument for democratic participation and social demands. Low-intensity political and social conflicts have their roots in inequity, territorial divisions, the unequal distribution of resources and ethnic cleavages. The continuing high degree of social mobilisation and contestation over government policies, combined with weak democratic institutions and polarisation, entail risks of political instability and a return to violent confrontation. The national early warning system is not (yet) operational and needs financial and logistic support.

## 2.2. OLD AND NEW CONFLICT PATTERNS IN COLOMBIA

In terms of population and territory, Colombia – a middle-income country with high social inequity – is the most important of the three cases considered in this report. It hosts the last and oldest armed conflict in Latin America which has its roots in the 19th century. The main guerrilla groups, the ELN and the rural FARC, emerged in the

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<sup>7</sup> The departments of Beni, Pando, Santa Cruz and Tarija represent 44 percent of GDP.

1960s. As a response, paramilitary groups began to organise in the 1980s and narco-cartels used the state vacuum to expand their territorial and political influence. At the end of the Cold War, the increasing ideological weakness of ELN and FARC was compensated for by their involvement in drug trafficking, kidnapping and terrorist attacks. In the 1990s, President Ernesto Samper made territorial concessions to the FARC. Widespread violence characterised his government (1994-1998) as a result of a stronger FARC and the increasing influence of the paramilitary forces of AUC. The so-called “para-politics” led to a semi-feudal system in rural areas dominated by alliances between drug barons and paramilitaries who had infiltrated state institutions (Congress, government and local politics). Rural properties and regional disparities were at the heart of the conflict, according to NGOs, which led to 5 million displaced people, high homicide rates, human rights violations and the risk of a fragile state. The main national responses to armed conflict since the end of the 1990s can be summarised as follows:

- 1) Andrés Pastrana (1998-2002) started a peace process through negotiating with the FARC. New territorial concessions deepened the weakness of the state and its lack of a monopoly of violence, particularly in the country's rural areas, dominated by guerrillas, paramilitaries and drug barons. The 11th September 2001 attacks in the United States marked a radical shift in the government's policy from negotiation to the use of military force. The FARC and ELN were classified as terrorist groups by the Pastrana government and later on, in 2002, by the EU, following a Spanish initiative. Plan Colombia, launched in 2001, served as a national security strategy to combat warlords by military means. Generous resources provided by the US government were used to train and strengthen the armed forces and the police in their fight against guerillas and drug barons.

At the end of the Pastrana administration a sophisticated **early warning system** was launched, created in 2002 as part of the “independent” Ombudsman to prevent massive human rights abuses and forced displacements in rural areas. In its initial stages, it was co-financed by the United States through USAID. The EWS model distinguished between imminent and strategic warnings (two research units) and between formal and informal alerts. Alerts and information were provided and confirmed by diverse sources (governmental and non-governmental), based on strong support from local NGOs. Alerts were sent to different state entities, but mainly to the Colombian Armed Forces. A map of conflicts and a complicated system of variables with strong local impact (territory, relation between armed groups, societal type) was created to detect and prevent massacres. Imminent alerts were more efficient, while structural alerts did not receive any response. In its first years, the EWS increased its staff from 2 to 60 people. Several lessons can be drawn: (i) external financing (USAID) allowed for the creation of an independent, regional based EWS with feedback from NGOs; (ii) alerts failed due to a lack of response or late responses to warnings; (iii) a structural EWS with complicated, overly sophisticated data and too many variables is not viable; (iv) in midst of a conflict, it is extremely difficult to obtain politically “neutral” information on human rights abuses; (v) independence was hindered by strong interdependence between regional officers and local authorities; (vi) the fact that the armed forces created their own EWS undermined the efficiency of the Ombudsman-related system; (vii) it is difficult to balance strong relations with NGOs with a military response (and the risk of new human rights abuses) to early warnings and alerts; (viii) it is not clear who decides when and according to which criteria an early warning can be deactivated. Although the EWS was successful in some cases, there was no response or a too late a response in others.

- 2) Through its policy of “democratic security”, the government of Álvaro Uribe (2002-2010) further militarised the conflict. In 2005 Congress approved the Peace and Justice Law as an incentive for the demobilisation of paramilitaries and, to a minor extent, guerrillas. Based on strong support from the United States, Uribe's government recovered a military presence in rural areas and former FARC territories, and improved citizens' security. The balance began to shift towards the armed forces and both guerrilla groups and paramilitary forces were weakened. As a result, the conflict continued at a low-intensity level. The guerrillas retired to the northern and southern borders of Colombia. Their presence and the displacement of military operations to those regions provoked diplomatic tensions with Ecuador and Venezuela on several occasions. Under the Peace and Justice Law and the observation of the Organization of the American States (OAS), 30,000 paramilitaries were demobilised. Nonetheless, only three paramilitary leaders were judged and sentenced to (the maximum of) of eight years in prison. Uribe's policy had a series of negative consequences: firstly, the resurgence of *bacrim*; secondly, the increase of human rights abuses by military forces (particularly the “false positives”, scandal when 2,000 innocent young men, supposed to be guerrillas, were murdered); thirdly, a

populist policy of political polarisation between left and right; fourthly, a clientelist social policy and no land reform; fifthly, the symbiosis between state/government, paramilitaries and corruption.

With regards to the **EWS** related to the Ombudsman office, the system began to decline under the Uribe Presidency. In 2004, after a late response to an early warning on human rights abuses, USAID decided to withdraw funds and “nationalise” the system. Thereafter, the Colombian government created an official commission to supervise the EWS. From that moment on, the purpose of the EWS was to elaborate reports on human rights, without pronouncing any “alerts”. Since then, it has become insignificant and less independent.

- 3) President José Manuel Santos (2010-present), former Defence Minister under Uribe, maintained the strategy of democratic security, based on the military defeat of armed groups. Nonetheless, under his government, four major changes were introduced: (i) the recovery of properties including the return of land to former (displaced) owners and compensations; (ii) the recognition of the existence of an armed conflict and the possibility of negotiations with (a weakened) FARC and/or ELN, assisted by envisaged constitutional changes which would reform the legal framework for transitional justice; (iii) the approval, in June 2011, of a Victims and Land Law, including compensation for the victims of human rights abuses and murder, as well as *memoria histórica* [the witnesses of human rights abuses]; (iv) a penal reform which reduces the age of punishment to 14 years and eliminates prison sentences for minor infractions. All these steps are considered to be part of Santos's dual policy of national reconciliation and the military weakening of armed groups. At the regional level, through confidence-building measures, Santos has improved relations with Ecuador and Venezuela.

The responses of Uribe and Santos have been successful as strategies to downplay the armed conflict and increase citizens' security. The ELN is almost fully demobilised but still has some presence along the northern border with Venezuela. Although its alliance with drugs traffickers remains strong, the FARC has also been weakened and hit by the deaths of three of its main leaders. According to some local observers, there is a window of opportunity to negotiate with the FARC. Santos has also initiated introductory steps to recognise rural conflict and compensate victims (400,000 families were forced to abandon their lands without property titles). Nonetheless, the social roots of the conflict (high levels of inequity and major regional differences) still have to be addressed as well as the challenge of reintegrating former guerrilla fighters or paramilitaries into society.

**Key conflict issues/key issues for early warning:** Despite the reduction of armed conflict to some rural areas and the north and south border regions with Venezuela and Ecuador, human rights abuses and extrajudicial executions are still a common practice in Colombia. Furthermore, new criminal groups have emerged and could threaten the trend towards the weakening and demobilisation of non-state armed groups. For these new threats and others, the national early warning system, including alerts, could be reactivated (financial support from the EU should be considered).

### 2.3. WIDESPREAD VIOLENCE AND POLITICAL TENSIONS IN VENEZUELA

Without any evident reason for violence, Venezuela is today much more insecure than its neighbour Colombia. With a homicide rate of 52 per 100,000 inhabitants (2009 figures provided by NGOs)<sup>8</sup> – the third most common cause of death – the Andean country has become one of the most insecure in the Americas<sup>9</sup>. In 2009 Venezuela registered nearly 20,000 homicides and more than 16,000 kidnappings. Different to other countries, violent conflicts have multiple roots and are not directly related to clearly identifiable actors such as drug lords in Mexico, youth gangs in Central America or guerrilla groups like in Colombia. Violence is a result of three main driving factors:

- a fragile and inefficient state without the capacity to mediate or channel social conflicts;
- a government which lacks the political will and a weakened civil society without real capacity to respond;
- increasing political polarisation under the Chávez government (1999-present).

<sup>8</sup> The Government has not published official figures since 2005.

<sup>9</sup> In Caracas, the homicide rate has risen to 118 per 100,000 inhabitants.

Two main conflict streams are closely intertwined: political polarisation between the government and the opposition and increasing crime rates due to the circulation of arms and interpersonal conflicts. Many actors (at state and non-state level) are involved in violence. Unlike Bolivia and Colombia, the government has long ignored the problem (official statistics on crime have not been published since 2005) and reacted too late. As its response has been ad hoc and ideologically driven (the creation of a new Bolivarian police close to the Chávez government), it will probably not solve the problem in the short and/or medium term. Crime rates are particularly high in the poorest areas of the country dominated by Chávez loyals, where state institutions are mainly absent. High impunity (90 percent) and crime rates, and political conflicts and social disintegration offer an explosive mix which might transform Venezuela into a weak state.

The socio-economic consequences of violence are already visible: migration, capital flight and high poverty rates. Although public insecurity has been a long-term problem in Venezuela prior to the Chávez government, the situation has worsened during his presidency. Violence has multiple roots: (i) personal conflicts and the lack of instances for mediation in poor areas; (ii) the circulation of up to 15,000 weapons (among 28 million inhabitants); (iii) the increase of drugs trafficking and criminal gangs (nine out of ten victims are poor young men); (iv) a violent political discourse by the president and the militarisation of society by the creation of militias; (v) a process of de-institutionalisation (according to public opinion polls, 80 percent of citizens believe that the state is weak and 70 percent describe the police as highly inefficient, violent and corrupt); (vi) political polarisation between the government and political opposition as well as between central and local governments; (vii) repression of the opposition and harassment of NGOs; (viii) high poverty rates and inequity, combined with social decay; (ix) drugs trafficking (Venezuela is a major transit point in Latin America) and the presence of Colombian guerrilla groups in border regions; (x) the increasing difficulty to distinguish between crime and political violence.

Unlike Bolivia and Colombia, national responses to conflict have been weak, insufficient and uncoordinated. Given the fragility of institutions and the low political will of the government to address violence, no early warning system or conflict-prevention policies have been adopted, neither at the governmental nor NGO level. As 90 percent of Venezuelans consider public security the main national problem, the issue is highly politicised. In this particular context it would be extremely difficult to create a credible or neutral national early warning system.

Although the Chávez government approved 15 plans for national security and appointed 11 Ministers of Justice and Domestic Affairs, figures do not show any improvements. While judicial or prison reforms have not been addressed, since 2006 a police reform has been at the heart of the debate. The main findings of 2006 had been recently recovered by Minister Tareck El Aissami<sup>10</sup>. Major problems are the lack of coordination between the different security forces, human rights violations, corruption and impunity. Some progress has been made on training and salary incentives with regards to the new Bolivarian police in Caracas (3,000 men). However, the dominant response to violence, if there has been one at all, continues to be repression. The absence of a coherent government strategy has been partially compensated for by NGOs and other civil society initiatives. They have begun to monitor and analyse the phenomenon and publish their own figures based on official (not public) data. Nonetheless, repression and harassment against NGO representatives again proved the issue is part of the political confrontation between government and opposition in Venezuela. The prospects of presidential elections in 2012 and Chávez's illness are additional conflict factors in a polarised, difficult and tense political environment.

**Key conflict issues/key issues for early warning:** Mainly ignored by the international community, Venezuela is on the way to becoming a fragile state. Political conflicts and repression have increased, as well as homicide rates. The explosive mix between de-institutionalisation, polarisation, authoritarianism, the circulation of arms and high crime rates, combined with the crisis of political leadership following the illness of President Chávez, could result in violent confrontation.

<sup>10</sup> At a seminar on governance and police-management held in November 2011 in Venezuela (with the participation of Spanish and British experts). See: Consejo General de Policía (2011). *Gobernanza y gestión de la policía: Avances del nuevo modelo policial venezolano [Governance and police-management: progress of the new policing model in Venezuela]*. Publicaciones Monfort, Caracas.

### 3. EU ENGAGEMENT

More by accident than by vocation, the EU has become the main external political actor in Bolivia and Venezuela. In Venezuela, its engagement has been traditionally low compared to the prominent role of the United States. Tense relations between the Morales and Chávez governments with Washington have led to an upgrade of the EU's role in both countries. In all three countries, the EU is the main source of development assistance: in the 2007-2014 period, €320 million has been committed to Colombia, €234 million to Bolivia and €40 million to Venezuela.

The EU has a positive image and fluent relations with both governmental and non-governmental actors in Bolivia and Colombia. In these countries the EU plays a key role in social development and the fight against drugs (as a counterweight to US eradication policies). Alternative development, natural resources (Bolivian gas and Colombian oil) and trade can be identified as principal European interests.

The EU has a low profile in Venezuela. Contact with both the government and civil society in Venezuela is more limited due to the difficult and polarised political environment and the threat (made by the Chávez government) to cut external funds, particularly in sensitive areas such as human rights or public insecurity which could be considered as an interference in domestic affairs. No similar problems have emerged in Bolivia and Colombia.

Bolivia and Colombia have been included in the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR) and are beneficiaries of IfS crisis response projects. Colombia received €5 million for conflict victims plus €1.2 million in support for the “Working Group on Historical Memory”, and Bolivia received funds for several projects related to the reinforcement of national dialogue and democratic institutions. Venezuela is a minor beneficiary of EIDHR projects<sup>11</sup> and has not been included in the IfS. Since Venezuela's retreat from the Andean Community, political dialogue channels are limited to the general EU-LAC framework of summits and ministerial meetings. In all three countries, the five-year Country Strategy Papers and Council Statements have been the main political instruments of the EU.

#### 3.1. AID PROFILE AND IFS IN BOLIVIA

In Bolivia, the EU (Commission and Member States) has a solid and consolidated aid profile. As one of the poorest countries in Latin America, Bolivia has the biggest allocation of EU aid and is among the top priorities for the region. The EU has been actively involved in Bolivia's political and social transformation process under Evo Morales through political mediation and electoral observation. According to local observers, it has a positive and strong image as a provider of development assistance. Compared to the US (and the former presence of the Drugs Engagement Agency (DEA)), the EU's activities are not considered as an interference in domestic affairs and its drugs policy has been considered as less interventionist. The European Commission and EU Member States (particularly Germany, the Netherlands, Sweden and Spain) have a strong presence in the country. Compared to the EU's government focus, Member State activities tend to prioritise non-state actors. According to the Country Strategy Paper, aid priorities were focused on non-conflict issues such as the fight against drugs, small- and medium-size enterprises or the management of natural resources.

In October 2009 the European Commission decided to include Bolivia in the Instrument for Stability (IfS) and finances projects with a total budget of €4 million. The motivation behind this initiative was to support, as part

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11 €900,000 in 2009 and €1.2 million (per year) in 2010 and 2011.

of the EU's conflict prevention strategy, national dialogue and democratic institutions at a critical moment of the Bolivian democratic process with the context of new tensions arising due to the adoption of the new Constitution in January 2009 and presidential elections in December of the same year. Along the same lines of early warning and conflict prevention, several dialogue promotion and institutional support projects were approved, among them the strengthening of the Supreme Electoral Court and support for the parliament in the legislative implementation of the Constitution, electoral observation by a local NGO, "East-West dialogue" forums with a local NGO, media training (with the Carter Center), support for social indigenous movements, and alternative development (with UNODC). In principle, IfS-financed projects will end in 2012. The local perception of the IfS and the concrete projects financed under this instrument tends to be positive, particularly with regard to electoral support and the construction of dialogue. Negative aspects identified included slow levels of implementation, scarce evaluation of projects and the presence of external consultants with limited local knowledge. Spain is the only Member State which is financing several projects on conflict prevention and peacebuilding.

In December 2010, the Council of Ministers decided to include Bolivia as one of the pilot countries for the implementation of the Council Conclusions on democracy in EU external relations of 2009. This will result in an analysis of the state of democracy in the country, the mapping of EU cooperation on democracy and dialogue with major stakeholders on the subject. This exercise will end with a proposal on how to improve future cooperation on democracy with Bolivia.

### 3.2. PEACEBUILDING AND HUMAN RIGHTS IN COLOMBIA

In Colombia there has been an implicit division of labour between the EU and the United States: Washington traditionally provides military assistance to support the policy of democratic security and the fight against drugs, while the EU offers development assistance for peacebuilding and alternative development (to coca and cocaine). Additionally, the alternative development policy of the EU and its local and regional focus is seen as a counterweight to the more aggressive US policy (of eradication and military support). The EC-financed peace workshops in different parts of the country, aimed at strengthening local capacities for peace and development, are the most visible EU branding in the country. Some interviewees considered them as the European response to Plan Colombia.

Compared to Bolivia and Venezuela, the European Parliament (EP) has a high profile in Colombia. From the EP perspective, there is a certain trade off between human rights and economic interests. While human rights abuses are regularly condemned and denounced by the EP, the European Commission, particularly the Delegation in Bogotá, has concentrated its recent activities on the free trade agreement between the EU and Colombia which has already been approved by the Commission. Nonetheless, the EU maintains a regular human rights dialogue in Colombia with government officials and a parallel forum with representatives of civil society. The official dialogue forum emerged during the Uribe government as a result of requests by local NGOs and some EU Member States. There are also regular consultations on security between the EU and the Colombian government.

Unlike Bolivia and Venezuela, the Colombia Country Strategy Paper clearly indicates its development assistance focus on peace and human rights. As Colombia figures among the Latin American priorities for development assistance, with a staff of 60 officials, the EU Delegation is one of the largest in the region. The EU is financing 150 multiannual projects, 55 among them orientated towards democratic governance, human rights and institutional reforms and 44 towards conflict prevention. Colombia has been among the three major beneficiaries of the EIDHR. Since 2007, limited funds of €6.2 million have been committed to the long-term component of the IfS: projects concentrated on human rights. The idea behind this was to support the peacebuilding and reconciliation process following the controversial Peace and Justice Law. Until 2010, the IfS financed the programme "Victim-Orientated Assistance as a Contribution to Peacebuilding and Reconciliation", including legal assistance for victims of demobilised paramilitaries and the support for transitional justice policies. In 2011 a second initiative to support the Colombian Working Group on Historical Memory started.

### 3.3. LOW-PROFILE AND POLITICAL CAUTION IN VENEZUELA

In Venezuela, external actors are increasingly under pressure. Given the low political profile of Venezuela's main trade partner, the United States, the EU has become a main donor and principal external actor. Nonetheless, the difficult political environment, the official constraints imposed on contacts with NGOs<sup>12</sup> and the reluctance of the government to cooperate on political issues such as human rights or public security represent serious institutional and political constraints for the EU's engagement in Venezuela. Due to the sensitive character of the issue, no information on the contents of internal reports from the Delegation to Brussels could be provided.

As it does not affect the security interests of external actors (the US being the main player) and given the difficult political context, violence has not been seriously addressed by the international community, including the EU. Given that Venezuela is said to have the world's largest oil reserves, there is also a certain trade off between economic interests and security or human rights concerns<sup>13</sup>. The lack of political instruments in an oil-exporting country, where development assistance has been insignificant, and a lack of political dialogue channels (before EU-Andean dialogue) also impedes higher EU political influence in Venezuela. Apart from human rights projects with NGOs and some resources for local NGOs working on public security, EU activities in Venezuela have been focused on socio-economic development and official development assistance (ODA) with governmental partners<sup>14</sup>.

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12 The national law of sovereignty prohibits external funds for civil society organisations suspected to be part of the opposition.

13 S. Gratius (2011). 'EU Democracy Promotion in Latin America: More a Tradition than a Policy', *European Foreign Affairs Review*, No. 16, p.689-703.

14 Recent ODA includes the project "Drogastop" as part of the European Commission's engagement to combat and prevent drugs use.

## 4. EU CAPACITY AND LIMITS FOR EARLY WARNING AND CONFLICT PREVENTION

### 4.1 CONFLICT ANALYSIS

Given its long-term engagement and presence in Bolivia and Colombia, the EU has an acknowledged and broad capacity for conflict analysis using its own sources (strong Delegations and Member State presence), third parties including non-governmental (think tanks, NGOs, media, local partners) and official (presidential office, ministries, regional authorities) agencies. Although in both countries the EU's engagement is based on close relations with all local actors, some observers have criticised European Commission activities of having a pro-government approach. In Bolivia, the EU Delegation counts on a special representative for conflict prevention and, in Colombia, on a human rights official. The positive perception on the EU's role and image (integral, long-term approach, social focus, recognition of the roots of conflicts, soft responses) prevail over criticism over long administrative procedures, a governmental stance and the lack of a comprehensive evaluation strategy which includes local actors.

The EU's solid capacity for conflict analysis and comprehension in Bolivia and Colombia is in contrast to the limited capacity for conflict assessment in Venezuela, a result of a weaker European presence and limited contact with both the government and organised civil society. Although EU officials are aware of increasing levels of crime and political violence, no conclusions on EU responses have been drawn. Among other reasons, oil interests, dissent between member states, political cautiousness and a low priority of Venezuela in EU policy might have played a role.

In **Bolivia**, several Council Declarations on the situation in Bolivia since 2005 prove that the EU is aware of the multiple conflict patterns and the risk of violent confrontation between the government, the opposition, indigenous and social movements. On several occasions, the Council of the EU stressed the need for national dialogue, the unity of the country and a peaceful settlement of disputes, particularly in 2008 and 2009<sup>15</sup>. Criticism with regards to the EU's capacity for conflict assessment is concentrated on the pro-government focus of the EU Delegation and some observers noted a certain disconnection from local views and necessities. Some EU Member States argue that the EU's strong governmental approach could even favour one side of the conflict and should be more balanced by increasing funds to NGOs and/or oppositional groups. The lack of coordination between the EU Delegation and Member States has also been identified as an additional problem for conflict analysis, given that there is no common approach or analysis on early warning.

In **Colombia**, through close contact with government agencies and a broad range of non-governmental partners as well as conflict assessment capacities within the EU Delegation in Bogotá and the Embassies of Member States, the EU has a broad and detailed knowledge on the evolution of the conflict and the human rights situation. Nonetheless, a certain difference between the EU's human rights approach and the European Commission's recent trade focus (and Spanish economic interests) can be stressed. Furthermore, according to some critical voices, the costs of human rights abuses by the armed forces have been valued lower than the positive results of the democratic security policy of the Uribe (and now Santos) government.

<sup>15</sup> See, for example, the Declaration of the Presidency on behalf of the European Union on the situation in Bolivia of 11th April 2008. Available at <http://europa.eu/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=PESC/08/46&format=HTML&aged=0&language=EN&guiLangu age=en> and 12th September 2008. Available at [http://www.europa-eu-un.org/articles/en/article\\_8136\\_en.htm](http://www.europa-eu-un.org/articles/en/article_8136_en.htm)); the Declaration by the Presidency on behalf of the European Union on the referendum in Bolivia of 28th January 2009. Available at [http://www.consilium.europa.eu/ueDocs/cms\\_Data/docs/pressData/en/cfsp/105643.pdf](http://www.consilium.europa.eu/ueDocs/cms_Data/docs/pressData/en/cfsp/105643.pdf)

Since 2002, when the EU included the FARC and ELN in the list of terrorist groups, its former focus on negotiations and dialogue between guerrilla and government changed towards a clear support of Uribe's democratic security policy. This perspective can be confirmed by recent Council Declarations on Colombia<sup>16</sup>. Although contact with NGOs and the opposition is strong, and the EU continues to call for a negotiated solution to the internal armed conflict, this shift in EU policy marked a path towards a clearer pro-governmental approach. Therefore, economic and security interests (the securitisation of development assistance and the classification of AUC, ELN and FARC as terrorist groups) might have a certain impact on (absent) early warning and conflict-prevention policies. It also changed the EU's conflict assessment, given that the guerillas' social demands are no longer seen as legitimate. In this sense, the conflict assessment moved closer to that of the government. With views on the free trade agreement, economic interests also played a role in conflict assessment and, particularly, the evaluation of the human rights situation (for example, although it was part of human rights dialogue, there has been no official EU reaction on the case of the "false positives" in Colombia).

The case of **Venezuela** is different. The 2007-2013 Country Strategy Paper neither addresses the problem of insecurity nor even relates to it. Nonetheless, EU officials in Caracas and Brussels are aware of the risks of state fragility, selective repression, the circulation of arms, corruption and crime (by the police and other actors) as well as tensions along the border with Colombia. EU officials recognise some negative impact on EC co-financed projects as well as the harassment of trade unions and human rights activists. The EU Delegation is well informed and sends regular reports, including those on public insecurity, to Brussels, but has not seen any reason to react.

In this case, conflicting interests between human rights, public security and economic interests of certain Member States all play a role as an obstacle to major EU engagement in Venezuela. Consequently, there is no consensus among Member States on how to deal with Venezuela: while some countries favour more diplomatic pressure on the government, others prefer to abstain from domestic affairs.

Limited contacts in Venezuela and lower EU regional presence are additional factors against early warning or conflict prevention policies. The lack of credible governmental strategies to respond to increasing violence and its reluctance to involve external actors constitute a further obstacle to stronger EU political engagement. When the European Commission expressed, for example, its willingness to support police reforms, it did not receive any response from the Chávez government. Other projects failed or could not be implemented for similar reasons.

## 4.2. (LACK OF) DECISIONS ON EARLY WARNING AND INTERNAL COMMUNICATION

Different sets of early warning systems have to be distinguished: for social conflicts and political confrontations in Bolivia; for human rights abuses and massacres in Colombia; for violence and the fragile state in Venezuela. Since none of the three countries fit the classical conflict profile, the EU has not made a clear decision in any of the countries with regard to an early warning process. While its (development) engagement in Colombia concentrates on the classical peacebuilding and human rights component, IfS projects in Bolivia focus on institutional building and dialogue promotion as a strategy for conflict prevention. The EU has not responded to political violence and crime in Venezuela.

Particularly in Colombia, the EU Delegation has received alerts regarding human rights violations by local partners. In those cases, the EU contacted government representatives (the human rights or security offices of the presidency) and/or NGOs on the ground to obtain further information and publicise the alert. Immediate communications with Brussels have not been considered. Similar procedures have been adopted by the EU in Bolivia. In the context of the controversial debate on the free trade agreement with Colombia, the EU Delegation reacted to several inquiries from the high representative, Catherine Ashton, and the European Parliament.

<sup>16</sup> See the Declaration by the Presidency on behalf of the European Union on the elections in Colombia, Brussels of 29th May 2002. Available at <http://europa.eu/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=PESC/02/76&format=HTML&aged=1&language=EN&guiLanguage=en>; the Declaration by the Presidency on behalf of the European Union on the presidential elections in Colombia, Brussels of 31st May 2006. Available at <http://europa.eu/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=PESC/06/77&format=HTML&aged=1&language=EN&guiLanguage=en>

Although decisions tend to be taken on the ground (at Delegation or Member State level), in all three countries, internal communications between the EU Delegations and Brussels are fluent. There is very fluid and involve regular contact between local Embassies or Delegations and Brussels. Furthermore, EU officials in the Delegation send annual or special reports on the situation in their countries to the Desk officers in Brussels. While communication within the European Commission works reasonably well, some problems concerning (technical and political project) coordination with member states have been identified in all three countries.

While relations are more balanced in Colombia, there is a clear dominance of Member States compared to the EU Delegations in Venezuela and, particularly, Bolivia. In all three cases regular coordination meetings take place between the Delegations and Member States. In Bolivia, meetings have been formalised by the creation of the Grupo de Socios para el Desarrollo de Bolivia [Group of partners for Bolivia's Development], integrated by the EU, Canada, Japan and the United States, which is orientated towards general donor coordination. Nonetheless, the EU delegation is not part of the ad hoc group on conflict management. No similar donor forum has been created in Colombia, where several interviewees criticised the lack of coordination between the EU and the United States. The same applies to Venezuela: internal coordination is limited and there is little formal contact with the US Embassy.

In the 2000-2003 period, according to EU officials, some Member States used their national early warning systems for conflict assessments and special reports on political instability and social tensions in Bolivia and Colombia. However, no further information on the relations between warning and responses has been provided. At the EU level, there are no early warning mechanisms and, apart from the long-term Country Strategy Papers, the IfS is the only collective EU instrument to address and/or prevent conflicts in Bolivia and Colombia. In general, EU officials on the ground have a limited knowledge of EWSs and consider them as either too expensive or too complicated to apply.

In the special case of Venezuela, regular reports to Brussels did not include any alerts or warnings. According to some EU officials, the situation was not considered to be so serious to justify special attention or to include Venezuela in the "list" of fragile states. The lack of strategic interests and the absence of a clear conflict profile with identifiable actors further contribute to this cautious perception.

Development assistance has been the dominant response of the EU to conflicts in Bolivia and Colombia, but public insecurity has not been identified as a target for engagement in Venezuela. While Council statements proved a close follow-up and "diplomatic early warning" on conflicts in Bolivia and Colombia, the lack of response in Venezuela (not even in Council statements) reflects the limited dialogue channels and low level of relations with the country as well as the absence of a common view on how to deal with the political situation.

In Bolivia and Colombia EU policy reveals a clear preference for peaceful solutions to political crises and conflicts. In both countries, the EU ignores the existence of the national early warning systems which could be a useful tool to strengthen local capacities for conflict prevention and to compensate for the lack of EU mechanisms. In all three cases, the absence of early warning decisions and responses can be attributed to three main factors: the clear focus on development assistance; the lack of strong security interests and/or special dialogue mechanisms with Latin America (apart from the fight against drugs); Spain's dominant profile and economic interests.

### 4.3. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Compared to Bolivia, the EU has a rather low profile as a political actor in Colombia and Venezuela. In all three countries it is perceived as a dominant provider of development assistance. Since Bolivia and Colombia are major aid recipients, they concentrate much more attention on the EU than the oil exporter and rather distant partner Venezuela. In all three countries some conflict lines can be identified between human rights and peacebuilding on the one hand, and economic interests (Bolivian gas, Colombian trade and Venezuelan oil and gas interests) on the other.

For different reasons, none of the three countries has been addressed by the EU's EWS and no alerts have been announced. Although the EU is a rather neutral actor and finances programmes with NGOs in Bolivia, Colombia

and Venezuela, the concentration on Official Development Cooperation on behalf of the European Commission is perceived (by some EU Member States and local NGOs) as pro-governmental.

In terms of visibility, capacity, presence, and engagement for human rights, peace and the fight against drugs, the EU has a positive image in Colombia. The EU's large resources and profile in the only Latin American country with an armed conflict reflect a classical understanding of security and peace.

The strong presence of European donors in Bolivia has the advantage of a visible and high profile, but also the disadvantage of a certain distortion of power with regard to local actors, including the risk of being “part of the political game”. However, through dialogue and an institutional approach the EU tends to contribute to lower social and political tensions in Bolivia and is a respected partner.

The practical absence of European responses to conflict drivers in Venezuela not only undermines the EU's credibility on early warning and conflict prevention but also its image as a political actor and donor. Very few projects have addressed the human rights situation or public insecurity, and Venezuela has not been included in the IfS. The EU's lack of response has been in line with the Venezuelan government and other donors.

## KEY RECOMMENDATIONS:

**In Bolivia**, the EU should maintain its profile and presence, increase efforts to strengthen state institutions and promote national dialogue. Another challenge would be to stress the local ownership of projects and include civil society in the design and evaluation of projects. Furthermore, there is an urgent need for more systematic coordination between the European Commission and EU Member States with regard to projects on human rights and conflict prevention. Apart from using its own mechanisms of early warning, the EU should consider offering technical and financial support (within the framework of the IfS) to Bolivia's national EWS which could also be used by the EU. This would also contribute to increasing the understanding of local conflict trends and the adjustment of EU responses to national necessities.

**In Colombia**, the EU should increase its capacity for early warning and conflict prevention (human rights abuses and massacres). One tool would be to restore the (deactivated) national early warning system of the Ombudsman office. Since USAID had initially financed the system, further coordination efforts with the United States on this and other projects would contribute to the division of work and a clearer profile of both external actors in Colombia. The strategy of “alternative development” (replacing coca plants with other agricultural products) should be critically revised and adapted to Bolivian and Colombian necessities.

**In Venezuela**, the current patterns of structural violence and political polarisation represent a clear threat to the democratic and peaceful traditions of the country established since 1958. Therefore, the European Commission should decide on a more proactive policy on political violence and public security. This would imply a critical revision of current tools and projects and a more strategic vision for Venezuela. As a first step, by establishing closer contact with both governmental and non-governmental actors, the EU should increase its conflict awareness and assessment capacity. As a second step, EU early warning mechanisms on fragile states should be activated, particularly with regard to the escalating de-institutionalisation process including impunity, a badly-managed prison system, a repressive and corrupt police force and political violence against non-governmental actors. Following the example of Bolivia, the inclusion of Venezuela in the IfS (to finance projects on confidence building, national dialogue and institutional support) could be a third step to address the problem.

The lack of an EU response on violence in Venezuela proves that early warning and conflict prevention still concentrate on the classical cases of inter- or intrastate conflicts with clearly identifiable profiles and actors. Therefore, particularly in Latin America, a region with high levels of insecurity, the EU should broaden its security concept to new challenges beyond traditional conflict patterns. This does not mean additional resources, rather the adjustment of current ODA to include more projects related to early warning and conflict prevention. In the particular case of Venezuela, early warning should be combined with conflict-prevention strategies. Similar to Bolivia, measures should focus on confidence building between government and civil society, the support of NGOs working on human rights and public security, the strengthening of institutions and the promotion of disarmament through public diplomacy.

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