

THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION EARLY-WARNING ARCHITECTURE AND CRISIS-RESPONSE CAPACITY

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ACRONYMS

CCA	Country Conflict Assessments
CFSP	Common Foreign and Security Policy
DG DEV	Directorate-General on Development
DG DEVCO	DG for Development and Cooperation – EuropeAid
DG ELARG	DG on Enlargement
DG RELEX	DG on External Relations
EC	European Commission
ECHO	European Commission Humanitarian Office
EEAS	European External Action Service
FCA	Forgotten Crisis Assessment
FEWER	Forum on Early Warning and Early Response
FPIS	Foreign Policy Instruments Service
GLOBESEC	Global Security and Crisis Management Unit
GNA	Global Needs Assessments
IFS	Instrument for Stability
JRC	Joint Research Centre
MIC	Monitoring Information Centre
NGOs	Non-governmental organisations
RCRPOs	Regional Crisis Response Planning Officers

INTRODUCTION

There are many definitions of early warning, and sometimes as many definitions as there are actors involved.¹ The main distinction, though, can be drawn between natural-disaster-related early warning and conflict-related early warning: the former anticipates and warns against threats that are physically predictable (areas subjected to drought, flood, etc. and possible consequences), while the latter is more conditional because it is based on human behaviour (when, where and how will a conflict break out? What will be the consequences? etc.). In relation to violent conflicts, early warning can be understood as a 'process that alerts decision-makers of the potential outbreak, escalation, and resurgence of violent conflict; and promotes an understanding among decision-makers of the nature and impacts of violent conflict'.² Early warning – considered a systematic activity whether governmental, inter-governmental or non-governmental – was the focus of considerable attention in the 1990s following the end of the Cold War, when the international community was faced with conflicts emerging and/or breaking out in the Balkans and in Africa. Initially consisting of gathering and analysing quantitative and qualitative data, this activity then evolved to include the formulation of recommendations to decision-makers and, in some cases, prompting action.

Beyond being the world's biggest aid donor, the European Union has gradually shown its willingness to become a "global actor". The development of a Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP), the deployment of EU operations, the adoption of an EU Programme for the Prevention of Violent Conflicts (2001) and other external-action-related policy frameworks are some of the milestones which theoretically endow the EU with a stronger role in preventing and responding to conflict.³ However, ongoing failures to prevent genocides, violent conflicts and countries slipping into fragile situations have challenged the EU's – and, more generally, the international community's – ability to take into account and respond to early warnings of conflict.

Turning early warning into timely action is not straightforward. In addition to dealing with the political realities of sovereignty, security and physical access in-country, adequate institutional structures and processes are critical to the EU's ability to analyse and respond to early-warning signals. The effective prevention of violent conflict requires a robust and mainstreamed capacity to monitor and analyse conflict trends and appropriate early-warning signals, communicate findings and recommendations to the relevant in-country and Brussels-based actors, and the political decision to mobilise capacity and resources to respond in a timely and effective manner. Coordination between EU institutions, Member States and in-country actors is also crucial throughout these various stages of analysis, warning and response to ensure respective efforts are maximised and to act coherently.

The relevance of early warning to the European Commission (EC)

The adoption of the Lisbon Treaty is already leading to changes in the whole institutional architecture, such as the establishment of the European External Action Service (EEAS). However, by the time this research was

1 Each actor involved, according to its own field of intervention, has a specific focus and interest in early warning, such as environmental and natural-disaster-related early warning, humanitarian assistance, conflict or counterterrorism-related early warning. The definition proposed by the Forum on Early Warning and Early Response (FEWER), as set out in its mission statement, seems to be consensual as far as conflict early warning is concerned: 'The systematic collection and analysis of information coming from areas of crises for the purpose of: a) anticipating the escalation of violent conflict; b) the development of strategic responses to these crises; and c) the presentation of options to critical actors for the purposes of decision-making' (FEWER mission statement, 19th February 1997. York: FEWER).

2 D. Nyheim (2008). *Can violence, war and state collapse be prevented? The future of operational conflict early warning and response systems*. 18th May. Paris: OECD.

3 EU Programme for the Prevention of Violent Conflicts, Gothenburg, June 2001; Council Conclusions on Security and Development, Brussels, November 2007; Council Conclusions on an EU Response to Situations of Fragility, Brussels, November 2007.

completed (January 2011), the early-warning-related architecture and processes had not changed significantly and were still operating along former arrangements. As a result, we do not yet know what the post-Lisbon set-up will look like in this field. However, we hope that this research will help to inform the structure that eventually arises. One possible contribution is to start by understanding what the “building blocks” of the new system might be. To this end, two mapping exercises looking back at the two EU institutions’ (EC and Council of the EU) early-warning systems up to and including 2010 – when the changes post-Lisbon started to come into effect – have been undertaken by Saferworld (covering the EC) and Clingendael’s Conflict Research Unit (covering the Council of the EU).⁴ Consequently, this paper uses the pre-Lisbon structures, policies, names and acronyms, and should be read with that timeframe in mind.

Within the pre-Lisbon arrangements, the EC was in charge of designing and implementing EU development cooperation strategies and programmes, and of bilateral dialogue with partner country authorities on these matters. Following the adoption of the EU Programme for the Prevention of Violent Conflicts in 2001, the EC developed policies and stepped up its capacities to analyse and respond to conflict through a wide range of short- to long-term measures, presented below. Its wide presence on the ground, thanks to the network of EC Delegations⁵ around the world, added to the financial weight of its cooperation programmes provided the EC with the necessary potential to act as an important conflict-prevention and crisis-response actor. From the onset, the availability of early-warning systems was identified as a key requirement to ensure quick reaction to nascent conflicts, in a mostly short-term approach.⁶ The follow-up development of capabilities, such as the Crisis Room, and tools, such as the EC Checklist for Root Causes of Conflict, gave way to a longer-term approach to early warning by the EC, one that would highlight longer-term trends, making it possible to track conflict dynamics, root causes and patterns across time, in order to ultimately inform decision-making processes, such as EC strategies and programmes in third countries.

This mapping document, therefore, looks at both short- and long-term approaches to early warning. It focuses on the pre-Lisbon Treaty institutional capabilities in the EC and maps out the processes, mechanisms and tools which constitute an early-warning system relating to violent conflicts only (thus excluding natural disasters). It was researched and produced by Saferworld as part of the Initiative for Peacebuilding - Early Warning project in the course of 2010. Together with the Clingendael Conflict Research Unit’s mapping of the Council of the EU’s early-warning system, it is intended to inform a series of case studies which will analyse the effectiveness of EU early-warning systems in collecting, communicating and triggering adequate EU responses to potential or ongoing violent conflicts in third countries (Armenia, Bolivia, Colombia, Democratic Republic of Congo, Kenya, Kyrgyzstan, Sri Lanka, Sudan and Venezuela). Eventually, a synthesis report will review findings and lessons in order to provide evidence-based recommendations for future planning and decision-making in this area in the context of the post-Lisbon Treaty institutional architecture.

The first section of this paper focuses on the structures and main actors involved. The following sections set out the tools and processes that apply to the various stages of the early-warning cycle: gathering and analysing information; communicating early-warning information; and finally responding to early-warning signals.

4 *The early warning and conflict prevention capability of the Council of the European Union. A mapping of the pre-Lisbon period*, Clingendael Institute Conflict Research Unit, Initiative for Peacebuilding - Early Warning, December 2010.

5 They have now been renamed “EU Delegations” and acquired broader responsibilities, such as the formal political representation of the EU in third countries.

6 ‘Communication from the Commission on Conflict Prevention’, Brussels, 11th April 2001.

Box 1. Relevant Policy Frameworks Relating to the EC and Early Warning

▪ Commission Communication on Conflict Prevention (2001):⁷

- *'In parallel to long-term preventive action, the EU should improve its ability to react quickly where a situation in a particular country seems to be entering a downward spiral. This clearly requires an effective early-warning system.*
- *A capacity for troubleshooting depends crucially on the existence of a proper EU early-warning mechanism, not only to alert EU decision-making and operational centres to an imminent crisis but also to study its causes and possible consequences and identify the most appropriate response.*
- *The Commission proposes to integrate more systematically into the political dialogue with partner countries discussions on early-warning systems and regular monitoring of potential conflict zones.*
- *The Commission's own worldwide network of Delegations gives it considerable scope for monitoring areas of instability. [...] The Commission is working to upgrade its communication tools in order to ensure that the delegations will be able to make a timely and substantial input, not least in situations of instability or crisis.'*

▪ EU Programme for the Prevention of Violent Conflicts (2001):⁸

- *'Successful prevention must be based on accurate information and analysis as well as clear options for action for both long- and short-term prevention.'*
- The document also outlines a way forward saying that cooperation and coherence must be enhanced, especially between *'early warning, analysis, planning, decision-making, implementation and evaluation'*.

▪ Seville European Council Conclusions (2002):⁹

'Priority action for the European Union, in the fields of the CFSP and the ESDP in particular, in the fight against terrorism should focus on:

- *devoting greater efforts to conflict prevention;*
- *strengthening arrangements for sharing intelligence and developing the production of situation assessments and early-warning reports, drawing on the widest range of sources.'*

▪ Towards an EU Response to Situations of Fragility: Engaging in Difficult Environments for Sustainable Development, Stability and Peace (EC, 2007):¹⁰

- *'Donors, partner countries, regions and organisations, international institutions, civil society and governments have developed early-warning, analytical, monitoring and assessment tools relevant for situations of fragility. Very often, these tools need to be supplemented by the appropriate instruments allowing for timely implementation of the outcome of the analysis.*
- *The potential of Country Strategy Papers (CSPs) to prevent fragility needs to be enhanced: root causes of conflict, expressions of violence, insecurity and risk of vulnerability must be more systematically addressed through development programmes and ensuring that conflict-sensitive approaches are applied.*
- *Regular exchanges of risk analyses and relevant EU responses at the field level through EU Heads of Mission meetings and at headquarters through desk-to-desk dialogues between institutions and member states and across Council groups should take place in order to ensure whole-of-government approaches.*
- *A comprehensive review of assessment and analytical tools on governance, conflict and disaster monitoring will be carried out.'*

⁷ Op. cit.

⁸ Gothenburg, 2001.

⁹ Presidency Conclusions, Seville European Council, 21st–22nd June 2002.

¹⁰ EC, Brussels, 25th October 2007.

▪ **Council Conclusions on Security and Development (2007):**¹¹

'To enhance coherence and consistency, the Council calls for further intensified cooperation within and between Council bodies, Commission services and Member States, in particular by improving the sequencing in the strategic planning of their short-term and longer-term actions. This should be promoted by:

- *systematically carrying out security/conflict-sensitive assessments and conflict analysis, where appropriate, in the preparation of country and regional strategies and programmes;*
- *engaging in in-depth consultations, strategic political and conflict analyses and screenings with a view to planning and acting consistently on early signs of tension, instability and fragility.'*

▪ **Council Conclusions on an EU Response to Situations of Fragility (2007):**

In the "Preventing and addressing situations of fragility" section, the document identifies a number of areas of progress, including: *'Develop early warning mechanisms on the basis of information related to democratic governance issues, rule of law, human rights, poverty levels, and use conflict-sensitive approaches. The contribution from civil society in this context is important'.*

11 Brussels, 2007.

1. EC STRUCTURES RELATED TO EARLY WARNING: WHO'S WHO?

Within the EC framework, the Directorate-General on External Relations (DG RELEX) (and more especially the Crisis Platform and Policy Coordination – CFSP / Department A) plays a central role in terms of conflict early warning in third countries, from information-gathering to the analysis and the response). The other Brussels-based actors involved consisted, theoretically, of the geographic desks of DG RELEX (Asia, Middle East, Northern Africa, Southern America), the DG on Development (DG DEV) (African, Caribbean and Pacific countries) and the DG on Enlargement (DG ELARG) (Western Balkans, Turkey).¹²

The **Crisis Room**, sitting within DG RELEX Department A, is the EC early-warning dedicated cell, 'at the service'¹³ of other EC units. Its role is to gather, process, analyse and provide information relating to conflict through various means. It runs routine selective scanning of countries around the world as a contribution to the "EU Watchlist" exercise run by the Council of the EU,¹⁴ and can also respond to specific analysis requests from the Crisis Response Planners. It centralises conflict-related information on the *Tariqa* internal website (open-source intelligence platform) and also develops its own early-warning tools, such as Cluster Analysis that identifies crisis risk patterns across a sample of countries.

Crisis Response Planners also sit within the Crisis Platform and Policy Coordination (CFSP) department. They are responsible for programming and managing Instrument for Stability (IfS) related proposals in response to a crisis around the world. There are nine planners covering Africa, Latin America and Pacific, Europe, Middle East and Asia regions.

The **EC's Joint Research Centre's** (JRC) overall role is to provide scientific and technical support for the conception, development, implementation and monitoring of EU policies. In the field of early warning, its mandate is to create, test and update various analytical tools that can end up being used by the Crisis Room, the European Commission Humanitarian Office (ECHO) or for the centre's testing activities. The JRC is not mandated to warn people in Brussels, but they might do it at times on their own initiative.¹⁵ The JRC has developed different tools and analytical models in relation to conflicts, such as conflict-risk assessments methodology and natural-resources satellite monitoring (through the Information Centre on Natural Resources and Conflict). Within the JRC, the Global Security and Crisis Management Unit (GLOBESEC)¹⁶ is in charge of developing these early-warning, conflict and natural-disaster-related tools and techniques.

EC Delegations in third countries vary in their activity and capacity with regards to gathering and analysing information on potential conflicts and emerging or ongoing crises. Some Delegations are staffed with political officers whose role is to monitor political and security situations. Some Delegations in countries suffering from protracted conflicts also have special staff that deal with conflict, including issuing early-warning signals. Other Delegations are not equipped with this specific expertise and therefore do not gather conflict early-warning information in any systematic way.

¹² DG RELEX has been dissolved and most of its components have been transferred into the EEAS; others have ended up in the EC's Foreign Policy Instruments Service (FPIS). Parts of DG DEV have been transferred to the EEAS and others merged with the former DG AIDCO to form the new DG for Development and Cooperation – EuropeAid (DG DEVCO).

¹³ Interview with Crisis Room staff, May 2010.

¹⁴ The Watchlist consists of a confidential list of 40 countries, updated every six months, that the EU is monitoring closely. For more information, see Clingendael's mapping of the Council of the EU Early Warning System.

¹⁵ Interview with JRC staff, April 2010.

¹⁶ <http://globesec.jrc.ec.europa.eu/>

Among Delegation staff specifically tasked to focus on conflict, peace and security issues are the **Regional Crisis Response Planning Officers** (RCRPOs) stationed in eight Delegations around the globe,¹⁷ who act as intermediaries between the field and the Brussels-based Crisis Response Planners; they collect and analyse information pertaining to nascent conflicts regionally to inform EC Headquarters and respective in-country Delegations on IfS funding priorities and opportunities. These positions are a recent addition (the decision was made in 2008) to EU Delegations, conditioned by the growing IfS budget and the growing number of conflict-prevention funding requests from Delegations.

Lastly, although this research does not cover humanitarian aspects of early warning, it is worth mentioning **ECHO** tools which are relevant to early-warning processes and methodology. Besides the **Monitoring Information Centre** (MIC), which provides daily information on natural disasters and ongoing emergencies for civil protection purposes, tools such as the Global Needs Assessments (GNA) and the Forgotten Crisis Assessment (FCA) sometimes contribute to generating an early warning over a specific region. Their actual and primary purpose is to inform ECHO's annual funding allocation. The GNA classifies countries according to their relative vulnerability and the existence of a crisis situation, and the FCA helps to identify severe, protracted humanitarian crisis situations where affected populations are receiving no or insufficient international aid and are getting no international media coverage, and where there is no political commitment to solve the crisis.¹⁸

According to interviewees, there is little evidence that the outcomes of these assessments are taken on board within the conflict early-warning processes, even though these assessments are made public. In-country, however, RCRPOs and ECHO officers are well placed to ensure greater synergy in information-sharing and analysis, a collaboration which does not happen systematically.¹⁹

Observation:²⁰ The Question of a Single EC Early-warning System

There are various actors involved in the early-warning cycle, i.e. gathering and analysing information and then responding to a conflict. However, the extent to which they all form part of a shared and recognised early-warning system where each of them has a specific role and contributes to a common process can be questioned, as can their own sense of belonging to a single system.

17 Dakar, Delhi, Managua, Amman, Astana, Nairobi, Addis Ababa, Manila.

18 The GNA consists of the "Vulnerability Index", calculated from nine indicators such as Human Development Index, Human Poverty Index, Prevalence of HIV-Aids, Gini Index, etc. and a "Crisis Index", comprising natural-disaster-related data as well as several think tanks and academic conflict and security-related assessments (Uppsala Conflict Database, Conflict Barometer Report of the Heidelberg Institute for International Conflict Research, War List of the Center for Systemic Peace, Crisis Watch Reports from the International Crisis Group, Reuters AlertNet). The FCA consists of the Vulnerability Index, media coverage of the conflict, public aid per capita and a qualitative assessment by ECHO desk officers processed through a questionnaire. JRC collects all the data and ECHO's policy and evaluation unit is in charge of ranking the countries, communicating and responding to that analysis accordingly. For more information, see European Commission, *Technical Note, Methodology for the Identification of Priority Countries for the European Commission Humanitarian Aid, 'GNA and FCA'*, Brussels, December 2008.

19 Interviews with ECHO staff and Crisis Responses Planners, and RCRPOs, April–May 2010.

20 These are initial observations about the EC early-warning structures relating to violent conflicts until the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty. They are based on the research conducted for this mapping exercise and, as such, are not intended to be comprehensive. These issues will be investigated and analysed in light of the case studies and further elaborated in the synthesis report.

2. INFORMATION-GATHERING AND ANALYSIS

This section explores the details of each part of the early-warning cycle in order to better understand the roles and responsibilities of the above-mentioned actors and their potential interactions for any early-warning and crisis-response purposes.

2.1 A WIDE VARIETY OF SOURCES OF INFORMATION

The EC actors (Crisis Room, the Crisis Response Planners and geographic desks in Brussels, as well as RCRPOs and other involved Delegations staff in-country) mostly use and process all kinds of open-source information. These include within-the-conflict sources, both open and confidential assessments from experts, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and think tanks, reports and information from other EU bodies (SITCEN, EU missions on the ground, JRC, etc.), as well as international organisations' sources (UN, OSCE, etc.). There is no limit to whose data and information can be solicited or taken into account, as long as it is accessible to these actors and relevant to their work. Intelligence-type sources are sometimes made available but on a non-systematic basis.

2.2 INFORMATION-GATHERING AND ANALYTICAL TOOLS

2.2.1 CRISIS ROOM CONFLICT EARLY-WARNING TOOLS

Tariqa is an internal EC web portal that compiles and provides first-hand resources on a particular conflict, theme or issue. The tool was designed in response to the demand from Delegations around the world and Brussels-based geographic desks for an internal integrated single source of information. It integrates and can filter various quantitative and qualitative data from media news services, search engines, information databases, geographic information systems, etc.,²¹ as well as information on all EU departments' involvement in a particular country/region at a particular time, and can be upgraded as the conflict situation changes.²²

Cluster analysis is a statistical method designed as the DG RELEX contribution to the “EU Watchlist” exercise that is run by the Council twice a year. Cluster analysis is meant to reveal groups (“clusters”) of countries that are characterised by a similar conflict risk, according to families of indicators and quantitative data such as the UNDP Human Development Index, Carlton Conflict Indicators, Freedom House, Human Rights Watch and Transparency International Rankings, as well as other physical security, human rights, and stability-related data. Qualitative assessments can be processed in a cluster analysis triangulation as well. The outcome of cluster analysis reveals patterns that do not appear in the media and cannot be currently observed or anticipated with the help of other methods.

EC Checklist for Root Causes of Conflicts was developed by the Conflict Prevention Network (mandated by the EC in 2000), a consortium consisting of NGOs, academic institutions and independent experts managed by the German Institute for International and Security Affairs. It was then further elaborated by the EC's Crisis Prevention Unit, in a bid to systematise and standardise the process of political reporting produced on a regular basis by the Delegations. The exercise covers eight thematic areas: legitimacy of the state; restriction of the rule

21 For example, BBC Lexis Nexis, Oxford Analytica, various Google search engines.

22 D. Stauffacher, W. Drake, P. Currian and J. Steinberger (2005). *Information and communication technology for peace: The role of ICT in preventing, responding to and recovering from conflict*. ICT for Peace, UN ICT Task Force Series 11.

of law; violation of fundamental rights; weak civil society and media; tensions between communities and absence of dispute-solving mechanisms; poor economic management; social and economic regional inequalities; and geopolitical stability. Each of these eight thematic areas is then broken down into sub-sections which further detail the analysis. **Country Conflict Assessments (CCA)** are then completed on the basis of this checklist by Delegation staff and/or Brussels-based desk officers.

2.2.2 JRC CONFLICT/CRISIS EARLY-WARNING TOOLS

European Media Monitor²³ analyses media sources around the world (in 43 languages) with the aim of revealing the appearance and recurrence of specific topics. The software can also offer real-time monitoring of violent conflicts and disasters and can display the signals on a regularly updated map. Numerous indicators cover quantitative and qualitative data. The obtained forecast undergoes a second round of analysis and is checked with experts.

Conflict Risk Assessment models are elaborated and tested to investigate the link between the risk of an armed conflict and a given set of socio-economic indicators. Ultimately, the assessments aim to elaborate a conflict-prediction model, i.e. the location, timeframe, impacts of conflict and conflict-response feedback effects.²⁴ A pilot case study was undertaken on Kenya in January 2008.

Satellite technology provides important information on resource-driven conflicts. JRC provides technical and scientific support to the EC, such as monitoring illicit crops in Afghanistan to inform the Commission's Drugs Strategy for 2005 and the relevant North-South Drugs Cooperation Programming. JRC also supports the Kimberley Process (through the EC, which holds the chair of the Working Group on Monitoring) by monitoring illegal mining activities.

Observation:²⁵ The EC has Multiple and Parallel Information-gathering and Analysis Processes

There are several tools, methods and ultimately types of analysis produced by these different actors. Although the EC Checklist for Root Causes of Conflict had been elaborated with the purpose of streamlining information-gathering, analysis and processing, its use was abandoned after three years of pilot testing for various reasons (lack of support for the process across all EU institutions; difficulty in Brussels of processing the type of information collected; concerns that these qualitative analyses were leaving room for subjective assessments). As a result, the conditions for enhancing cooperation and coherence between early warning, analysis, planning, decision-making, implementation and evaluation, as stated in policy documents, do not seem to be met systematically.

23 <http://emm.newsbrief.eu>

24 See C. Burnley, D. Buda and F. Kayitakire (2008). *Quantitative global model for armed conflict risk assessment*. Institute for the Protection and Security of the Citizen and JRC. Available at http://isferea.jrc.ec.europa.eu/Activities/ProjectPortfolio/Documents/2005_Conflict_Modeling/Conflict-Risk-Assessment-June2008.pdf

25 These are initial observations about the information-gathering tools and processes at the EC's disposal until the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty. They are based on the research conducted for this mapping exercise and, as such, are not intended to be comprehensive. These issues will be investigated and analysed in light of the case studies and further elaborated in the synthesis report.

3. ALERTING AND COMMUNICATING EARLY WARNINGS AND OTHER TYPES OF CONFLICT-RELATED INFORMATION

Following information-gathering, analysis and the identification of evidence and signals of a potential conflict, a key phase in the early-warning cycle is the alert process. An effective alert will ensure that accurate information is provided to the right people so that a timely and appropriate decision is taken to respond to a conflict situation.

Interviewees did not refer to a systematic alert protocol or process for conflict early warning. When a situation is under the spotlight, the relevant stakeholders in Brussels (Crisis Room, Crisis Response Planners, DG RELEX or DG DEV desks) and in-country (Delegation) are in daily contact to share latest information and design an appropriate response. Beside this ad hoc information exchange and coordination mechanism, the so-called “ARGUS” general alert rapid system is meant to be a coordinating mechanism among the Commission’s sector-based rapid alert systems (for natural disasters, conflicts, terrorist attacks, pandemic threats, etc.) in case of major multisectoral crisis.²⁶ However, it did not come across as a regularly mobilised mechanism as far as conflict early warning in third countries is concerned.

Subsequently, there are many ways to communicate early warnings and other conflict-related information. Each process (political reporting from Delegations, cluster analysis, specific crisis-focused report – thematic, country or regional, conflict-risk assessment, etc.) has its own framework and structure and is ultimately tailored to the need of the recipient or the planned response. Even political reporting from the Delegations can vary from one country to the other, in relation to the issues at stake, the EU priorities in the country and the sensitivities of the author.

The assumption within the EC early-warning community is that the probability of decision-makers responding to a signal depends on their level of knowledge of, and concern about, the situation in question. Therefore, **early-warning agents sometimes need to support early warnings with early advocacy** in order to sensitise their own colleagues or their hierarchy to the need to respond to a situation. Alerting strategies that are commonly used to raise awareness internally include providing visual evidence of human suffering, appealing to decision-makers’ sense of responsibility to protect the innocent, emphasising ethical and humanitarian imperatives, demonstrating the proximity of the threat with clear and unequivocal evidence, and suggesting that a timely intervention has a good chance of succeeding.

²⁶ Communication from the EC on ‘Commission provisions on “ARGUS” general rapid alert system’, Brussels, 23rd December 2005; COM(2005) 662 final.

4. RESPONDING TO EARLY-WARNING INFORMATION

The final phase of an effective early-warning cycle is the response to a potential conflict or ongoing crisis. There is no protocol regarding the type, spread or intensity of violence which set standards to an EU response to a crisis. However, the following factors are usually taken into consideration to inform a decision:

- The level of knowledge about the geographic area and the emotional resonance of the conflict to both EU decision-makers and/or citizens;
- EU political priorities (also encompassing the EC and Member States);
- The humanitarian situation; and
- Regional balance (of EU support to crises in different regions of the world).

There are several options for an EC response to a conflict early warning. Some of them are direct responses with a short-term perspective (IfS programmes); others are not directly related to the EC early-warning and crisis-response architecture, but still aim or have the potential to prevent and respond to conflicts.

The *IfS*, which replaced the Rapid Response Mechanism in 2007, has provided the EC with the means to respond to a crisis using specific funding outside the conventional call for proposals scheme. Under Article 3, this financial instrument provides short-term (up to 18 months) assistance in response to 'situations of crisis or emerging crisis'. It was designed to fund initiatives that cannot be funded by other longer-term geographic financial instruments (such as the Development Cooperation Instrument, European Neighbourhood Policy Instrument, Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance, European Development Fund). Fast-track decision-making (a few weeks between the identification of a project and the actual decision) on funding makes this instrument particularly suitable for addressing emerging crises and conflict escalation, i.e. for early response to early warning.

The decision-makers involved in designing and approving a response consist of the Crisis Response Planner, who identifies funding opportunities and designs programmes, together with the Delegation (through the RCRPO or not). The respective Brussels-based geographic desk (DG RELEX, DG DEV, DG ELARG) is involved notably to approve the appropriateness of a project in the context of bilateral relations. The Head of Crisis Platform Directorate signs off the decision proposal, seeks the final approval of the High Representative for Foreign Affairs Security Policy and then consults the Council's Political and Security Committee about the decision. Usually, if consensus is secured among all the Commission structures, the approval of the proposal at the highest Commission level and further by the Council is a formality.²⁷ Crisis Response Planners and IfS managers then monitor the IfS projects implemented by international and local NGOs, UN agencies and other institutions.

Other types of short- to mid-term measures include humanitarian assistance, emergency economic assistance and election observation missions, that are implemented with the implicit aim of preventing violence from breaking out or of containing and reducing the spread of violence. The EU election observation missions can play a significant role in that respect and send a signal that "the whole world is watching" in a region where the risk of destabilisation is high. It is also one of the few instruments able to deploy monitors on the ground for short- to mid-term missions (few weeks to several months).

²⁷ Even though Member States do not have the responsibility to formally approve IfS funding decisions, they are still consulted on a regular basis. Only one funding proposal has ever been "rejected" by the Member States, because of political sensitivities.

Longer-term responses to conflict relate to EU cooperation strategies with a third country. When elaborating and/or reviewing Country Strategy Papers in conflict-affected countries, more or less focus can be placed on the root causes of conflict in order to ensure the strategy actually contributes towards building a sustainable peace. For example, the mid-term review of the Sri Lanka Strategy Paper, a process launched after the 2009 crisis, developed an approach based around different conflict scenarios. Similarly, one of the Georgia Strategy Paper's (2007-13) priorities aims to support the settlement of internal conflicts. However, not all Country Strategy Papers, especially in areas that are subject to tensions or crises, contain such an emphasis on conflict.

Assistance conditionality and sanctions are also tools that can be applied to exert political and financial pressure or to impose a ban on any activity that may fuel conflict in third countries on the verge of, or just coming out of, a crisis. A conditional increase in assistance can be used to reorient communities away from the use of violence, while a conditional decrease or suspension of assistance can represent a restraining factor against proponents of violence. For countries that are heavily dependent on aid, this can be an effective measure. Sanctions, in general, are used as an instrument of punishment of governments that cause and sustain violence. When imposing sanctions (or "restrictive measures") on third countries, non-state entities or individuals of a third country, the EU seeks to bring about change in activities or policies when facing violations of international law or human rights, or policies that do not respect the rule of law or democratic principles. Types of sanctions vary from an arms embargo or suspension of cooperation through to restrictions on admission (visa and travel bans). The EC can propose such measures and sometimes has a role in monitoring the application of sanctions as well, along with Member States who decide on sanctions.²⁸

Observation:²⁹ The Pre-eminence of Crisis Response

Most of the interviewees acknowledged that, while the EU is getting better at responding to and managing crises, it still needs to improve its prevention skills. This relates to both the timing of measures adopted (before, during or after a crisis has erupted) and to their articulation with or contribution to a broader (preventative) strategy. As far as timing is concerned, most of the measures undertaken through the IfS seem to be adopted after a crisis has erupted, with the aim of overcoming the funding gap that is characteristic of these contexts. Linked to this, even when short-term or long-term measures attempt to address some of the root causes of the conflict, there is no clearly set-out strategy that would provide an overall rationale and objective to which these measures could then contribute.

²⁸ The list of restrictive measures (sanctions) is regularly updated and available on the DG RELEX website.

²⁹ These are initial observations relating to the EC's response to early-warning information. They are based on the research conducted for this mapping exercise and, as such, are not intended to be comprehensive. These issues will be investigated and analysed in light of the case studies and further elaborated in the synthesis report.

CONCLUSION

The EC can rely on several dedicated early-warning elements: the Crisis Room, which is the unit entitled to gather, analyse and provide information related to early warning; the JRC, which can design, develop and run tools to inform decision-makers in the EC or to enable others to conduct early warning; the IfS, which is a direct funding mechanism which enables the EU to respond to worrying signs of conflicts. In addition, it can also count on its large network of Delegations, which constitute an asset in terms of capacity in-country, as well as on the wide array of short- to long-term measures at its disposal to respond to conflicts in different ways. This potential has been reflected in the policies elaborated since 2001 which commit the EU to enhance and improve conflict-analysis and early-warning frameworks, tools and processes.

However, as underlined in every *Annual Report on the implementation of the EU Programme on the Prevention of Violent Conflict*, despite progress being made, '*strengthening the link between early warning and early action continues to be the focus of EU efforts*'.³⁰ In relation to this, we have been able to draw the following initial observations from the research undertaken for this mapping:

- **Lack of a single streamlined EC early-warning system**

Several actors use different sources of information, methods, tools, channels of communication, according to their own convenience, and they produce different kinds of output linked to different short- and long-term measures aiming to respond to conflict and fragility threats. As a result, the research has not been able to identify one streamlined early-warning system that would inform all decision-making processes (political dialogue, programming, crisis response, etc.), as is done in ECHO for funding allocation for instance. Moreover, early-warning and other conflict-related analyses are not systematically connected to – and therefore not always in a position to inform – decision-making in the EC.

- **The challenge of mainstreaming conflict-related information**

Even though early-warning and conflict-related issues more broadly are supposed to be mainstreamed across EC policies, strategies and programmes,³¹ such practices are rarely implemented. EC staff face growing requirements to mainstream other emerging and important cross-cutting issues, such as human rights, gender, climate change, etc., and therefore they sometimes look at these issues as an added burden rather than an opportunity to design and deliver more effective strategies and programmes. As a result, conflict-related information is often collected randomly, and the opportunity to link this information to programming processes relies on the sensitivity and the assessment of the person(s) in charge.

- **Forecasting conflict: what is the purpose of early warning?**

Expectations towards early warning very often relate to the ability to predict a crisis, or at least to provide a solid set of evidence on the possible outbreak of a crisis, so that decision-makers can take the necessary steps to prevent it. The Crisis Room and the JRC have elaborated tools and models based on quantitative and qualitative data (the Conflict Risk Assessment and Cluster Analysis methods). However, and sometimes despite the strong signals that are detected, the factors triggering a violent conflict or a crisis are still considered as difficult to identify (how can we know whether and when a crisis will erupt in a country like Egypt, considered

³⁰ *Annual Report on the implementation of the EU Programme on the Prevention of Violent Conflict 2010*, Council of the EU, Brussels, 31st May 2010. See also previous annual reports from 2002.

³¹ See, for instance, EC (2008). *Programming Fiche on Conflict Prevention*, which sets out the rationale, added value and some programming suggestions in order to ensure that external assistance and policies are contributing towards tackling the root causes of the conflict and that EC assistance does not have unintended negative impact on the conflict dynamic.

stable, or in a country like Kyrgyzstan, considered as being at risk for many years?). This observation poses an uncomfortable question about the purpose of early-warning systems and the expectations that are placed in them: are they there to identify the signals and root causes of a conflict over a shorter or longer timeframe, leading to preventive action, or are they simply a tool that helps to predict whether and when a crisis will erupt?

▪ **Crisis response versus conflict prevention?**

The IfS is the most adequate EC financial instrument to deal with conflicts, thanks to a timeframe for funding allocation that enables quick reaction. Other geographic instruments which constitute the backbone of EC assistance are deemed less suitable to address conflict situations in the short term, given their lengthy procedures, based on bilateral agreements with partner authorities. As a result, the IfS is often used to complement longer-term instruments when a crisis situation arises. However, this research has found that it is mostly used in response to a crisis rather than to prevent a conflict. The lack of overall conflict-prevention strategies at country or regional levels that would guide all, short- and long-term, EC programming decisions often decreases the potential for mutually reinforcing impact on conflict dynamics.

▪ **Addressing the political sensitivities of partner countries**

When considering a potential or an ongoing crisis, the EC sometimes finds that the leadership of partner countries are reluctant to discuss and address conflict-related issues, which they often consider as interference in their internal affairs. Such reluctance can be expressed while jointly elaborating Country Strategy Papers or even in relation to an IfS programming decision. The EC proposal to integrate discussions on early-warning systems and regular monitoring of potential conflict zones more systematically into political dialogue with partner countries³² has resulted in support for regional and continental early-warning capacities abroad (such as the African Union's Continental Early Warning System, or that of the Arab League of States). However, these issues still prove sensitive in bilateral relations, especially when other donors or regional powers do not share the same strategies towards a country.

The EC has made important achievements since the adoption of the EU Programme for the Prevention of Violent Conflicts in 2001. This mapping document provides a picture of the EC early-warning system before the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty, and thus helps to identify both the challenges that need to be overcome and the potential to be more effective in analysing and preventing conflict in the future. The ongoing establishment of the EEAS, expected to bring more coherence to the EU's various external actions, is an opportunity to learn from the EU early-warning performance to date in preventing conflicts. The reports and activities which will take place under the Initiative of Peacebuilding - Early Warning project will provide a contribution to this debate.

32 'Commission Communication on Conflict Prevention', Brussels, 11th April 2001.

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