

WALK THE TALK:

The EU needs an effective early warning system to match its ambitions to prevent conflict and promote peace

Lucia Montanaro and Julia Schünemann

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CONTENTS

Acronyms	6
Basic working definitions	7
Executive summary	9
I. Introduction	10
The added value of an effective early warning system	10
Challenges	11
The EU's policy framework for conflict prevention and early warning	13
II. The EU's early warning system and its constraints	15
Main constraints and challenges	15
Constraint 1: Lack of individual and collective capacity to manage information on violent conflict and drivers of fragility in the world	16
Strong and weak signals	17
Implications for decision-making	17
Recommendations	18
Constraint 2: Scattered and insufficiently integrated early warning systems combined with ineffective decision-making procedures for preventive action	20
Recommendations	20
Constraint 3: Early warning supporting tools are not used to their full potential	24
Recommendations	26
Constraint 4: Cognitive biases related to risk and threat perception, political judgement and decision-making on preventive action	28
The perception of risks and threats	29
“Loss aversion” and “aversion to certain losses”	29
“Extension neglect” and “psychic numbing”	30
Recommendations	30
Constraint 5: Predominance of national interests and a national over multilateral rationale among decision-makers/policymakers in Member States	30
Recommendations	32
III. Conclusions and recommendations	34
References	37

ACRONYMS

ARGUS	General European Rapid Alert System
CFSP	Common Foreign and Security Policy
CMPD	Crisis Management and Planning Directorate
CPCC	Civilian Planning and Conduct Capability
CSDP	Common Security and Defence Policy
CSP	Country Strategy Papers
DAC	Development Assistance Committee
DFID	Department for International Development
ECHO	European Commission Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
EEAS	European External Action Service
EUMS	EU Military Staff
EUSR	EU Special Representatives
FASP	Foreign Affairs and Security Policy
FYROM	Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia
HIIK	Heidelberg Institute for International Conflict Research
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross
IfP	Initiative for Peacebuilding
IfS	Instrument for Stability
JLS	Justice, Freedom and Security
MDGs	Millennium Development Goals
MIC	Monitoring and Information Centre
NGO	Non-governmental organisations
ODA	Official development assistance
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
OSINT	Open source intelligence
PPEWU	Policy Planning and Early Warning Unit
PSC	Political and Security Committee
RCRPO	Regional Crisis Response Planning Officer
RTC	Responding to Conflict
SALW	Small arms and light weapons
SITCEN	Situation Centre
WHO	World Health Organisation
WKC	Watchkeeping Capability
WMD	Weapons of Mass Destruction

BASIC WORKING DEFINITIONS¹

EARLY WARNING SYSTEM

Early warning is a process that alerts decision-makers to the potential outbreak, escalation and resurgence of violent conflict. It is a basis for informed decision-making and a tool to manage political priorities and objectives. An early warning system: a) includes systematic monitoring, collection, ordering and analysis of information (based on qualitative and quantitative conflict analysis methods); b) promotes a better understanding of conflict dynamics and impacts; c) provides forecasts of potential developments; and d) presents options for the purpose of decision-making on early and effective response through relevant instruments and mechanisms. Lastly, early warning necessarily comprises communicating information and analysis to decision-makers in a position to take preventive and/or mitigating action.

THREAT

A state's or a coalition's perception that it is in some degree of danger based on the assessed capabilities, intentions and actions of another state/coalition or group.

POTENTIAL THREAT

A threat is characterised as potential by the existence of a threatening capability but absence of current hostile intent, or of a hostile intent and a developing threatening capability.

RISK

The hazards to which a state or coalition's interests or strategy are assessed to be exposed. These risks, which are risks to stability and security, do not necessarily originate in, or in the vicinity of, the state or the coalition.

FRAGILE STATES

According to the World Bank, "fragile states" share a common characteristic: their policies and institutions are weak, making them vulnerable in their capacity to deliver services to their citizens, control corruption or provide for sufficient voice and accountability. They face risks of conflict and political instability. According to the UK Department for International Development (DfID): 'fragile states are those where the government cannot or will not deliver core functions to the majority of its people, including the poor'.²

CRISIS MANAGEMENT

Coordinated actions taken to defuse crises, prevent their escalation into armed conflict and/or contain resulting hostilities. The crisis management machinery should provide decision-makers with the necessary information and arrangements to use appropriate instruments (political, diplomatic, economic, civilian and military) in a timely and coordinated manner.

CONFLICT PREVENTION

Strategies aimed at preventing the outbreak of violent conflict by addressing conflict while it is still latent.

CONFLICT TRANSFORMATION

Strategies aimed at the wider social and political sources of conflict seeking to transform negative dynamics into positive social and political change.

¹ These definitions, unless otherwise stated, are informed by those of the EU, Initiative for Peacebuilding (IfP), International Alert, NATO, Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and Responding to Conflict (RTC).

² DfID website, 'Glossary'. Available at <http://www.dfid.gov.uk/About-DFID/Glossary/?key=F>

PEACEBUILDING

To undertake programmes designed to address the causes of conflict and fragility, and the grievances of the past, and to promote long-term peace and justice. Peacebuilding is a series of actions to improve the security of citizens and states, the rule of law and the basis of economic wellbeing.

The Organisation for Economic Cooperation (OECD) and Development Assistance Committee (DAC) defines peacebuilding as: 'actions and policies aimed at preventing the outbreak, the recurrence or continuation of armed conflict, encompassing a wide range of political, developmental, humanitarian and human rights programmes and mechanisms, including short- and long-term measures tailored to addressing the particular needs of societies sliding into conflict or emerging from it. Includes long-term support to, and establishment of, viable political and socio-economic and cultural institutions capable of addressing the proximate root causes of conflicts, as well as other initiatives aimed at creating the necessary conditions for sustained peace and stability'.

The Initiative for Peacebuilding (IfP) defines peacebuilding as: 'an approach that is long-term and people-centred, committed to tackling the structural causes and drivers of conflict. Peacebuilding is universally relevant but context-specific. It recognises the centrality of human rights and justice and the responsibility of individuals and institutions to uphold and safeguard these'.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Early warning is an essential key to anticipating and preventing violent conflict. Early action is impossible without early warning. Early warning must be grounded on the reality of conflictual dynamics in the field and serve as a basis for decision-making and early and effective action.

The current EU early warning and response system is characterised by short-termism and ad hoc decision-making. It lacks prioritisation grounded in evidence, and sub-optimal decision-making contributes to inefficient policymaking. The system suffers from problems in the production, communication, warning receptivity and disconnects between early warning and early action, which limit its capacity to anticipate and nip the development of risk factors in the bud. The aim of this paper is to identify and analyse the shortcomings and constraints of the current EU early warning system and suggest ways to overcome these in order for the EU to match its global ambitions to prevent conflict, promote peace and mitigate threats to EU interests and international security.

In order to ensure real impact, the EU needs to make changes in its current plans for the European External Action Service (EEAS) and develop an effective and holistic early warning system. The current EU early warning centres, information sources and strands need to be woven together in order to use them to their full potential. To do this the EU needs to establish a fusion centre and an effective indicational warning system.

On the basis of the definition of priorities and established requirements by decision-makers, tailored indicators need to be developed by analysts in the suggested fusion centre. An effective EU early warning system requires skilled early detection and comprehensive trend analysis of developing risk factors that are likely to coalesce to precipitate outbreaks of violence. Such an indicational warning system would enable analysts to effectively manage the mass of information and extract the critical elements for developing holistic critical assessments and scenarios. This, in turn, would facilitate the EU's capacity to carry out early and effective action and ensure targeted, maximised and sustainable impact rather than applying a reactive short-term approach.

This paper also argues that the EU has a comparative advantage in increasing its engagement in conflict prevention. Given that resources are scarce and EU effectiveness as a global actor needs to be strengthened and better communicated to its citizens, the EU needs to identify where it can have the strongest impact on conflict, instability and security. The EU should therefore engage more in countries with latent conflict dynamics, where it could have substantial and sustainable impact. At present, resources are predominantly targeted for consolidated conflict settings, where the EU's potential for real impact is very limited.

INTRODUCTION

There were a total of 365 political conflicts in 2009, including both latent and manifest ones. Of these, 31 involved use of massive violence. Sporadic violent incidents occurred in 112 cases, while another 226 conflicts were non-violent.³ The EU's potential comparative advantage as a global actor lies in its capacity for conflict prevention, civilian crisis management and peacebuilding. As the world's largest provider of aid and development cooperation, and with delegations spread all over the world, the EU has a unique "reach" into many conflict-affected and fragile countries. However, in spite of having clear policy commitments and a wide range of tools at its disposal, the EU does not yet live up to its full potential.⁴ To fulfil its potential, the EU needs to identify where and how it can have the strongest impact in conflict prevention and peacebuilding. Prevention is crucial for meeting today's multidimensional security challenges. Europe's security is inseparably and irretrievably intertwined, and therefore dependent upon, the security of other actors, and vice versa, and the pressure for multilateral cooperation is increasing.⁵ As stated in the UN's *Report of the Secretary-General's High-level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change*, '[i]n today's world, a threat to one is a threat to all', which is why '[e]very state requires international cooperation to make it secure'.⁶

The aim of this paper is to identify the shortcomings and constraints of the current EU early warning system and suggest ways to overcome these in order for the EU to match its ambitions to prevent conflict, promote peace in the world and mitigate threats to EU interests and international security.

The analysis in this paper is primarily based on information gathered in a series of research interviews conducted between November 2009 and September 2010 with EU officials,⁷ as well as representatives of EU Member States, NATO officials, Economic Community Of West African States (ECOWAS) representatives and independent experts. It is complemented by a review of the existing policy documents and literature (e.g. from academia, think tank, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), etc).

THE ADDED VALUE OF AN EFFECTIVE EARLY WARNING SYSTEM

Early warning is an essential key to anticipating and preventing violent conflict and crisis response. Early action is impossible without early warning. Early warning must be grounded on the reality of conflictual dynamics in the field and serve as a basis for decision-making and early and effective action.

Early warning is a process that alerts decision-makers to the potential outbreak, escalation and resurgence of violent conflict. It is a basis for informed decision-making and a tool to manage political priorities and objectives. An early warning system: a) includes systematic monitoring, collection, ordering and analysis of information (based on qualitative and quantitative conflict analysis methods); b) promotes a better understanding of conflict dynamics and impacts; c) provides forecasts of potential developments; and d) presents options for the purpose

3 Heidelberg Institute for International Conflict Research (HIIC). *Conflict barometer 2009*. Heidelberg, Germany. Available at http://hiik.de/en/konfliktbarometer/pdf/ConflictBarometer_2009.pdf

4 R. Whitman and S. Wolf (2010). 'The EU as a conflict manager: the case of Georgia and its implications', *International Affairs*, Vol. 86, No. 1, pp.87-107.

5 S. Biscop (2005). *The European Security Strategy. A global agenda for positive power*. Aldershot, UK: Ashgate.

6 UN (2004). *Executive summary. A more secure world: our shared responsibility – Report of the Secretary-General's High-level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change*. UN Department of Public Information. p.1. Available at <http://www.un.org/secureworld/brochure.pdf>

7 European Commission, European Council, European Parliament.

of decision-making on early and effective response through relevant instruments and mechanisms.⁸ Lastly, early warning necessarily comprises communicating information and analysis to decision-makers in a position to take preventive and/or mitigating action.⁹

A coherent and effective early warning and response system offers significant added value to the EU in terms of becoming a more effective and credible conflict-prevention and crisis-response actor. Such a system will be a tool to:

- Manage information on conflict and fragility dynamics;
- Manage political priorities and objectives against a background of scarce resources;
- Deliver a basis for evidence-grounded decision-making; and
- Enable politicians to take action if they decide it is appropriate and thereby have an impact.

Furthermore, it will contribute to:

- Increased EU effectiveness in preventing violent conflict and addressing fragilities;
- Addressing threats that could impact on EU interests and security;
- Bridging the link between early warning and early and effective action;

It will increase cost-effectiveness in several dimensions by:

- Saving the lives of populations in conflict-affected contexts (locals and expatriates) and avoiding unnecessary destruction;
- Pooling Member States' financial, material and human resources;
- Facilitating a shift from crisis management to conflict prevention; and
- Addressing global security in a more comprehensive way, including through linking internal and external security objectives and transnational threats that require multilateral solutions.

CHALLENGES

It could be argued that increasing the quality of early warning does not automatically lead to more timely and effective action. Nevertheless, an approach based on forward-looking analysis and anticipation of potentially destabilising elements will create pressure for policymakers to act, and thereby reduce the possibility of them shifting political responsibility on the ground by saying 'we did not act because we did not know'.¹⁰

Too often early warning does not lead to timely, relevant and effective action from the international community,¹¹ a problem also described as the 'warning-response gap'.¹² This paper addresses the main political and institutional constraints in the current EU early warning and response system to conflict-affected and fragile areas. It pays special attention to evolutions linked to the Lisbon Treaty and the establishment of the European External Action Service (EEAS) as an important window of opportunity for the EU to increase its coherence and live up to its ambitions and potential as a global actor that matters and makes a difference in conflict prevention, crisis

8 See also definitions outlined by the OECD Development Assistance Committee's (DAC) Network on Conflict, Peace and Development Cooperation (CPDC) and Fragile States Group (FSG) (now merged as the International Network on Conflict and Fragility, or INCAF) in D. Nyheim (2008). *Can violence, war and state collapse be prevented? The future of operational conflict early warning and response systems*. OECD-DAC Network on Conflict, Peace and Development Cooperation (CPDC) and the DAC Fragile States Group (FSG) Joint Session, 10th meeting, 5th June 2008, Paris. p.11; G. Banim (2005). *Early warning for early action. Policy commitment to early warning*. p.270. Available at http://ec.europa.eu/external_relations/ifs/publications/book_1_en.htm; A. P. Schmid (1998). *Thesaurus and glossary of early warning and conflict prevention terms*. London, UK: Forum on Early Warning and Early Response (FEWER). Available at [http://www.reliefweb.int/rw/lib.nsf/db900sid/LGEL-5ERDQ8/\\$file/fewer-glossary-may98.pdf?openelement](http://www.reliefweb.int/rw/lib.nsf/db900sid/LGEL-5ERDQ8/$file/fewer-glossary-may98.pdf?openelement)

9 L. Woocher (2008). *The effects of cognitive biases on early warning*. Center for Conflict Analysis and Prevention. United States Institute of Peace. p.4.

10 G. Banim (2005). Op. cit. p.273.

11 See also A. Schnabel (2008). 'Improving early warning and response systems: learning from human security, preparing for climate change' in A. Ricci (Ed.). *From early warning to early action? The debate on the enhancement of the EU's crisis response capability continues*. Brussels: European Commission, Directorate. p.387; L. Woocher (2008). Op. cit.

12 A. George and J. E. Holl (1996). *The warning-response problem and missed opportunities in preventive diplomacy*. A Report to the Carnegie Commission on preventing deadly conflict. New York: Carnegie Corporation.

management and peacebuilding. The paper provides recommendations to policymakers on how to overcome or at least mitigate the identified constraints, and to support a more coherent and effective EU early warning and response system.

The current EU early warning and response system is characterised by short-termism and ad hoc decision-making. It lacks prioritisation grounded in evidence. Sub-optimal decision-making contributes to inefficient policymaking. Given that resources are scarce, the EU needs to identify where and how it can have the strongest impact in conflict prevention and peacebuilding.

Lessons must be learnt and integrated from the numerous early warning failures of the past. There are three types of failures: intelligence, warning and response (where the response has been slow and ineffective or inappropriate).

Early warning failures and under-evaluations stretch from Pearl Harbor in 1941 to the Israeli under-evaluation of the movement of Egyptian troops and the unexpected attack on Yom Kippur in 1973; Saddam Hussein's invasion of Kuwait in 1990; the Rwandan genocide in 1994; 9/11; Taliban attacks during the winter of 2003; the "unexpected" victory of Hamas in 2006; the 2008 violent crisis in Kenya; the coup d'état in 2008 in Mauritania; or the coup d'état in Honduras in 2009.

The delineation between strategy, policymaking and intelligence is symptomatic of evidence- and ground-based knowledge being undervalued. There is a need to link preventative forecasting intelligence with the strategic level, in order to nip the developments of risk factors in the bud. Early warning systems suffer problems in production, communication, warning-receptivity and the gap between early warning and early action.

The World Health Organisation (WHO) estimates that each year about 700,000 people are killed through violence or in armed conflicts around the world. Hundreds of thousands more are displaced from their homes or die from the hunger and poverty that so often follow armed conflicts.¹³

It is hard to measure the cost of conflict and the benefits of conflict prevention. The calculations of conflict tend to be limited to direct material and human losses, and possibly the military budget. However, it is also important to include: the human toll; the destruction of social fabrics and coping mechanisms; the effects on the economy, as resource bases are devastated; the repercussions when traditional institutions and power relations are altered; the threats to regional stability if disputes spill over into neighbouring states; the cost of humanitarian aid and rebuilding war-torn societies; the price tag for international peacekeeping; and lost opportunities in development, trade and investment.¹⁴

Although conflict prevention is staggeringly more cost-effective for both the international community and the country in conflict,¹⁵ international involvement often comes at a later stage, when a conflict has already unfolded and the military, economic and political costs are high. For example, the aid to Rwanda during the three years following the genocide amounted to over US\$2 billion. It is estimated that, through preventative intervention, it would have been possible not only to avoid this human tragedy but also to do so at a cost of approximately a third of this amount.¹⁶

The EU and its Member States need to make a shift in their focus towards more conflict prevention rather than crisis management. This would entail more cost-effective management of scarce resources and enable

13 OECD-DAC (2008). *Evaluating conflict prevention and peacebuilding activities*. A joint project of the DAC Networks on Development Evaluation and on Conflict, Peace and Development Cooperation. Available at <http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/36/20/39289596.pdf>

14 M. S. Lund (1996). *Preventing violent conflicts. A strategy for preventive diplomacy*. Washington DC: United States Institute of Peace (USIP), pp.1–7.

15 M.E. Brown and R. N. Rosecrance (Eds.) (1999). *The costs of conflict: prevention and cure in the global arena*. Carnegie Commission on Preventing Deadly Conflict; H. Lavoix (2008). 'Developing an early warning system for crises'. In A. Ricci (Ed.). Op. cit. pp.365–382; M. S. Lund (1996). Op. cit.

16 H. Lavoix (2008). Op. cit.; Carnegie Commission on Preventing Deadly Conflict (1997). *The international response to conflict and genocide: lessons from the Rwanda experience. Study 4: Rebuilding post-war Rwanda*. Copenhagen: Steering Committee of the Joint Evaluation of Emergency Assistance to Rwanda.

the EU to have more impact in building peace.¹⁷ This approach requires both skilled early detection and trend analysis of developing risk factors that are likely to coalesce to precipitate outbreaks of violence, combined with contingency plans for preventive action. In reality, the central issue is not *if* prevention is better than intervention or crisis management, or whether prevention can work, but *how* and under *what conditions* it can be effective. The alternatives to an effective early warning system conducive to conflict prevention – ‘indifference toward all international conflicts, or dangerous and costly interventions into already inflamed hotspots’¹⁸ – are unsatisfactory.

THE EU'S POLICY FRAMEWORK FOR CONFLICT PREVENTION AND EARLY WARNING

Over the last ten years, the EU has developed a solid policy framework for conflict prevention, acknowledging the pivotal role of early warning and early response. However, the EU's implementation of these policies does not yet sufficiently reflect these commitments.

Conflict prevention and the consolidation of peace lie at the heart of the EU's internal identity.¹⁹ Conflict prevention and peace consolidation also constitute explicit objectives of EU external action.²⁰ The Lisbon Treaty affirms that, through its external action, the EU aims to ‘preserve peace, prevent conflicts and strengthen international security’.²¹ Despite the shift towards a narrower understanding of security, emphasising the fight against terrorism following 9/11, the European Security Strategy of 2003 states that ‘conflict prevention and threat prevention cannot start too early’ and that ‘an early identification and understanding of risk factors increases the chances of timely and effective action to address the underlying causes of conflict’.²² The strategy also recognises the need for developing a ‘strategic culture that fosters early, rapid, and when necessary, robust intervention’.²³ The report on the implementation of the strategy (2008) also acknowledges that early warning is a main component of the EU's conflict prevention framework and a tool that needs to be reinforced.²⁴

In 2001 the EU Programme for the Prevention of Violent Conflicts committed to enhancing the EU's coherence in ‘early warning, analysis, planning, decision-making, implementation and evaluation’.²⁵ It set out what is a ‘clear and unambiguous’ early warning policy.²⁶ It states that the EU would monitor potential conflict situations on the basis of ‘accurate information and analysis’ as well as ‘clear options for action for both long-term and short-term prevention’. It recommends that ‘member states, their Heads of Mission, EU Special Representatives, EC delegations and other representatives of the Commission, as well as the Council Secretariat, including both the Policy Planning and Early Warning Unit (PPEWU) and the EU Military Staff (EUMS), should provide regular information on development of potential conflict situations, i.e. through the development and use of standard format and methods for early warning reports’.²⁷ However, according to EU diplomats there are no specific guidelines on how to warn and to whom the warnings should be directed. Additionally, there is a lack of recommendations on how to deal with crises at the delegation level.

17 Sixty-seven percent of EU citizens support foreign affairs and security decisions and actions being taken jointly as the EU, rather than separately by Member States. See European Commission (2010). *Eurobarometer 73 – Public opinion in the European Union. October–November 2009*. Available at http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/eb/eb72/eb72_vol1_en.pdf

18 M. S. Lund (1996). *Op. cit.* p.xiii.

19 See, for example, the EU Programme for the Prevention of Violent Conflicts, European Council, Göteborg, June 2001 and Lisbon Treaty, Article 3.1. For more information, see: J. Niño Pérez (2004). ‘Conflict indicators developed by the European Commission – the check list for root causes of conflict/early warning indicators’. In V. Kronenberger and V. Wouters (Eds.). *The European Union and conflict prevention: policy and legal aspects*. The Hague; L. Montanaro-Jankovski (2007). ‘The interconnection between the European Security and Defence Policy and the Balkans’, *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies*, Vol. 7, No. 1, pp.139–15.

20 Council of the EU (2001). *EU Programme for the Prevention of Violent Conflicts*. Göteborg.

21 See Article 21.2.C.

22 Council of the EU (2003). *European Security Strategy: a secure Europe in a better world*. Brussels. p.7. Available at <http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cmsUpload/78367.pdf>

23 *Ibid.* p.11.

24 Council of the EU (2008). *Report on the implementation of the European Security Strategy: providing security in a changing world*. Brussels. Available at http://www.consilium.europa.eu/ueDocs/cms_Data/docs/pressdata/EN/reports/104630.pdf; see also, for example, B. Nicoletti (2009). ‘EU and early warning – prevention progress?’, *European Security Review*, No. 47, ISIS Europe. p.17; H. Lavoix (2008). *Op. cit.*

25 Council of the EU (2001). *Op. cit.*

26 According to G. Banim (2005). *Op. cit.* p.270.

27 Council of the EU (2001). *Op. cit.*; see also G. Banim (2005). *Op. cit.* p.270; L. Montanaro-Jankovski (2007). *Op. cit.*

Moreover, the 2001 Commission communication on conflict prevention identified a series of challenges that nearly ten years later still remain to be addressed, such as:

- The need for more systematic and coordinated use of EU instruments to get at the root causes of conflict;
- Improving the efficiency of actions targeting specific causes of conflict;
- Improving EU capacity to react quickly to nascent conflicts; and
- Promoting international cooperation with all EU partners.

In the introduction to this paper, the authors provided a brief overview of the EU's policy framework for conflict prevention and early warning. The second section of the paper analyses the main political and institutional constraints of the current EU early warning and response system. It suggests ways to overcome or mitigate them, while identifying windows of opportunities linked to the Lisbon Treaty and the set-up of the EEAS. Lessons learned from other inter-governmental organisations such as NATO and ECOWAS are also taken into account. The final section offers conclusions and recommendations to policymakers on how to support a more effective EU early warning and response system.

II. THE EU'S EARLY WARNING SYSTEM AND ITS CONSTRAINTS

MAIN CONSTRAINTS AND CHALLENGES

Through the research, several constraints to early and effective warning and response were identified. The following is not an exhaustive list, but a selection of the most significant constraints that need to be overcome. They can roughly be classified into two groups:

- Constraints related to individual and collective processes of information management, political judgement and decision-making; and
- Constraints related to the institutional set-up of the EU's early warning and response system and the actual early warning tools.

The constraints highlighted in this paper are:

- Lack of individual and collective capacity to manage information on violent conflict and drivers of fragility in the world;
- Scattered and insufficiently integrated early warning systems combined with ineffective decision-making procedures for preventive action;
- Early warning supporting tools are not used to their full potential;
- Cognitive biases related to risk and threat perception, political judgement and decision-making on preventive early action; and
- Predominance of national interests and a national over multilateral rationale among decision-makers/policymakers in Member States.

Cognitive factors are crucial to explaining how decision-makers perceive and process warnings.²⁸ They can also help explain reluctance among decision-makers towards early warning and the missing link between early warning and early, preventive action.

Lastly, the lack of financial and human resources currently assigned to the EU's early warning and response system is a general problem that significantly reinforces most of the aforementioned constraints. The best institutional set-up and most sophisticated tools in place will not deliver without the necessary financial and human resources and substantial investment in professional training. The EU cannot fulfil its potential and live up to existing expectations without the necessary investment in human resources.

28 The literature on information processing suggests that it is basically impossible to separate the process of perception from the process of information processing. This is why, to a certain extent, research that focuses on perceptions has been replaced by research that focuses on cognitive information processing. See W. J. Severin and J. W. Tankard Jr. (1997). *Communication theories. Origins, methods, and uses in the mass media* (4th Edition). New York: Longman. p.82.

CONSTRAINT 1: LACK OF INDIVIDUAL AND COLLECTIVE CAPACITY TO MANAGE INFORMATION ON VIOLENT CONFLICT AND DRIVERS OF FRAGILITY IN THE WORLD

We live in an information society with ever increasing amounts of available information. Analysts are overloaded by an enormous mass of information from classified sources of human intelligence (HUMINT) and signals intelligence (SIGINT),²⁹ and from what is known as “open sources” (publicly available sources). The difficulty is to extract from the mass of information those that are relevant for a holistic and well-targeted assessment. ‘The gap between the information we can get hold of and the information we understand’ is constantly widening.³⁰ When it comes to violent political conflicts, there is not even an agreement on what constitutes such a conflict or on the number of conflicts in the world.³¹ What is clear, however, is that there are too many conflicts, but too few human and financial resources, including time and methodological constraints, to enable awareness and understanding of them, let alone have any actual impact on them. People’s individual and collective capacity to manage information on violent conflict, crises and drivers of fragility and violence in the world is limited. “Information management” refers to the whole cycle of systematic monitoring, collection, ordering, understanding and analysis of information, as well as its communication.

In the field of economics, Joseph Stiglitz³² fundamentally questioned the key mainstream assumption of ‘perfect information’, demonstrating that in reality it often does not apply. In the domain of diplomacy, humanitarian relief and intelligence, ‘perfect information’ does not exist either.³³ For any actor involved in these fields it is difficult to have exhaustive, balanced, unfiltered, uncensored and free information. Instead, a situation of information chaos and ‘information asymmetry’ prevails.³⁴

“Information asymmetry” means that the information on different conflicts in international mainstream media is incomplete and heavily unbalanced in quantitative terms. This leads to too little warning – information and analysis – on some conflicts and situations of fragility in comparison to others, regardless of the gravity of the situation, the humanitarian implications or the losses of human lives. A simple search via Google News counting the number of articles on a given country per day can illustrate this.³⁵ While there was an average of 456 articles per day on Iraq, closely followed by Afghanistan (436) and Iran (325), translating into strong (hypertrophic) signals, Indonesia, Thailand, Venezuela and Zimbabwe, for example, were only covered by an average quantity of less than 28 articles per day. Signals were even weaker (hypotrophic) on Kenya, Kyrgyzstan and Somalia, with an average quantity of less than 20 articles per day, and there was almost no coverage of Bolivia, Guatemala or Guinea. Furthermore, there are important information blind spots due to intelligence gaps.³⁶

29 HUMINT refers to intelligence gathering by means of interpersonal contact, as opposed to the more technical intelligence gathering disciplines, such as SIGINT, imagery intelligence (IMINT) and measurement and signature intelligence (MASINT). NATO defines HUMINT as ‘a category of intelligence derived from information collected and provided by human sources’. Typical HUMINT activities consist of interrogations and conversations with persons having access to pertinent information. SIGINT refers to intelligence-gathering by interception of signals, whether between people (communications intelligence, or COMINT), or involving electronic signals not directly used in communication (electronic intelligence, or ELINT), or combinations of the two. As sensitive information is often encrypted, signals intelligence often involves the use of cryptanalysis. Also, traffic analysis – the study of who is signalling whom and in what quantity – can often produce valuable information, even when the messages themselves cannot be decrypted.

30 A. Ricci (2008). Op. cit. Introduction, p.14.

31 This paper uses the definition of the HIIK, according to which conflicts are defined as ‘the clashing of interests (positional differences) over national values of some duration and magnitude between at least two parties (organized groups, states, groups of states, organizations) that are determined to pursue their interests and achieve their goals’. According to this definition, conflict items include: territory, secession, decolonisation, autonomy, system/ideology, national power, regional predominance, international power, resources and others. Conflicts can be non-violent or violent, and have different levels of intensity. See HIIK (2009). Op. cit. p.84.

32 See J. E. Stiglitz (1975). ‘Information and economic analysis’. In M. Parkin and A. R. Nobay (Eds.). *Current Economic Problems*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; J. E. Stiglitz (1985). ‘Information and economic analysis: a perspective’, *Economic Journal*, Vol. 95, Supplement: Conference Papers, pp.21–41; J. E. Stiglitz (1989). ‘On the economic role of the state’. In A. Heertje (Ed.). *The economic role of the state*. Oxford: Blackwell.

33 A. Ricci (2008). Op. cit. p.12.

34 Since about 1970, an important strand of economic research, also referred to as “information economics”, has explored the extent to which markets and other institutions process and convey information. Joseph Stiglitz, George Akerlof and Michael Spence shared the 2001 Nobel Prize for their analyses of markets with asymmetric information. According to Stiglitz (1975, 1985, 1989), many of the problems of markets and other institutions result from costly information, and many of their features are responses to costly information. He therefore questioned the assumptions about perfect information that many of the central theories and principles in economics are based on. See J. Stiglitz (1975). Op. cit.; J. Stiglitz (1985). Op. cit.; J. Stiglitz (1989). Op. cit.

35 This search was done on a daily basis from 10th August 2010 to 18th August 2010 on <http://news.google.com> using the search syntax ‘about:country’.

36 See also R. Baer (2002). *See no evil: the true story of a ground soldier in the CIA’s war on terrorism*. New York: Three Rivers Press (Crown Publishing Group).

Hyper-presentation of a problem in mainstream media often generates a hyper-concern of politicians about the given situation. International mainstream media reinforces information asymmetry by exaggerating warnings and thereby creating fatigue, or in other cases putting pressure on politicians. The media contributes to resonance mechanisms, whereby it generates messages that are then reverberated. The agenda set by international mainstream media is often followed by decision-makers without being sufficiently contrasted with evidence and analysis. If the mainstream media focuses on, for example, five given conflicts in the world, this exerts pressure on politicians to act on those chosen conflicts rather than on others. It also affects the general climate of awareness and compassion in the public sphere.

STRONG AND WEAK SIGNALS

The sheer quantity of articles in the international media is relevant, as it is an indicator of a country's general visibility in the public realm and determines the probability of detecting warning signals early. Only if a country emerges at all on the agenda is there a possibility of detecting weak signals, which might be significant for issuing a warning related to dynamics on violent conflict. Otherwise, strong signals will always overshadow/block out weak signals. The difference between a weak and a strong signal is that a strong signal is reported by, for example, 400 articles in mainstream media, while a weak one by, for example, only three in local media. Yet, these three sources may be a highly significant conflict trigger. Therefore, "weak" means weak in terms of media attention (quantity of sources), but not necessarily weak in significance. Even if these weak signals subsequently reach the attention of the mainstream international media, the lengthy time lapse is such that the window of opportunity for preventive action is often lost. The problem that weak signals are systematically overlooked increases the probability that *significant* weak signals are not taken into account, and ultimately reduces the possibility of the EU having an impact.

Examples of significant weak signals are varied. They include:

- The pre-Rwandan war messages in the "Kangura" Hutu media, inciting racial hatred and claiming Hutu power, which were considered instrumental in the 1994 genocide, during which an estimated 800,000 people died;
- Two Kosovo-Albanian children drowning in Kosovo, which sparked the 2004 violence and led to numerous deaths, the destruction of 730 homes and 29 monasteries, and 4,000 Serbs being forced to flee from their homes;
- The adoption of specific legal and/or constitutional reforms;
- The death or sacking of a political figure;
- The 2009 plans for popular consultations in Honduras, which sparked a coup d'état;
- The fumigation of glyphosate in Colombia and Ecuador;
- The Filipino government importing one million tons more rice in 2008 than in the previous year, which provoked panic, accelerated a global food crisis and led to the price of rice shooting up by a factor of six, in turn leading to riots in 40 countries in Asia and Africa; and
- The rise in global wheat prices by 83 percent the same year, sparking major riots in Egypt.

These examples demonstrate that it is essential not to just cover mass media and to highlight how small actions or events can trigger major consequences, such as the investment of the Filipino government, which had regional and global consequences. Effective early warning is critical and requires evidence-based, robust and rigorous analysis of the complex web of linkages between actors and their power alliances, events and trends, rather than the ever too often bureaucratic over-simplification of a given context.

IMPLICATIONS FOR DECISION-MAKING

Information asymmetry is matched by asymmetric political and public awareness and attention (attention asymmetry), which in turn translates into different levels of public compassion, intelligence monitoring, project responses, etc. Levels of conviction regarding the importance of some conflict dynamics are low and compromise the willingness of decision-makers to act. Assumptions have a self-reinforcing character, 'as selective attention

to information contributes to the perseverance of beliefs'.³⁷ Information chaos risks leading to the arbitrary reduction of complexity and oversimplification of reality, a process Heuer described as employing 'simple rules of thumb that reduce the burden of processing [...] information'.³⁸ If decision-makers/policymakers do not possess enough references in terms of information and analysis based on evidence, short-termism becomes the structuring element of political judgement,³⁹ especially when they are under pressure. This can trigger sub-optimal decision-making and a predominantly reactive approach favouring crisis management instead of conflict prevention and peacebuilding.⁴⁰ Not only is crisis management much more costly (see Introduction), it is also less likely to have a significant impact, and therefore risks being inefficient. Subsequently, the political discourse is often adapted to practise *ex post facto*.⁴¹

As described above, information chaos and information asymmetry spur short-termism and sub-optimal decision-making and reinforce the EU's tendency towards a reactive crisis-management approach. More and better intelligence and warning will provide evidence, and help identify alternatives via the forecasting of potential developments and scenarios related to dynamics of violent conflict and fragility. This is crucial to managing political priorities against a background of scarce resources.

Even if analysts were able to deliver highly sophisticated (i.e. accurate and timely) warnings, which in principle is assumed to be possible here, the decision to act upon these ultimately lies in the hands of decision-makers. This is not only a matter of conviction and motivation to take action, and the necessary capacity to do so, but also related to objectives and priorities. 'The smooth operation of an early warning system [...] requires some effort with regard to the definition of the general objectives of the actor involved'.⁴² The EU still lacks a clear definition of priorities and objectives in the field of conflict prevention; it lacks a coherent and comprehensive conflict prevention strategy.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Early warning is a necessary tool to effectively manage information on conflict and fragility dynamics in the world and overcome widespread patterns of arbitrary reduction of complexity and oversimplification of reality among decision-makers, which ultimately lead to sub-optimal decision-making and inefficient policymaking.

In order to manage the enormous mass of information, the EU needs a fusion centre and an effective indicational warning system. On the basis of the definition of areas of interest, priorities and established requirements by the High Representative and the Political and Security Committee, tailored indicators need to be developed by analysts in the fusion centre. This indicational warning system would optimise efforts and enable analysts to effectively manage the mass of information and extract the critical elements to support the analyst's capacity to develop holistic critical assessments and scenarios. This, in turn, would enable the EU to carry out early and effective action ensuring maximised impact.

However, such a system is not free. The setting up of an effective early warning system requires allocating sufficient human and financial resources and making substantial investment in professional training, as well as in adequate and innovative methodologies.

Open source information is crucial for early warning, as numerous weak signals can be detected.⁴³ Between 80 and 90 percent of the necessary information can be gathered through open sources. Over recent years, open source information has significantly grown in quantity and quality. It is fast and can easily be shared. Open source intelligence (OSINT) is a form of intelligence collection that involves finding, selecting and acquiring information from publicly available sources and analysing it to produce actionable intelligence.

37 J. Brante (2010). *Linking warning and response in multinational organizations. The case of the EU and Russo-Georgian war of 2008*. Draft paper presented in Stockholm, 9th September 2010. p.12; J. Levy (2003). 'Political psychology of foreign policy'. In D. Sears, L. Huddy and R. Jervis. *Oxford handbook of political psychology*. Oxford University Press. p.264.

38 R. J. Heuer (1999). *Psychology of intelligence analysis*. Center for the Study of Intelligence. Langley, VA: Central Intelligence Agency. p.122.

39 A. Ricci (2008). *Op. cit.* p.16.

40 See also R. Whitman and S. Wolf (2010). *Op. cit.*

41 A. Ricci (2008). *Op. cit.* p.16.

42 H. Lavoix (2008). *Op. cit.* p.373.

43 In the intelligence community, the term "open" refers to overt, publicly available sources, as opposed to covert or classified sources.

The EU should better exploit the potential of open source information and intelligence. Given that turning open source information into OSINT and warnings is costly, time-consuming and requires specific skills, substantial investments in time, money and methodology are necessary. It is also crucial to have sufficient analysts to process the information. The Crisis Room with six staff members, and the new Crisis Response and Peacebuilding directorate in the EEAS with only two officials, are hugely understaffed. The team needs to be strengthened. Furthermore, a shift in attitude regarding OSINT is needed. Far too many decision-makers continue to consider alternative sources of security-related information as “suspicious” or “dangerous”.⁴⁴

There is a need for evidence-informed prioritisation if the EU wants to become a more effective player in the field of conflict prevention. Given that resources are scarce, the EU needs to identify where it can have the strongest impact on conflict prevention, for the sake of cost- and impact-effectiveness. This is why the EU needs to pay more attention to weak early warning signals in order to raise its profile in the field of conflict prevention. The EU should engage more in countries with latent conflict dynamics, where it could have substantial and sustainable impact. At present, resources are predominantly targeted for consolidated conflict settings, where the EU's potential for real impact is very limited. Relatively modest political or economic interventions in pre-violent conflict situations can prevent disputes from escalating and subsequently becoming more disruptive as well as more costly and difficult to resolve.⁴⁵ Given that EU and Member States' resources are limited, the EU should maximise these by prioritising actions in countries where it can have a greater impact. Choices have opportunity costs. If funds are primarily given to so-called “hotspots” or “red countries” – countries suffering an acute crisis situation – this necessarily implies that there are less funds available for countries where conflict dynamics are – or at least are perceived to be – more latent, or are completely overlooked. Examples of this type of country can be found all over the world, such as Benin, Egypt, Guatemala, Guinea-Conakry, Honduras, Indonesia and Mauritania.

The EU needs to promote an early warning community and invest more in training. EU officials working on conflict and fragility-affected countries need interdisciplinary training in sociology, political science, peace and conflict studies, as well as on empirical research in social science (methodology) and causality analysis. Likewise, there is also a need for more and better training on how to manage information in order to mitigate information asymmetry regarding violent conflict and situations of fragility in the world.

The EU also needs to draw more upon the expertise, insights and local contacts from NGOs, think tanks and civil society (local and international).

More empirical studies on information asymmetry in the international mass media are needed in order to increase opportunities for re-framing. More research is also needed on flux of information.

More pronounced political leadership is needed to foster a European strategic vision, a strategic culture for the prevention of violent conflict on the basis of clear objectives and priorities: a European norm. In the EU Programme for the Prevention of Violent Conflicts, the EU announced the setting of ‘clear political priorities for preventive actions’, stating that ‘successful conflict prevention relies on preparedness to take action before a situation deteriorates into violence’ and that the ‘development of policy options must start with clear political priorities and direction, set out through regular reviews of potential conflict areas’.⁴⁶ Ten years after Göteborg, and in the light of the Lisbon Treaty and the setting up of the EEAS, the EU needs to show how it wants to approach conflict prevention and peacebuilding in a truly comprehensive way, bringing together the humanitarian, development and (internal and external) security dimensions. This requires an honest debate on threats and interests. This, in turn, would allow for increased transparency and accountability towards citizens, both in Europe and in conflict-affected and fragile countries.

44 A. Ricci (2008). *Op. cit.* p.13.

45 See also M. S. Lund (1996). *Op. cit.* p.x.

46 Council of the EU (2001). *Op. cit.* p.3.

CONSTRAINT 2: SCATTERED AND INSUFFICIENTLY INTEGRATED EARLY WARNING SYSTEMS COMBINED WITH INEFFECTIVE DECISION-MAKING PROCEDURES FOR PREVENTIVE ACTION

The EU can draw on a wealth of different sources of information, such as EU delegations, Regional Crisis Response Planning Officers (RCRPOs), Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) missions, EU Special Representatives (EUSR), The European Commission Crisis Room and sectorial crisis rooms, the intelligence services of Member States feeding into the Situation Centre (SITCEN), EUMS, European Commission Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection (ECHO), the Monitoring and Information Centre (MIC), the General European Rapid Alert System (ARGUS), country and thematic desks, and local and international civil society, including media. However, the early warning system is polycentric and lacks a fusion centre where the different sources of information and EU strands would be woven together, analysed in a comprehensive manner and redistributed. If the information is not managed effectively, integrating all relevant aspects, the analysis will be defective, and so too will the warning. This often results in an over-simplification of reality (see also previous section) and does not enable politicians to assess the evolution of the parameters of risk and take timely and adequate action. On the contrary, it often leads decision-makers to adopt a reactive ad hoc approach.

Moreover, there is a strong disconnect between the field and the headquarter levels, which is more acute in some cases than others, such as in Honduras and Nepal. Warning receptivity at headquarter level tends to be limited, in particular for countries low on the political agenda. The information and analysis from the ground produced by EU delegations, RCRPOs and local civil society organisations is often undervalued or gets “lost”. For an effective early warning system, it is crucial to draw on local expertise and people who know state society relations from the inside. In 2009 regular reports were sent from the EU delegation in Honduras to headquarter level on the mounting tensions and breakdown of constitutional rule caused by the confrontation between the executive, congress and judiciary, as well as military involvement. Moreover, the EU delegation had provided a correct forecast analysis of when the climax of the tensions would take place, which did indeed result in a coup d'état in June 2009. However, political attention remained low and there was a lack of flexibility to adapt to the evolving conflict dynamics, but pressure to disburse funds including for general budget support.⁴⁷

The Lisbon Treaty and the setting up of the EEAS are an opportunity to merge in a single structure all the early warning centres established in the course of the past ten years in Brussels. However, plans for a fully integrated system within the EEAS are lacking. Steps in the right direction are the fusion of the SITCEN and the Crisis Room, as well as a clearer warning hierarchy with the High Representative at the top. Missed opportunities include the disconnects between policy and implementation, with policies designed by the EEAS but implemented by the Commission through its financial instruments. This is not conducive to effective conflict prevention.

Too often decision-makers do not act in a timely and effective manner, and are therefore not able to influence the trajectory of fragility or conflict dynamics. In some cases they lack the compelling information and analysis; in others they do not trust the analysis provided, are biased or not convinced by the cost-benefit analysis, and do not act in spite of available warnings, such as in Sudan or the 2007–08 crisis in Kenya.

The EU's CSDP is still a highly institutionalised and complex process of consultation and cooperation between Member States' governments. Decision-making is collective in nature and requires full consensus between all 27 Member States before action is possible. Interests vary greatly, and it often proves difficult to forge a consensus. This can also lead to the dilution of a judgement in the interest of compromise and unanimity, and trigger the predominance of the minimum common denominator.

In addition, decision-making mainly relies on the information and analysis from intelligence agencies. The current system does not sufficiently integrate all the different sources of information and EU strands, including those on the ground. Furthermore, there is a significant disconnect with other policy fields of EU external action, such as development and trade. CSDP military and civilian rule of law operations are ‘institutionally and practically

⁴⁷ In spite of the evolving conflict, EU Headquarters insisted on the quick disbursement of development cooperation funds including funds for general budget support which normally requires a stable, transparent government in place. At the time, this was clearly not the case in Honduras.

divorced from activities supported by the Commission in pre-, active and post-crisis situations'.⁴⁸ Moreover, the procedures suffer from breaks in the chain of command and decision processes. But as Commissioner Benita Ferrero-Waldner states, EU crisis-management and conflict-prevention capacities 'must be based on a multi-dimensional approach addressing the whole conflict cycle and integrating in each case the best mix of our many instruments – civilian and military, development assistance, democracy and human rights support, political dialogue and regional partnerships, as well as the Instrument for Stability's resources for responding to crises, building capacity for crisis response and addressing long-term security threats'.⁴⁹

The EU explicitly and repeatedly envisages a higher profile on the world stage. The crux of a coherent and effective EU foreign and security policy is a fully integrated EU early warning system equipped with a holistic indicational early warning fusion centre where all the different sources of information and analysis are woven together (human, open sources and satellite images from headquarter and field level). This would provide political decision-makers with an evidence- and context-based comprehensive overview in line with defined strategic objectives, so that they can make the decisions to act in a timely, effective and comprehensive manner. The fusion centre needs to centralise information from SITCEN, the Crisis Room, sectorial crisis rooms of the European Commission, the Crisis Response and Peacebuilding Directorate, Member States' intelligence services, ECHO, MIC, ARGUS, Justice, Freedom and Security (JLS), Watchkeeping Capability (WKC), security offices, Crisis Management and Planning Directorate (CMPD), Civilian Planning and Conduct Capability (CPCC), EUMS, EU delegations, EU RCRPOs, EUSRs, country and thematic desks, geographical working groups and local and international civil society and the media. There is a need to create an effective system for the flux of information from the periphery to the centre. But there is a need to go beyond current EEAS plans for the early warning system and management of the flux of information by joining the SITCEN and Crisis Room, which indeed need to be established within the fusion centre (see diagram).

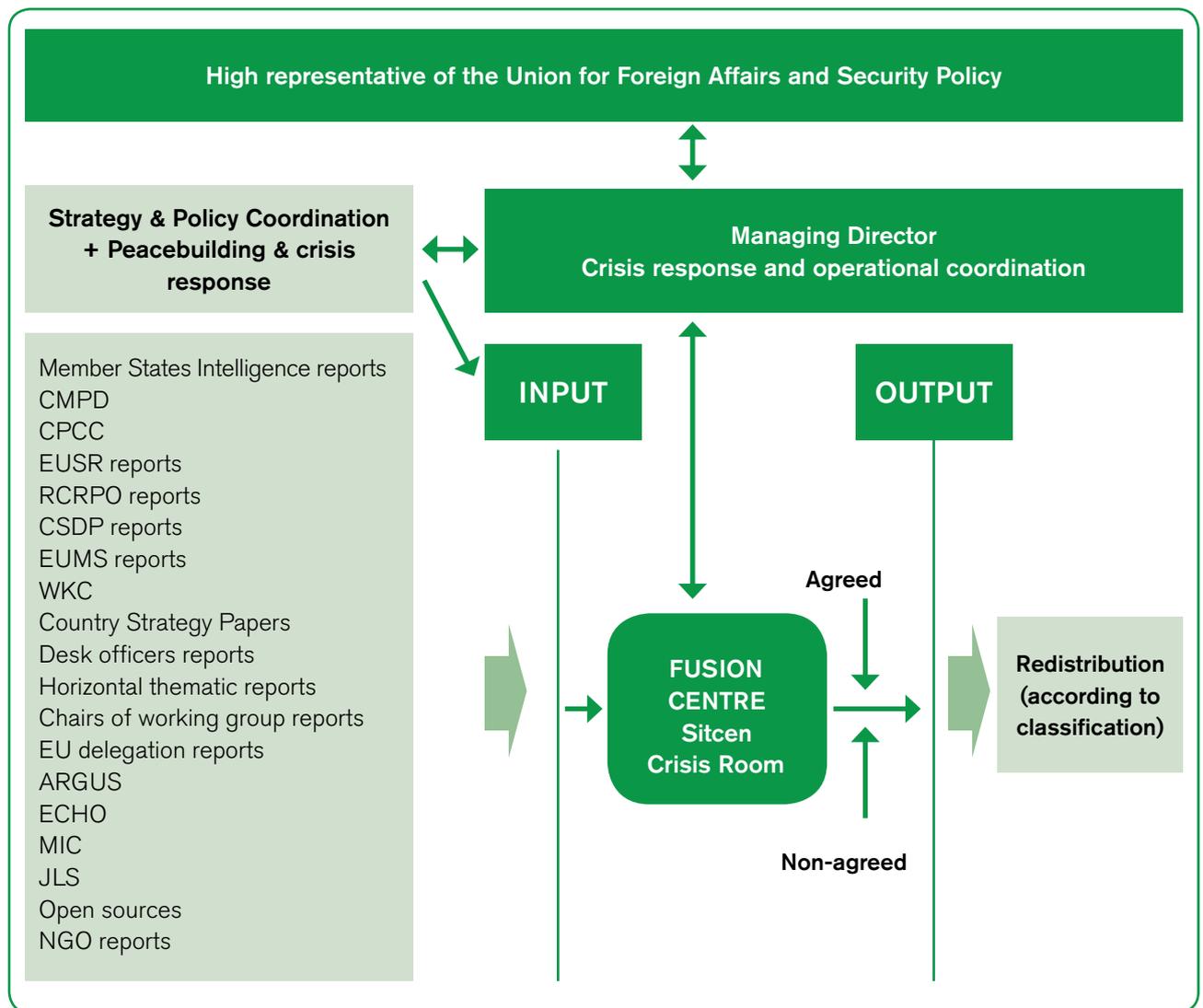
RECOMMENDATIONS

This fusion centre needs to be hierarchically linked to the Managing Director of Crisis Response and Operational Coordination and the High Representative Baroness Ashton, and ensure a fluid pipeline of communication with the strategic policy planning cell. All sensitivities and key areas of interest of Member States need to be represented by Member States' staff working in the fusion centre. Regarding the outputs of the fusion centre, the choice between EU-agreed intelligence and non-agreed intelligence is delicate, as often when it is agreed it implies a dilution of the intelligence and therefore results in a less effective intelligence. Therefore, a system that uses a mixture of agreed and non-agreed intelligence fusion centre outputs should be adopted. This should imply an agreement on EU areas of interests, priorities and establishment of requirements, but then the product of the analysis of the fusion would not need to be agreed by all Member States, but would indicate in a footnote if there are major opposing analyses by a given Member State on a given risk or threat assessment and potential scenarios. This would ensure the high quality of the fusion centre products, but enable the High Representative and Political and Security Committee (PSC) to be aware of the resistance of a Member State on a specific issue. The Member States should be able to access the fusion centre outputs. Overleaf is a diagram designed by the authors suggesting the organogram of an effective EU early warning system.

The comprehensive information needs to be analysed to provide decision-makers with a forecast risk analysis, in light of the predominant risks and threats that the EU is concerned with. The different sources of information need to be weaved together through a comprehensive indicational warning system which also provides a few potential scenarios of how the threat could evolve. The early warning needs to demonstrate through evidence-based analysis that, if the risk parameters evolve in such a direction, then the outcome of the situation would be X. The forecast analysis and scenarios need to be drafted sufficiently in advance so as to enable effective response. It is clearly easier for the EU to plan a response based on a warning a few months in advance instead of the day before. This would allow for preparation of different response options taking into account the competencies and capabilities of the EU (see also 'Constraint 3'). Thereby, politicians would have the freedom to decide whether or not to act in a timely and targeted manner, ensuring maximum impact on conflict dynamics and therefore efficient usage of scarce resources. The EU's credibility as a global actor would consequently grow with its successes.

48 C. Gourlay (2004). 'European Union procedures and resources for crisis management', *International Peacekeeping*, Vol. 11, Issue 3. p.404 ff.

49 B. Ferrero-Waldner (2010). 'Making the difference? What works in response to crises and security threats – the debate continues', European Commission, p.7.



Ideally, an EU early warning fusion centre should not only centralise information and analysis, but also redistribute it throughout the system, including to aid programming and management units. Increased sharing will boost the potential added value of the community and in turn increase incentives to be part of it. In any case, the system will remain polycentric.⁵⁰ Even after the setting-up of the EEAS, there will be a constant need to encourage the sharing of information and analysis among existing early warning centres across the EU. This should be facilitated by clear guidelines, increasing knowledge through training (both at headquarter and delegation level) and creating incentive mechanisms for individuals.

Furthermore, warnings need to be effectively communicated, which is especially difficult and time-consuming in large multilateral frameworks like the EU.⁵¹ According to Andrea Ricci, the Crisis Room Coordinator, an 'opinion movement in favour of a given type of action' or an 'alignment process' has to be created.⁵² An integral EU early warning system needs to facilitate effective linkages and flows between gathering information, analysis, communication of the warning and the response. All the parts need to work well together, so as to lead to relevant and effective action.⁵³

The transition from warning to action is achieved through a form of *centrifugal communication*. It is actually the repetition in eccentric circles of a basic sequence: an important detail is isolated from the stream of information;

50 A. Ricci (2008). Op. cit. p.15.

51 W. Shapcott (2009). *Do they listen? Communicating warnings: a practitioner's perspective*. Paper presented at workshop on 'Forecasting, Warning and Political Response', organised by the FORESIGHT Project at King's College London, 18–19th September 2009; A. Ricci (2008). Op. cit. pp.14–15.

52 A. Ricci (2008). Op. cit. p.15.

53 A. Schnabel (2008). Op. cit. p.387.

the detail is amplified and interpreted. Then the interpretation is first shared and then agreed by a larger community. Every time the sequence is repeated successfully, energy and speed are added to the process. Without a communication process this energy does not succeed in crossing the borders that separate analytical units, competing risk assessment entities in a single country, and policy units across EU Member States and EU institutions. The opportunities for all these gears to misalign, to interrupt the consensus dynamics are so numerous, and the combination of co-factors generating disagreement is so large, that it should not surprise anyone if the system produces sub-optimal results.⁵⁴

There is a need to foster a community of analysis and to increase the understanding of the added value of early warning. Education and training need to be reinforced for decision-makers who are already convinced, as well as for those who are still reluctant. There is a need to develop social networks around early warning within EU institutions.

The ambitions and priorities of the EU need to be matched with the necessary structures, procedures and mechanisms, financial and human sources, and political will.

It is important to recognise that:

- [E]arly warning is a dynamic process of interaction between analysts and policymakers. Regardless of how risk estimates are generated, these must be evaluated and acted on by a human being who is subject to potential flaws in reasoning and decision-making in situations of risk and uncertainty [...] Therefore, reliance on computer models may be one part of a strategy designed to minimise the effects of cognitive biases on early warning, but is clearly insufficient.⁵⁵

There is a need for more training on how early warning works, and both decision-makers and analysts need to understand the work of the other, so that there can be fluidity between early warning and early action. It is important to remember that, when judgements in warnings are based on beliefs that are in contrast to the recipients' "established truths", the warning receptivity will decrease and vice versa.⁵⁶ Regular interaction engaging in anticipatory thinking with interlocutors and customising warning will be conducive to increasing warning receptivity.⁵⁷

The institutional set-up, structures and procedures of the EEAS must ensure a holistic whole of EU approach and robustly enhance EU early warning and early action capacities. This also requires decision-making mechanisms and procedures to be improved to facilitate timely and preventive action. In order to improve the link between early warning and early action, it is important that:

- Decision makers:
 - Establish clear areas of interest, priorities and requirements; and
 - Provide feedback on fusion centre outputs to indicate if these fulfil requirements or if more intelligence is needed.
- Early warning professionals be aware of:
 - Decision-makers' current political preferences and agendas;
 - Their dominant beliefs and assumptions about the world;
 - What kind of evidence they consider credible;
 - On what kind of issues they require a higher bar of proof;
 - The political instruments they have available for preventive or mitigating action; and
 - The lead time needed to deploy those instruments and the risks/costs associated with deploying them.

⁵⁴ A. Ricci (2008). *Op. cit.* p.14–15.

⁵⁵ L. Woocher (2008). *Op. cit.* p.19.

⁵⁶ On early warning receptivity, see J. Brante (2010). *Op. cit.* p.13.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.* p.38.

CONSTRAINT 3: EARLY WARNING SUPPORTING TOOLS ARE NOT USED TO THEIR FULL POTENTIAL

The EU can draw on a series of valid early warning supporting tools that could be integrated into an effective early warning system such as: regular reports from both CSDP missions and EU delegations, Country Strategy Papers, mid-term reviews, EUSR reports, the 'Watch List', EUMS reports, the root causes check list, Head of Mission reports, sector-specific reports (e.g. on human rights) and Tariqa 3. However, EU staff are not sufficiently educated about the range of existing tools. This in turn means that policymakers do not use the available tools to their full potential.

Early warning tools can be classified as either data-based (i.e. quantitative) or judgement-based (i.e. qualitative). While the former are based on the collection and analysis of large datasets, the latter rely on the subjective assessment of experts. Given that they are complementary, the EU uses both methods.

The aforementioned tools suffer from a series of weaknesses, such as: structurally weak sourcing; lack of forecast risk analysis and scenario development; insufficient integration of political, security, social, ethnic/tribal/clan and economic factors; and inadequate reporting and warning mechanisms. The EU must strengthen its focus on the root causes (both structural and systemic) of fragile and conflict-prone countries.⁵⁸ As Galtung highlights, it is important that the EU's strengthening of capacities to respond to crises and security threats does not become 'bandages and tranquillisers, ice to lower the temperature, rather than getting at the root causes' and reducing fragilities in sustainable ways.⁵⁹

Country Strategy Papers (CSPs) are a key EU early warning supporting tool. However, they are currently under-used. CSPs should cover the full range of relevant dimensions to identify and understand fragility and conflict dynamics in a given country. Previously, they were drafted under the responsibility of the Commission, with more or less input from Member States. Since the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty, the delegations represent the EU rather than just the Commission, and CSPs need to be more comprehensive and incorporate a more global EU approach. This implies strengthening the monitoring of security and conflict dynamics. Already in 2001, the Council requested that the Commission implement its proposal on strengthening the conflict-prevention elements in the CSPs.⁶⁰ While strategies for some countries include this kind of assessment, such as in the case of Morocco, others lack it completely. Moreover, CSPs rarely include analysis on transnational or trans-regional threats. CSPs, as well as the respective mid-term reviews, are the ideal starting point for scenario planning.

EUSRs promote EU policies and interests in troubled regions and countries, and play an active role in efforts to consolidate peace, stability and the rule of law. They send regular reports, provide presentations and discuss the updates and potential response options in the PSC. EUSRs support the work of Catherine Ashton, High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy (FASP), in the EU's efforts to become a more active, more coherent and more capable actor on the world stage. They provide the EU with an active political presence in key countries and regions,⁶¹ acting as a "voice" and "face" for the EU and its policies. However, EUSRs lack training in mediation, conflict sensitivity and early warning.

The creation of the RCRPO posts is a very positive development. As of May 2010 there were eight, based in Ethiopia, India, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Kenya, Nicaragua, Senegal and Thailand, covering the respective regions.⁶² RCRPOs support the political sections of the respective delegations; they do not deal with budget or project management issues. They are responsible for monitoring conflict dynamics as well as for the early identification of project opportunities in the field of conflict prevention and peacebuilding.

58 M. Van Bellinghen (2010). 'Conflict prevention and peace building: the EU "holistic" approach and instruments in support of a more peaceful world 20 years on from now'. In A. Ricci (Ed.). *Making the difference? What works in response to crises and security threats – the debate continues*. Brussels: European Commission; L. Montanaro (2009). *The Kosovo statebuilding conundrum: addressing fragility in a contested state*. FRIDE and International Alert. Working Paper, No. 91; J. Schünemann (2009). *What role for the EU? Finding a niche in the Haitian peacebuilding process*. IfP: Security Cluster.

59 J. Galtung (2010). 'The road ahead'. In A. Ricci (Ed.). Op. cit.

60 Council of the EU (2001). Op. cit. p.4.

61 The 11 EUSRs currently in office cover the following regions: Afghanistan, the African Great Lakes, the African Union, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Central Asia, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM), Georgia, Kosovo, the Middle East, Moldova, the South Caucasus and Sudan.

62 They cover between 5 and 20 countries.

The “Watch List” is also an important early warning tool for the EU. It is a global six-monthly overview prepared by the Council Secretariat and the Commission, and refers to the countries and regions agreed by the PSC, which also adopts the Watch List. The list draws on information and assessments available through the early warning bodies of the Council Secretariat, CSDP missions, EUSRs and Member States’ intelligence services. The most recent version of March 2010 covers 54 countries or regions.⁶³ It provides an analysis of the threats defined by the 2003 European Security Strategy (terrorism, weapons of mass destruction (WMD), proliferation, regional conflicts, state failure and organised crime), and adds poverty, disease, threats against energy security, illegal migration towards the EU and critical environmental threats. But the threats are far too broadly indicated and do not identify the consequence of the threat, which is of highest concern. It is insufficient to simply indicate for instance terrorism, poverty, the political situation, etc. There is also a lack of a tailored set of indicators for each threat in each area of interest as well as lack of prioritisation.

Moreover, the EU lacks a colour coding system for threat levels, despite the fact that such a system has elsewhere proven to be extremely useful and has been adopted by most EU Member States in their national systems, and by the US and NATO. The colour codings predominantly used are green for normal, then yellow, orange and red, depending on threat levels – red being the highest threat level. Additionally, black colour coding signals an intelligence gap for a specific threat. This system is very clear to politicians, who can then decide where they want more intelligence efforts to be deployed and/or potential response options to be developed.

Although the Watch List incorporates forecast analysis, it presents certain weaknesses in terms of utility, coherence, scaling, scenario setting and timing. The utility of the forecasting suffers from the lack of precision of the threat and its consequences. If the end state, and therefore the requirements, are not sufficiently precise, then the analyst cannot provide adequately targeted forecasting. Moreover, the usage of the criteria for analysis and warning is not coherent, and is often based on certain Member States’ particular interests, rather than on objective conflict and risk assessments. Therefore, the scaling is variable, which weakens the utility of the document as a tool. In this paper, it is considered arguable, for example, that Uganda should only be stated as a “low risk” and that Guatemala, Honduras, Nigeria and Sri Lanka should only be identified as “medium risk”. This should be seen in comparison with the categorisation as “medium risk” of, for instance, Cote d’Ivoire, and the categorisation of Kosovo as “high risk”.

Another problem is the quality of the analysis, given that it relies on the input of Member States, which tend to hold back sensitive information, as they do not sufficiently trust the impermeability of EU confidential documents with regards to certain Member States. Several EU Member States will only share their intelligence with states who are also NATO members. Moreover, the Member States’ intelligence is sent to its representative in SITCEN rather than SITCEN as an entity, and therefore does not forge a common effort, trust and effective vision and action. In addition, it suffers from certain Member States requiring a country to be on the Watch List, but then that state sometimes ends up not even sending intelligence on the area of interest they have requested. Furthermore, while the Watch List is shared as a product, Member States often do not share the actual added value behind it, i.e. the analysis and assessment gained from different sources. The fact that the content of the Watch List must be adopted unanimously – Member States can veto countries – makes it especially vulnerable to the predominance of Member State interests, preferences and particular notions of security. In that sense, the Watch List reflects the minimum common denominator within the EU, which weakens its added value. In addition, the list is predominantly based on a crisis-monitoring rather than conflict-prevention rationale. It has therefore proved of limited use to examining more structural crises and countries where there was no immediate danger of violent conflict. Updating is done on a six-monthly basis, whereas it would be more effective if it were every 90 days (i.e. on a quarterly basis), as six months is very long in the life of an evolving conflict.

In general, there is a lack of strategic forecast analysis on risks and the potential developments and scenarios related to dynamics of violent conflict and fragility. This abets a reactive rather than a preventive and long-term oriented approach. Scenario planning enables decision-makers to develop concrete response options in line with defined priorities well in advance of a potential crisis erupting. It also allows for better calculation of the cost of

63 The Watch List overview is predominantly categorised with regards to specific countries and territories selected by the PSC, but it also includes both certain regions, if the critical factors have a regional dimension, and certain conflicts, when a bilateral or multilateral conflict rather than the situation in a country is the main reason for concern. This grouping in the recent version was operated for: Israel/Palestinian conflict; Mali/Niger (Sahel region); and Mano River countries (Guinea, Liberia, Sierra Leone).

potential early actions and matching these with the available capabilities and instruments (e.g. financial, material, technical and human resources), combined with response options (e.g. diplomacy, mediation, development aid and trade agreements), for a global EU approach.

NATO, for example, developed its early warning system in 1952 and now benefits from a sophisticated, practical, easy-to-use and effective system. NATO carries out systematic forecast risk analysis, taking into account political, social, economic, ethnic, religious and security-related indicators. They are adapted to each context and are continuously updated. The analysis is always related to an “end-state” (i.e. the worst-case scenario) that has to be avoided from the perspective of decision-makers. The identification of an end-state goes beyond the identification of threats, given that it refers to a very concrete possible outcome/situation that needs to be avoided or whose trajectory needs to be changed. But despite the sophisticated and effective system that NATO benefits from, its actions are far more limited in scope and therefore it does not benefit from the wide spectrum of competencies and capabilities that the EU enjoys. The EU can draw on a wide spectrum of response options and combine these with EU approaches, which will allow it to maximise its impact in line with its strategies and objectives. But this is only possible if the EU matches its ambitions with the creation of an integrated, effective early warning system and addresses its constraints.

The new Tariqa 3 is a sophisticated qualitative and quantitative early warning supporting tool developed by the Commission's Crisis Room. It draws on a wide array of sources, among them Lexis Nexis, Factiva, Latest News (press agencies), Google (news and web), Oxford Analytica, Proquest (PhD thesis, etc.), etc. and includes video and audio material. Through Tariqa 3, it is possible to launch search requests per country, either standardised or specified manually via introducing a search syntax. More importantly, Tariqa allows undertaking cluster analysis and scenario drawing. Cluster analysis is a statistical exploratory tool designed to reveal natural groupings (clusters) within a data set that would otherwise not be apparent. It therefore allows for identifying commonalities between countries and can help policymakers design policy and response options. Via Tariqa's scenario drawing tool, it is possible to identify how strong or weak the impact of a given set of factors and actors on the situation/dynamics is in a given country. This, in turn, facilitates detecting and isolating weak signals, and is a way to double check if factors that are presented as strong in the international media are indeed significant. The latest version of Tariqa has also improved its tools for sharing information, through options to print, export into files or share electronically with other users.

Effective early warning and usage of its tools faces a variety of resistances, including to: change, institutional rationales, inter-institutional cooperation, early warning tools, drawing scenarios and communitarisation of intelligence. Some Member States would like to avoid early warning reports providing evidence, as these might generate pressure for action and reduce the possibility of escaping political responsibility.⁶⁴

In addition to the EU system, NGO signals are not sufficiently taken into account, in spite of the fact that the organisations are based in conflict-affected countries and have experience, contextual knowledge and networks on the ground. The EU does not draw sufficiently on NGOs on the ground to cooperate as antennas to detect conflict dynamics. Others, such as the ECOWAS early warning system, for example, incorporate NGOs in their system and sign contracts with selected NGO representative organisations in each country for this purpose. The EU could explore this option, drawing from ECOWAS's experience.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The EU needs a solid and easy-to-use indicational warning system that is continuously updated; monitors and manages information on a particular situation; provides a conflict analysis of the trends of risk factors; takes into account the power dynamics, alliances and events and manifestations; develops forecast scenario options sufficiently in advance; provides a response direction in line with EU collective strategic goals and priorities; and provides response options and response priorities, macro- and micro-level plans, implementation and monitoring.⁶⁵

Qualitative early warning supporting tools and sources feeding into an indicational warning system would enable an effective prioritisation and scenario developments. But the EU needs a system that can extract from the quantitative information, with the help of critical indicators, the crucial targeted elements for the early warning product.

The EU needs to establish indicators adapted to each context and threat; these may be indicators, for instance,

64 Interviews with both EU and Member State officials.

65 See D. Nyheim (2008). *Can violence, war, and state collapse be prevented? The future of operational conflict early warning and response systems*. OECD-DAC.

on power alliances, conflicted democracy dynamics, ethnic strife, border strife, regional strife, conflicts of natural resources, interested power groups (internal and external), charismatic warmongers and peacemakers, linguistic tensions, violence, involvement of international actors and institutions, small arms and light weapons (SALW), WMD, organised crime, control of the army, economic distress, tribal powers and activities, and ideologies and religion (e.g. harmony, tension, resentment, fanatical violence, etc.). In order to set up “good” indicators, a comprehensive picture of the situation is needed first. Indicators must not be static but dynamic, thus demonstrating the evolving nature of threats. Indicators must inform analysis and vice versa (not a linear process).

However, the risks entailed in the over-reliance on computer models, as previously experienced by the US, require a certain caution: they are a useful tool and can categorise information and suggest options, but should be considered as a support tool, not a crystal ball. The options need to be critically assessed and validated by analysts in order to be credible.

Instead of being a sum of Member States' interests, the Watch List should represent EU areas of interest and provide clear prioritisation. The Watch List must indicate what the specific situation and trends are in a given area of interest and how they can impact on the interests of the EU. For a country to be on the Watch List, even if one single Member State has requested it, it needs to be justified and recognised by all EU Member States as sufficiently of interest to the EU to be on the Watch List. The defined area of interest, the specific threat and why it is a major concern and a priority (i.e. potential consequences of the threat) should guide the fusion centre's focus, in line with identified priorities. It should be an EU-agreed list of countries and an EU-agreed warning problem definition. However, the intelligence reports that Member States submit in line with these areas of focus and common vision should not be EU-agreed and Member States should be free to send what they want.

Member States need to feed high-quality information into the Watch List, and share their assessments and analysis in addition to the list itself. There is a need to ensure a secure system of intelligence in the EU, with secured electronic post and a secure database. The early warning product of the fusion centre should be accessible to Member States.

Papers submitted by EUSRs and RCRPOs, and CSPs, have the potential if maximised to become key sources for effective early warning. Reports must be rigorous in their conflict analysis and early warnings, and must be regularly updated (i.e. not merely once a year for RCRPOs, as mentioned in the draft of the EU fragility and conflict action plan). Regular reporting is necessary to understand the evolution of conflict dynamics, but there also needs to be the flexibility to react to evolving dynamics of conflict.

Staff in headquarters and delegations need to receive training on conflict analysis to strengthen conflict and security assessment in CSPs. CSPs, as a key supporting tool for early warning, need to be used to their maximum potential. In particular, this implies strengthening the monitoring of security and conflict dynamics. CSPs need to include more and better conflict and fragility assessments, by paying attention to: political factors (e.g. elites, power struggles, political parties, relationships between government and opposition, role of parliaments, legitimacy issues, etc.); security factors (e.g. security sector (armed forces, police, democratic oversight mechanisms), crime, etc.); rule of law (e.g. human rights, corruption, impunity, etc.); socio-economic and equality aspects; civil society and the media; inter-ethnic tensions; transnational organised crime; regional dynamics; environmental vulnerability, etc. In addition, delegations should actively engage with and draw on the knowledge of local civil society.

The EU needs to step up its capacity to do forecast analysis and scenario planning. This will enable decision-makers to develop concrete options for responses and match these against the means at their disposal. Although, 'for warning analysis to be useful to policymakers, it must go beyond merely identifying a possible future event as plausible or even likely and threatening' and 'analytic products should consider the dynamics that are promoting escalation of the threat; the specific actors involved and their capabilities, interests and behaviours; and events in the offing that could trigger deterioration or create a window of opportunity for a more positive outcome'.⁶⁶

Thematic and geographic risk assessments often suffer from silo practices and need to be interwoven and integrated more into the early warning system.

Cooperation with reputable and trustworthy civil society organisations as partners and antennas for the EU in the

66 L. Woocher (2008). *Op. cit.* p.11.

field of early warning and conflict prevention should be developed. The EU should provide civil society with free access to Tariqqa 3, possibly selecting NGOs with contracts in the framework of the Instrument for Stability (IfS).

CONSTRAINT 4: COGNITIVE BIASES RELATED TO RISK AND THREAT PERCEPTION, POLITICAL JUDGEMENT AND DECISION-MAKING ON PREVENTIVE ACTION

Social and cognitive psychologists have identified a number of predictable errors – also known as “biases” – regarding the ways humans judge situations and evaluate risks.⁶⁷ Cognitive biases are defined as ‘mental errors caused by our simplified information processing strategies’;⁶⁸ they reflect a human tendency to draw incorrect conclusions under certain circumstances based on cognitive factors rather than on evidence.⁶⁹

The capacity to manage information on violent conflict and drivers of violence and fragility in the world, and responses in the field of early/preventive action, are directly linked to the issue of cognitive biases in human information processing and decision-making. Schema theory, for example, suggests that people processing information from the mass media use schemas as ‘devices to cope with complexity’.⁷⁰

Both information chaos and information asymmetry have important implications for decision-making. There is strong evidence in the literature that individual and collective decision-making frequently fails to meet the expectations of rational choice theory.⁷¹ Non-rational explanations – such as in prospect theory – seem to provide more realistic explanations of decision-making when knowledge and time are scarce and there is uncertainty about potential outcomes.⁷² Decision-making in the field of early warning and preventive action does indeed take place under such circumstances.

In this paper it is argued that cognitive biases affect policymakers’ warning receptivity and decisions about preventive action, and can therefore contribute to explaining the warning-response-gap.⁷³ ‘Collectively, cognitive biases can affect warning by influencing the warning analyst’s judgements (e.g. evaluation of evidence, judgement about likelihood of impending crisis, and characterisation of emerging threats) and the policy-maker’s evaluation of warnings and decision about a response’.⁷⁴

Several elements are crucial for decision-making in the field of early warning and preventive action: the perception and judgement of risk; the assessment of the nature of threats;⁷⁵ and prioritisation against a background of scarce resources.

67 D. Kahneman and J. Renshon (2007). ‘Why hawks win’, *Foreign Policy*, Vol. 158, p.34.

68 R. J. Heuer (1999). Op. cit. p.11.

69 The notion of cognitive biases was originally introduced by D. Kahneman and A. Tversky (1972). ‘Subjective probability: A judgment of representativeness’, *Cognitive Psychology* 3: 430–454. Such biases are thought to be a form of “cognitive shortcut”, often based upon rules of thumb, and include errors in statistical judgment, social attribution and memory.

70 S. T. Fiske and D. R. Kinder (1981). ‘Involvement, expertise and schema use: evidence from political cognition’. In N. Cantor and J. E. Kihlstrom (Eds.). *Personality, cognitions and social interaction*. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum. p.173.

71 D. Kahneman, P. Slovic and A. Tversky (Eds.) (1982). *Judgment under uncertainty: heuristics and biases*. New York: Cambridge University Press; R. P. Larrick (2004). ‘Debiasing’. In D. J. Koehler and N. Harvey (Eds.). *Blackwell handbook of judgement and decision making*. Oxford: Blackwell; R. Jervis (1976). *Perception and misperception in international politics*. Princeton, New York: Princeton University Press; R. J. Heuer (1999). Op. cit. In short, this model of decision-making assumes that a person ‘chooses what options to pursue by assessing the probability of each possible outcome, discerning the utility to be derived from each, and combining these two assessments’. See T. Gilovich and D. Griffin (2002). ‘Heuristics and biases: then and now’. In T. Gilovich, D. Griffin and D. Kahneman (Eds.) (2002). *Heuristics and biases: the psychology of intuitive judgment*. New York: Cambridge University Press. p.1.

72 G. Gigerenzer and R. Selten (2001). *Bounded rationality: the adaptive toolbox*. Cambridge: MIT Press. Prospect theory is a theory that describes decisions between alternatives that involve risk, i.e. alternatives with uncertain outcomes. Kahnemann and Tversky developed it in 1979 as a psychologically realistic alternative to rational choice/utility theory. Starting from empirical evidence, the theory describes how individuals evaluate potential losses and gains. See D. Kahneman, P. Slovic and A. Tversky (Eds.) (1982). Op. cit.

73 It is assumed that the impact of cognitive biases is stronger on decision-makers/policymakers than on warning analysts, as the latter are professionally trained to undertake critical thinking while the former work in bureaucracies with little or no incentives for intellectual non-compliance. See also: B. Jentleson and A. Bennett (2003). ‘Policy planning: oxymoron or sine qua non for U.S. foreign policy?’ In D. Larson and S. Renshon (Eds.). *Good judgment in foreign policy: theory and application*. Oxford: Rowman and Littlefield; L. Woocher (2008). Op. cit. p.18.

74 L. Woocher (2008). Op. cit. p.6.

75 Ibid. p.14.

THE PERCEPTION OF RISKS AND THREATS

Risk is traditionally referred to as indicating probabilities regarding negative consequences.⁷⁶ The definition of risk used in this paper is the hazards to which a state or coalition's interests or strategy are assessed to be exposed. These risks, which are risks to stability and security, do not necessarily originate in, or in the vicinity of, the state or the coalition, whereas the definition of threat used is that of a state or a coalition's perception that it is in some degree of danger based on the assessed capabilities, intentions and actions of another state/coalition or group. The key difference between risk and threat is that a risk is a hazard where either the will or capacity is not present.⁷⁷

Warning analysts have to estimate the probability of a threatening future event or scenario as well as the extent of potential negative consequences.⁷⁸ Decision-makers/policymakers receive and process this prospective analysis and have to decide if and how to act upon it. The perception of risk is a function of knowledge. We do not care about what we do not know. Early warning is crucial to increase decision-makers/policymakers' knowledge about conflict and fragility dynamics and enables them to anticipate future trends. It is a condition *sine qua non* to carry out informed risk assessment. It seems reasonable to assume that there is a significant correlation between the available warning – information and analysis – and the impact of cognitive biases on decision-makers. More and better warning should reduce the impact of cognitive biases, although one cannot assume that policymakers would always and fully “buy” their advisers' or warning analysts' assessments.⁷⁹

Drawing on prospect theory, a number of relevant cognitive biases likely to affect policymakers' response have been identified,⁸⁰ namely “loss aversion” and “aversion to certain losses”, “extension neglect” and “psychic numbing”.⁸¹

“LOSS AVERSION” AND “AVERSION TO CERTAIN LOSSES”

Evidence from empirical research suggests that people tend to place greater value on losses than they do on gains; that is ‘they are generally risk-averse with respect to gains and risk-acceptant with respect to losses’.⁸² “Loss aversion” means that ‘people prefer the status quo or another reference point over a 50/50 chance for positive and negative alternatives with the same absolute value’.⁸³ In addition, people show even greater “aversion to certain losses”, which, in turn, means that they ‘prefer to avoid a certain loss in favour of a potential loss, even if they risk losing significantly more’.⁸⁴

Applied to the field of early warning and early action, these patterns of human behaviour are clearly not conducive to preventive action. On the contrary, decision-makers might be reluctant to ‘accept a small, certain loss now (in the form of resources dedicated to the preventive action) to avoid a large, but uncertain loss in the future (i.e. the event and consequences they are being warned about)’.⁸⁵ They would rather be willing to take the risk that the threatening scenario may never occur. In addition, they know the cost of the preventive action, while the consequences of inaction are unknown and difficult to assess.

Furthermore, politicians tend to think in rather short-term time horizons, typically linked to their term in office and the electoral calendar. This might even reinforce the tendency to avoid certain losses in the short term and the political risk associated with them. However, the EU has massive investments all over the world, which might encourage decision-makers not to jeopardise these.⁸⁶ The EU is the world's biggest aid donor,⁸⁷ the most open market for developing countries and a net investor in terms of foreign direct investment. One could therefore

76 See also D. Carment and K. Garner (1999). ‘Conflict prevention and early warning: problems, pitfalls and avenues for success’, *Canadian Foreign Policy Journal*, Winter 1998; L. Woocher (2008). Op. cit. p.7.

77 Interview with NATO official.

78 L. Woocher (2008). Op. cit. p.7.

79 Ibid. p.14; J. Brante (2010). Op. cit.

80 L. Woocher (2008). p.14 ff.

81 See also L. Woocher (2008). Op. cit. for cognitive biases, which affect warning analysts' judgement of risk (i.e. availability heuristic and associated biases, base rate neglect, anchoring) and their assessment of the nature of threats (i.e. confirmation bias, bias in relating to causal explanations and centralised direction, attribution errors).

82 J. Levy (1994). ‘An Introduction to Prospect Theory’. In B. Farnham (Ed.). *Avoiding losses/taking risks: prospect theory and international conflict*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press. p.7.

83 Ibid. p.11; L. Woocher (2008). p.14.

84 D. Kahnemann and J. Renshon (2007). Op. cit.

85 L. Woocher (2008). Op. cit. p.15.

86 Ibid. p.15.

87 In 2009 the EU collectively dedicated €49 billion in official development assistance (ODA) and this will steadily increase in line with the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

assume that the EU has an interest in protecting these investments from potential destruction via the outbreak of violent conflict and would rather prevent conflict and reduce fragility.

“EXTENSION NEGLECT” AND “PSYCHIC NUMBING”

Two other types of cognitive biases can have an impact on decision-makers' response in the field of preventive action: “extension neglect” and “psychic numbing”.⁸⁸

“Extension neglect” refers to people's tendency to give the same value to an action regardless of the number of units – for example, people – it will affect, unless their attention is specifically directed to the numbers.⁸⁹ Research findings suggest that it might not be relevant for policymakers' decision-making *how many* people may potentially get displaced or killed given a specific scenario of conflict or violence. Hence, higher numbers of potential victims would not boost willingness to act. “Psychic numbing”, on the other hand, describes people's difficulties in processing and responding to harm affecting large numbers of people.⁹⁰ The difficulties in raising funds for flood victims in Pakistan in August 2010, despite the magnitude of the catastrophe and the millions of people affected, can illustrate this problem. Evidence suggests that stories including images of a single individual suffering seem to spur the most robust response. ‘These findings suggest that policymakers will have difficulty appreciating the true scope of crises that affect large numbers of people and will fail to dedicate resources in a way that matches the breadth of the problem – both potentially extremely troubling for early warning and response of large-scale humanitarian emergencies, man-made or otherwise’.⁹¹

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are based on two assumptions: that accurate and timely warning is possible; and that the impact of cognitive biases on decision-makers can be mitigated.

Decision-makers should receive training on how cognitive biases operate in order to raise awareness and control-capacity.

The way warnings are communicated to decision-makers needs to take into account cognitive biases. This particularly refers to “loss aversion” and “psychic numbing”.

The costs of inaction have to be better researched, articulated and communicated, as do the benefits of prevention; lessons learned and good practices have to be extrapolated and “advertised”.

CONSTRAINT 5: PREDOMINANCE OF NATIONAL INTERESTS AND A NATIONAL OVER MULTILATERAL RATIONALE AMONG DECISION-MAKERS/POLICYMAKERS IN MEMBER STATES

The debate about the predominance of EU Member States' national interests as a constraint to a more coherent and effective early warning and early action system needs to be placed in the context of the world's changing security and threat environment, as well as changing notions of security in international society. It is in this wider context that the issue of information sharing between EU Member States within the EU early warning and response system is addressed.

In this paper, it is assumed that states' national interests are constructed through social interaction rather than being inherent and exogenously given.⁹² Interests are not just out there. This implies that interests as well as

88 In addition, the so-called “hindsight bias” may also affect policymakers' responses to warnings they receive. It essentially describes people's inclination to see events that have occurred as being more predictable than they were before they took place. One explanation of the bias is the availability heuristic: the event that did occur is more salient in one's mind than the possible outcomes that did not. Applied to the field of early warning and preventive action, successful prevention would be less salient in policymakers' minds than specific crises.

89 D. Kahneman and A. Tversky (Eds.) (2000). *Choices, values and frames*. New York: Cambridge University Press. p.708.

90 P. Slovic in L. Woocher (2008). Op. cit. p.16.

91 L. Woocher (2008). Op. cit. p.17.

92 Constructivist approaches in international relations do not take actors and interests as given, but problematise them, treating them as the objective of the analysis. See M. Finnemore (1996). *National interests in international society*. New York: Cornell University Press. p.2. See also J. Weldes (1996). ‘Constructing national interest’, *European Journal of International Relations*, Vol. 2, No. 3. pp.275–318; E. Adler (1997). ‘Seizing the middle ground. Constructivism in world politics’, *European Journal of International Relations*, Vol. 3, No. 3, pp.319–363; and A. Wendt (1992). ‘Anarchy is what states make of it: the social construction of power politics’, *International Organization*, Vol. 46, No. 2.

identities are not static but susceptible to change. It makes sense to assume that states and regional bodies want security, but this does not tell us anything about what kind of security they want, what security means and how it can be ensured or obtained.⁹³

The EU constitutes a “security community”,⁹⁴ concretely a ‘pluralistic security community’ in which the use of violence among Member States is unthinkable. The sense of community, mutual sympathy, trust and common interests are constitutive aspects of a security community,⁹⁵ so are shared identities, values and meanings, many-sided direct interactions, and reciprocal long-term interest.⁹⁶ Security communities constitute genuine conflict-prevention institutions. For the purpose of preventive action and conflict prevention, the EU still needs to take better advantage of the existing security community, by scaling up its early warning capacity and creating procedures to enhance sharing of sensitive information and intelligence (see also ‘Constraint 2’). A shared understanding of threats and the perception that these threats are common and can only be tackled through closer cooperation must become constitutive for the EU as an increasingly outward-looking security community.

States’ interests are susceptible to change. They are embedded in the international system, which can change what states *want* by generating new interests and values for actors.⁹⁷ Finnemore examined several cases of changing norms and rules in international society and subsequent changes in states’ interests,⁹⁸ including how the rules of war⁹⁹ have changed over time. Taking the adoption of the first Geneva Convention in 1864 as an example, Finnemore explores the reasons why states found these rules to be “in their interest” and demonstrates that this new interest was created and taught to decision-makers in states by a transnational, non-governmental group of individuals, i.e. the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC). There is no reason why conflict prevention should not increasingly be perceived as a national interest of a state or the common interest of a security community, such as the EU.

In the field of security, major changes have also been taking place, with the end of the Cold War bipolarity constituting a point of inflection. Through globalisation and inter-dependence, security has essentially become multi-dimensional.¹⁰⁰ Today, the world faces “old” and “new” security threats.¹⁰¹ These include: war between states; regional conflicts; violence within states (including civil wars); large-scale human rights abuses and genocide; conflict over natural resources; poverty, infectious disease and environmental degradation; proliferation of WMD; state failure; terrorism; transnational organised crime (including trafficking in drugs, women, children and arms); climate change; energy security; economic crises, etc.¹⁰² These challenges are more complex than

93 M. Finnemore (1996). *Op. cit.*

94 In this paper the term “security community” draws on the work of Karl Deutsch. As Adler and Barnett explain, ‘Deutsch observed a pluralistic security community whenever states become integrated to the point that they have a sense of community, which, in turn, creates the assurance that they will settle their differences short of war’. The concept regained prominence after the end of the Cold War, and Adler and Barnett redefined the security community by shared identities, values and meanings, many-sided direct interactions, and reciprocal long-term interest. See E. Adler and M. Barnett (1998). *Security communities*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. p.3.

95 K. W. Deutsch et al. (1957). *Political community and the north Atlantic area: international organisation in the light of historical experience*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

96 E. Adler and M. Barnett (1998). *Op. cit.*

97 It changes state action, not by constraining states with a given set of preferences from acting, but by changing their preferences. See M. Finnemore (1996). *Op. cit.* pp.5–6.

98 M. Finnemore (1996). *Op. cit.*

99 War as a social institution rather than a Hobbesian state of nature.

100 For the argument that globalisation is responsible for complicating the security agenda, while at the same time reducing the elements of control that underpin the security strategy options of states, see V. D. Cha (2000). ‘Globalization and the study of international security’, *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol. 37, No. 3. p.397; J. A. Scholte (2000). *Globalisation: a critical introduction*. London: Macmillan. pp.207–233; I. Clark (1998). ‘Beyond the great divide: globalization and the theory of international relations’, *Review of International Studies*, Vol. 24. pp.479–98; J. M. Guehenno (1999). ‘Globalization and the international system’, *Journal of Democracy*, Vol. 10, No. 1. pp.22–35. See also S. Biscop (2005). *Op. cit.*; Carnegie Commission on Preventing Deadly Conflict (1997). *Op. cit.*; M. E. Brown and R. N. Rosecrance (Eds.) (1998). *The cost-effectiveness of conflict prevention*. Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield; H. Lavoix (2008). *Op. cit.*

101 Notions and concepts of security have also changed over time. The end of the Cold War, the absence of a major direct military threat and increasing interdependence gave rise to several initiatives to reconceptualise security and elaborate more comprehensive approaches (see B. Buzan and O. Waever (2003). *Regions and powers: the structure of international security*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; S. Biscop (2005). *Op. cit.* p.ix), moving beyond traditional state-centred concepts of security towards concepts of comprehensive security, sustainable security, human security, etc. The Cold War way of thinking about security was constructed around bipolarity and the notion of balances of power and defence. This is a paradigm that, in spite of the mentioned changes, has been persistent among policymakers’ attitudes to global security, even though ‘the global trend in major armed conflict and interstate wars has continued to decrease in the post-Cold War era and new challenges have emerged to threaten peace and security’ (A. Schnabel (2008). *Op. cit.* p.394). At the same time, the concept of human security has shaped much of the post-Cold War discourse on international peace and security (see M. Martin and T. Owen (2010). ‘The second generation of human security: lessons from the UN and EU experience’, *International Affairs*, Vol. 86, No. 1. pp.211–224).

102 UN (2004). *Op. cit.* p.1; Council of the EU (2003). *Op. cit.*

our multilateral, regional and national institutions are currently capable of managing. No single state can insulate itself from these threats, nor solve them alone. No state can have the monopoly of information, analysis and action. Hence, international cooperation is ever more necessary.

Security lies at the very heart of state sovereignty, which explains why processes of integration advance at a slower pace in this field compared to, for example, the domain of commerce and economics. The EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) is still a highly institutionalised and complex process of consultation and cooperation between Member States' governments. Currently, different parts of the EU's early warning system are spread over the EU's institutional architecture, while effective early warning requires a holistic approach. Decisions on preventive action fall under CSDP procedures (see 'Constraint 2').

RECOMMENDATIONS

There is a need to foster a new common notion of security and to deconstruct traditional, Cold War-innate, and therefore defensive, notions of security and sovereignty. The EU security community already exists; what needs to adapt to the context of new threats and challenges and increasing interdependence is the actual meaning of security, and what it takes to obtain it, including practices of multilateral cooperation, and information- and intelligence-sharing.

A reformed and improved community of intelligence for the EU needs to be forged with an increased propensity for effective early warning. Member States need to send their intelligence reports to the fusion centre and not just to their representative in SITCEN. But both these communications and the database need to be sufficiently secured to facilitate a shift from a culture of having the best available intelligence towards a culture of sharing it. As shown by reactions to the terrorist attacks in Madrid in 2004, crises can trigger changes in mindsets and attitudes as well as resulting in institutional change. The attacks spurred an initiative driven by Belgium and Austria to establish a community of intelligence, which, due to resistance from other Member States, was never established. It could be considered unnecessary and risky to wait for such an event to reform the current system.

The sharing of information and resources between existing early warning centres across the EU has to be a political decision from the top. A positive by-product would be the possibility for reality-checks exposing cognitive biases.

The EU needs to pay more attention to transnational threats and trans-regional and cross-border conflict dynamics, and to the wider repercussions of escalations of violence (in terms of migration, trade and international security). More information and analysis is needed on how, for example, transnational organised crime is interlinked with instability, fragility and conflict. Organised crime creates conditions that generate parallel economies and irrational and dysfunctional societies, such as in Guatemala and Mexico.¹⁰³ Effectively tackling transnational threats (e.g. conflictual dynamics linked to natural resources, climate change, migration, organised crime, piracy, terrorism or nuclear proliferation) requires multilateral cooperation, including the sharing of relevant information and intelligence. Information sharing needs to be regarded as a way of strengthening sovereignty instead of surrendering it.¹⁰⁴ A positive development in addressing regional threats is the EU's support for the African Union, ECOWAS and the League of Arab States in their development of early warning systems.

Currently, EU tools to assess conflicts and fragility are essentially centred on local dynamics, although there are several positive developments in this field, such as the creation of several RCRPOs, Tariqa 3, and the horizontal Watch List (see 'Constraint 3'). More RCRPO posts should be created according to EU interests, perceived threats and priorities. Cooperation needs to be increased among the areas of crisis response, peacebuilding and security, as well as between country focus and transnational threats.

Security and threat analysis have to be carried out with a long-term rationale. As a recent OECD report states: '[...] the requirements dictated by security needs in any given state may not match with geopolitical concerns.

103 On Guatemala, see J. Schünemann (2010). 'Looking the monster in the face': *The International Commission against Impunity in Guatemala and the 'rule of law builders contract'*. IfP: Security Cluster.

104 L. Charbonneau. 'Global gangs exploit blind spots for trafficking: U.N.', *Reuters*, 24th February 2010. Available at <http://www.reuters.com/article/idUSTRE61N5LR20100224>

However, developing a better understanding of the consequences of not ensuring security within a given state may influence donor countries' geopolitical analysis in the future'.¹⁰⁵

The added value of prevention in comparison with the potential risks and cost of inaction need to be articulated and communicated more clearly to high-level decision-makers/policymakers.

The predominance of national interest without increased grounding on conflict dynamics and anticipatory analysis, and without forging a common EU vision and EU areas of interest, is not conducive to ensuring security and wellbeing in Europe or to effectively enhancing global security. EU engagement predominantly driven by national interest can undermine EU foreign policy objectives. The sum of EU Member States' interests does not function effectively under the current system (that is also a weakness of the Watch List – see 'Constraint 3'). 'A weakness of our foreign policy is our incapacity of seeing our own future and wanting to preserve the status quo. We are neither willing nor able to address root causes of conflict because too often we ourselves contribute to these root causes in significant ways,' such as a certain EU Member State in Mauritania.¹⁰⁶ There is a lack of honesty in the EU on what actually constitutes national interest today, such as certain EU Member States' interests in Somalia. This opacity hinders debate on EU foreign and security policy. There is a need to reconcile national and often more short-term interests with longer-term European and global interests, and to manage potential trade-offs.

¹⁰⁵ OECD (2010). *Do no harm. International support for statebuilding*. Conflict and Fragility Series. Paris. p.18.

¹⁰⁶ Interview with EU official, April 2010.

III. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The EU has clear policy commitments, a unique reach into many fragile and conflict-affected countries and a wide range of tools at its disposal to prevent conflict and promote peace in the world. However, it does not yet live up to its full potential. The entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty and the setting up of the EEAS are an important window of opportunity for the EU to increase its coherence and match its global ambitions with the necessary structure, mechanisms and financial and human resources.

More pronounced political leadership is needed to foster a strategic culture for the prevention of violent conflict, which acknowledges the added value of early warning. The EU needs to identify where and how it can have the strongest impact on conflict prevention and peacebuilding. Given that resources are scarce, EU decision-makers need to make choices and set priorities according to the criteria of cost- and impact-effectiveness.

Early warning is key to anticipating and preventing violent conflict. Early warning is the basis for evidence-based analysis and decision-making, and thereby early and effective action. It is crucial to close the notorious gap between warning and timely, relevant and effective response. The current EU early warning and response system is characterised by short-termism and ad hoc decision-making. It lacks prioritisation grounded in evidence. Sub-optimal decision-making contributes to inefficient policymaking.

The most significant constraints to a more effective EU early warning system are:

- The lack of individual and collective capacity to manage information on violent conflict and drivers of fragility in the world;
- A scattered and insufficiently integrated early warning system, combined with ineffective decision-making procedures for preventive action;
- Early warning supporting tools not being used to their full potential;
- Cognitive biases related to risk and threat perception, political judgement and decision-making on preventive/early action; and
- The predominance of national interest and a national over multilateral rationale among decision-makers/policymakers in Member States.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The EU and its Member States need to make a shift from a reactive to a preventive approach, i.e. from crisis management to conflict prevention. This would entail more cost-effective management of scarce resources and enable the EU to have more impact in preventing conflict and building peace. This approach requires both skilled early detection and trend analysis of developing risk factors that are likely to coalesce to precipitate outbreaks of violence, combined with contingency plans for preventive action.

In order to manage information on drivers of fragility and the escalation of violent conflict more efficiently, and avoid the arbitrary reduction of complexity and oversimplification of reality, the EU needs to:

- Recognise and understand the added value of an effective early warning system as the basis for effective action;
- Allocate more human and financial resources to early warning and scale up professional training;
- Better exploit the potential of open source information and OSINT, which in turn requires substantial investment in time, staff, money, methodologies and training;

- Value information from the field; and
- Strengthen the focus on the underlying causes of fragility and conflict in order to have a more sustainable impact.

The EU should engage more in countries with latent conflict dynamics where conflict prevention and transformation is still possible. Therefore, the EU needs to improve its capacity to detect weak early warning signals. Regular reporting is necessary to understand the evolution of conflict dynamics, but there also needs to be flexibility to react to the evolving dynamics of conflict. The added value of prevention and the potential risks and cost of inaction need to be articulated and communicated more clearly to high-level decision-makers/policymakers. The costs of inaction and the benefits of prevention have to be better researched, articulated and communicated. Lessons learned and good practices have to be extrapolated and "advertised".

There is a need to set up a fully integrated early warning system that weaves together all the different sources to provide decision-makers with an evidence-based and comprehensive assessment, and enables them to act in a timely and effective manner in line with defined strategic objectives.

Therefore, the EU needs to establish an early warning fusion centre, which:

- Elaborates early warnings by weaving together information and analysis from different sources from headquarter and field level (human, open sources, satellite images, etc.); and
- Goes beyond the fusion of the Council SITCEN and the Commission Crisis Room and centralises information and analysis from SITCEN, the Crisis Room, sectorial crisis rooms of the Commission, the Crisis Response and Peacebuilding Directorate, ECHO, MIC, ARGUS, JLS, WKC, security offices, CMPD, CPCC, EUMS, EU delegations, RCRPOs, EUSRs, country and thematic desks, geographical working groups, as well as Member States' embassies, and local and international civil society and media.

An integral EU early warning system needs to facilitate effective linkages and flows between gathering information, analysis, communication of the warning and the response. There needs to be a community of analysis.

The EU needs a fusion centre and an effective indicational warning system. On the basis of the definition of areas of interests and established requirements by the High Representative and the PSC, analysts need to develop tailored indicators in this fusion centre. This indicational warning system would optimise efforts and enable analysts to effectively manage the mass of information and extract the critical elements to support their capacity to develop holistic critical assessments and scenarios, thereby facilitating the EU's capacity to carry out early and effective action and ensuring maximised impact.

A holistic database with sophisticated capacity of analysis is needed beyond OSINT and Tariqa 3 with cognitive systems.

In order to improve the link between early warning and early action, it is important that:

- Decision-makers:
 - Establish clear areas of interest, priorities and specific requirements; and
 - Provide feedback on fusion centre outputs to indicate if they fulfil requirements or if more intelligence is needed.
- Early warning professionals be aware of:
 - Decision-makers' current political preferences and agendas;
 - Their dominant beliefs and assumptions about the world;
 - What kind of evidence they consider credible;
 - On what kind of issues they require a higher bar of proof;
 - The political instruments they have available for preventive or mitigating action; and
 - The time needed to deploy those instruments and the risks/costs associated with deploying them.

Warning professionals must provide rigorous and targeted critical assessments accompanied by possible scenarios. Member States must provide the best available intelligence to the fusion centre.

There is a need for more training on how early warning works and both decision-makers and analysts need to understand the work of the other, so that there can be fluidity between early warning and early action.

There is a need to forge a common vision and focus on what constitutes EU areas of interest and priorities (i.e. agreed among Member States). The EU and its Member States also need to improve the community of intelligence, analysis and early warning.

The impact of cognitive biases on decision-makers needs to be mitigated. In order to achieve this:

- More interdisciplinary research is needed on how cognitive biases affect decision-makers/policymakers in the field of early warning and preventive action;
- Decision-makers should receive training on the impact of these biases, so they can be more aware of them and subsequently control them; and
- Communicating warnings to decision-makers needs to take into account cognitive biases, in particular “loss aversion” and “psychic numbing”.

It is necessary to increase cooperation between the areas of crisis response and peacebuilding and security.

The EU needs to pay more attention to transnational threats and trans-regional and cross-border conflict dynamics.

More RCRPO posts should be created to cover the priority areas of interest of the EU.

The EU needs to correct existing weaknesses regarding its early warning supporting tools. In particular, the EU needs to improve capacities to do forecast analysis and scenario planning. This will enable decision-makers to develop concrete options for responses and match these against the means at their disposal.

EU staff need to understand the added value of early warning and what it means and how it functions. EU delegations need specific guidelines on how to warn, following which criteria and to whom warning information should be directed, and how best to support the fusion centre endeavours.

The EU needs to maximise the added value of existing tools and use them to their full potential.

In this regard, the EU should:

- Take better advantage of CSPs as early warning and scenario planning tools and strengthen the monitoring of security and conflict dynamics in them;
- Train staff in headquarters and delegations on comprehensive conflict and security analysis;
- Ensure Member States feed high-quality information into the Watch List, and share their assessments and analysis as well as the list itself; and
- Use Tariqa 3, in particular its features for scenario planning and cluster analysis.

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