



**ITALIAN MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS**  
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Conflict Prevention  
through Multilateral Co-operation:  
a comparative framework-analysis

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# **Conflict Prevention through Multilateral Co-operation: a comparative framework-analysis**

*A contribution to the Italian Presidency  
of the G8 Conflict Prevention Officials' Meeting*

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## Abstract:

Among members of the international community, there is a broad consensus on the need to avoid conflict from escalating into violence. Beyond its obvious moral appeal, conflict prevention is convenient also on strictly economic grounds: preventive activities are clearly less onerous and far less expensive than post-conflict reconstruction.

In spite of this evidence, multilateral institutions remain insufficiently prepared to confront this challenge, which comprises anything from traditional mediation and arbitration to confidence-building along with broader initiatives on governance, development and human rights. Official development assistance in particular needs to be streamlined through a clearer conflict prevention “lens”.

The present paper intends to provide an overview on the different initiatives undertaken to date by different multilateral institutions, focusing in particular on the United Nations, the OSCE, the OECD-Development Assistance Committee (DAC) and the European Union. The potential for a more targeted catalytic action on the part of the G7/G8 is equally explored.



## 1. Introduction

Since the mid-1990s there has been an increasing, at times inflationary use of the term “*conflict prevention*.” In a sense, the belief that conflicts can be prevented and resolved has become part of the contemporary zeitgeist.

### 1.1. What is conflict prevention?

In order to better situate current developments, it may be helpful to briefly recall the meaning and scope of conflict prevention: the prevention of violent conflict is first of all not necessarily the same as *preventive diplomacy*. The very definition of diplomacy pertains to the field of inter-state relations. At a time where *intra*-state conflicts (what we once plainly called “civil wars”) have become the rule, the more comprehensive term “preventive action” seems to be more appropriate.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> According to Professor VICTOR-YVES GHEBALI, the expression *preventive diplomacy* “can be considered a tautology.” All present-day diplomacy, in fact, is necessarily preventive. Cf. Victor-Y. Ghebali, ed., *The OSCE and Preventive Diplomacy*, PSIO Occasional Paper, Number 1 (Geneva: The Graduate Institute of International Studies, 1999); See also UNITED NATIONS, *Preventive action and peacemaking* (New York: Department of Political Affairs, October 2000). Available at: <http://www.un.org/Depts/dpa/docs/peacemak.htm>.

Literally speaking, conflict prevention refers primarily to measures that can be implemented *before* a difference or dispute escalates into violence. In practice however, it also includes measures designed to prevent violence from flaring up again, or to counteract the spreading of conflict into other geographical areas. A clear delimitation between conflict-prevention and the settling of ongoing armed conflict is therefore not always possible. In some cases, it may not even be necessary, or desirable.

The present situation bears some inherent paradoxes: most current initiatives in fact are focused on the management of already existing crises, in situations which are often on the brink of exploding. In these cases, prevention, if at all, is usually envisaged in a short-term emergency perspective. Although this may be sufficient to avoid the worst, it does usually not eliminate the risk of future setbacks. As a consequence, costs for the international community are often high.

At a first glance, there seem to be no viable alternatives. In those countries that can afford to care about conflict prevention in the first place - such as the G8 and the OECD countries in general - opinion polls have a strong political appeal. They are closely followed by political pundits, which are increasingly looking for “strong”, primarily media-effective



initiatives. Hence, current activities are substantially focused on short-term humanitarian assistance. Quite evidently however, “humanitarian assistance by itself cannot bring about peace. It can only help people to survive in the short run.”<sup>2</sup> The present situation – it seems - goes at the expense of clearly outset, long-term preventive strategies.

## 1.2. Challenging current tendencies

According to a different viewpoint, there is nothing unavoidable in present tendencies. In order to break the current trend, going beyond mere emergency aid, a genuine and broadly shared “culture” of conflict prevention is needed. Taking increasingly up a long-term perspective, this would allow a more targeted focus on the underlying *root-causes* of violent conflicts.

In practice, it may sometimes be difficult to neatly distinguish between short-term and so-called “structural” or long-term prevention. The latter however does clearly include schemes to promote democratic governance and resource sharing (e.g. water), wider recognition of human- and minority rights, disarmament and reintegration initiatives, as well as economic and social development. Long term development

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<sup>2</sup> DEVELOPMENT ASSISTANCE COMMITTEE, *The DAC Guidelines: Helping Prevent Violent Conflict* (Paris: OECD, 2001).

assistance in particular ought to be streamlined through a much clearer conflict-prevention lens. Unequally distributed aid, in fact, may itself be a source of conflict, fostering grievance and resentment.<sup>3</sup>

Another point may be worth noticing: up to now, and following the classical intergovernmental approach, preventive action has usually not been carried out without the prior consent of all parties involved. However, and notwithstanding some resistance on the part of authoritarian states and often dubious democracies, in certain circumstances violations of human rights and international humanitarian law clearly amount to a ‘threat to international peace and security’.”<sup>4</sup> The international community needs to better respond to this challenge.

Of course the view remains contested. Putting cynicism apart however, conflict prevention appears clearly convenient even on “realist” and strictly economic grounds. It could thus

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<sup>3</sup> The links between resource-distribution and the emergence of potentially destabilising grievances where living-conditions worsen in relative (though not necessarily in absolute) terms needs to be further assessed in the future. See e.g. DON HUBERT, *Resource, Greed and the Persistence of Violent Conflict* (2001). To better understand these complex correlations, the concept of socio-economic “vulnerability” was recently put forward by some scholars. See e.g. UMBERTO TRIULZI et. al., *New Prospects for Assessing Conflict and Development Dynamics* (Rome: IPALMO-IAI Research, 2001).

<sup>4</sup> SWEDISH MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS, *Preventing violent conflict* (Stockholm, 1999).

substantially be endorsed on a rational-interest basis apart from ethical concerns.

### 1.3. The role of the G8

The present research was produced at the end of the Italian G8-presidency in 2001. A previous version was distributed at the *G8 Conflict Prevention Officials' Meeting*, which took place in Rome in December of the same year. References to the G8 and its catalytic role in the field of conflict prevention are thus made throughout the paper.

The G8 Heads of State and Government had announced their commitment to conflict prevention at their meeting in Cologne in June 1999. Subsequently, the *G8 Miyazaki Initiatives for Conflict Prevention* and the follow-up *Roma Initiatives* have had a decisive impact, either directly or indirectly through their influence on multilateral institutions and single states.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> In Miyazaki, under its Japanese presidency in 2000, the G8 identified five areas of initiative for conflict prevention, namely (1) Small Arms and Light Weapons, (2) Conflict and Development, (3) Illicit Trade in Diamonds, (4) Children in Armed Conflict and (5) International Civil Police. Under the subsequent Italian G8 presidency in 2001, (1) the Role of Women in Conflict Prevention and (2) the Role of Corporate Citizenship were identified as additional areas of focus.

However, this research is not intended to be about the G8 in the first place. The principal purpose of the present paper is to provide an overview on the different approaches to conflict prevention that can be found in multilateral institutions, namely the UN, the OSCE, the OECD and the European Union. Specific references to the G8 are made where it could positively influence the activities of exactly these institutions.

As UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan has repeated several times over the last years, “the critical concern today is no longer lack of early warning of impending crises, but rather the need to follow up early warning with early... action.”<sup>6</sup> If the ultimate aim is the successful prevention of violent conflict, closer and better co-operation among all actors involved appears imperative.

## 2. Conflict prevention and the UN

The UN was substantially created with the aim of preventing another world war. In this sense, article 1 of the Charter defines the organisation’s purposes to be the maintenance of international peace and security. To that end, it should be able “to take effective collective measures for the prevention and removal of threats to the peace.”

## 2.1. The UN's traditional role

In Article 33, the UN Charter spells out the whole classical array of tools for preventive diplomacy: “negotiation, enquiry, mediation, conciliation, arbitration, judicial settlement, resort to regional agencies or arrangements, or other peaceful means.”

However, while it appears clear that similar instruments can be effective in preventing classical interstate conflicts (“old wars”), they seem less adapted to our present needs.<sup>7</sup> The nature of conflicts themselves has in fact radically changed. And with the death toll of violent conflict either dramatically increasing, or simply becoming more evident, the international community is in utter need of innovating approaches. Still, more than ten years after the end of the cold war, a UN system of conflict prevention remains very much in its infancy.

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<sup>6</sup> See KOFI A. ANNAN, (S/1998/318) *The causes of conflict and the promotion of durable peace and sustainable development in Africa* (New York: United Nations, 1998).

<sup>7</sup> See ROBERTO TOSCANO, “Preventive Diplomacy at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century: which conflicts, which prevention?”, in Daniel Warner, *Preventive Diplomacy: The United Nations and the OSCE*, PSIO Occasional Paper (Geneva: The Graduate Institute of International Studies, 1996)

In the broadest sense, among the traditional preventive activities carried out by the UN one could recall the following:<sup>8</sup>

- a) *International norms production: an important, though not always “effective” means of conflict prevention;*
- b) *UN efforts at the promotion of democracy and better economic conditions, as well as its activities on human rights;*
- c) *Different UN offices: they often perform activities of early warning, themselves a pre-requisite for preventive involvement.*

In more specific terms, it is only since the mid-1990s that consistent efforts have been undertaken to improve the organisation’s preventive capacities. On the one hand, academic proposals for addressing the UN’s shortcomings in the field of conflict prevention abound:<sup>9</sup> they range from reform of the Security Council, also in the view of including

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<sup>8</sup> I here draw extensively upon SONIA LUCARELLI, “Conflict Prevention in post-Cold War Europe: Lack of Instruments or Lack of Will?”, in Kurt R. Spillmann and Joachim Krause, eds., *Studies in Contemporary History and Security Policy* (Bern: Peter Lang, 1999).

<sup>9</sup> See e.g. J. MARTIN ROCHESTER, “The United Nations in a New World Order: Reviving the Theory and Practice of International Organization”, in Charles W. Kegley, Jr., *Controversies in International Relations Theory. Realism and the Neoliberal Challenge* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1995), pp. 199-222.

greater representation from regions likely to be affected, to intelligence and the establishment of a specifically designed rapid reaction brigade.

The UN's role however is severely constrained by its resource problems, as well as by its reliance on the political will of member-states. Progress is therefore slow. In 1995, the Joint Inspection Unit in Geneva published a first report on "*Strengthening the UN system capacity for conflict prevention*", which called for an "effective division of labour between all the actors involved...taking into account their knowledge, ...and comparative advantages." <sup>10</sup> The creation of an ad hoc Working Group, or of a small committee on conflict prevention, was equally suggested.

## 2.2. Taking conflict prevention seriously

As a matter of fact, the United Nations first needed to adapt its very structures to the new challenge. The development of concrete working-strategies proceeded in parallel, mainly through the office of the Secretary-General. Kofi A. Annan's 1998 report on the causes of conflict in Africa already

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<sup>10</sup> UNITED NATIONS, (JIU/REP/95/13) *Strengthening the UN system capacity for conflict prevention*, recomm. 15 (Geneva: Joint Inspection Unit, 1995).

highlighted the relationship between preventive engagement and the need to foster long-term development.<sup>11</sup>

It is essentially over the last three years that that things have slowly started to move within the UN system. Although statements and resolutions have only partially been followed by concrete engagements, there are good reasons to feel confident. The G8 is probably not without merit. Within the Security Council, as a matter of fact the most “powerful” UN institution, the official debate was opened by a statement from its president in November 1999. The need for “development of effective long-term strategies”<sup>12</sup> was already highlighted in unmistakable terms.

### 2.3. Converging stances *within* the UN

The Security Council held its first open debate on the prevention of armed conflicts in July 2000. The G8's Miyazaki-initiatives on conflict prevention were all explicitly recalled in the final presidential statement, the only exception being the issue of child soldiers. Most interesting, and

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<sup>11</sup> KOFI A. ANNAN, *The causes of conflict and the promotion of durable peace and sustainable development in Africa*, cit.; Two years later, the UN's *Millennium Report* (2000) solemnly declared every step aiming at reducing poverty to be a concrete step towards conflict prevention.

<sup>12</sup> U.N. SECURITY COUNCIL (S/PRST/1999/34), *Role of the Security Council in the Prevention of armed conflicts*, Statement, President of the Security Council (New York, 30 November 1999).



although the issues have been but touched in the debate, there was already an explicit focus on women and DDR.<sup>13</sup> The role of women in particular has subsequently been taken up again by the UN, not least in the Millennium report. Still, further progress needs to be achieved on the initiative. Again, there could be a pivotal role for the G8: in Miyazaki already, the G8 Foreign Ministers affirmed their intention to “contribute to strengthening the conflict prevention and early warning capacity of the UN.” The specific roles of the Security Council and the Secretary General were also explicitly acknowledged. Still, G8 initiatives need to be much more incisive, and possibly more specifically targeted in the future in order to achieve substantial progress.

The UN in fact has traditionally been much more active in peacekeeping or post-conflict reconstruction. On the other hand, even the recent “Brahimi”-report on UN Peace Operations, not intended to focus on conflict prevention in the first place, had some relevant implications for preventive engagement. In its aftermath, the creation of an *Executive Committee on Peace and Security, Strategic Information and*

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<sup>13</sup> U.N. SECURITY COUNCIL (S/PRST/2000/25), *Statement by the President*. As a result of this first open debate, the suggestion was issued for the Council itself to hold periodic meetings at the Foreign Minister-level to discuss prevention issues (cf. *Press release SC/6893*). The recommendation was subsequently advanced several times by various UN-organs. Up to the present, it has remained without tangible results.

*Analysis* was first suggested by the Secretary-General as a “focal point” for inter-agency co-operation. The proposal was subsequently endorsed by the Security Council in its resolution 1372 (2000).<sup>14</sup>

The actual repartition of tasks in order to enhance the UN’s potential for conflict prevention has been hotly debated throughout the past few years. Traditionally, it is the Security Council which has been charged with the maintenance of international peace and security. The Security Council is also the only UN organ which, according to Art. 41 and Art. 42 of the Charter, may legitimately infringe state sovereignty in some well-defined circumstances (Chap. VII). Legally as well as politically speaking, the Security Council is thus endowed with the means to deal with most classical threats to international peace. However, it may be less so when it comes to dealing with today’s “new wars.”<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> See KOFI A. ANNAN (A/55/502), *Report on implementation of the Report of the Panel on UN Peace Operations* (New York, 20 October 2000); U.N. Security Council, *Resolution 1372 on Peacekeeping Operations* (New York: 13 November 2000).

<sup>15</sup> The expression has been coined by Mary Kaldor. “New wars”, she argues, “involve a blurring of the distinctions between war (usually defined as violence between states or organised political groups for political motives), organised crime...and large-scale violations of human rights.” Cf. MARY KALDOR, *New and Old Wars. Organized Violence in a Global Era* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1999).

Focusing upon long-term prevention in particular, the General Assembly, along with the Economic and Social Council, need to see their specific role enhanced. The ECOSOC might indeed have a comparative advantage when it comes to anticipating economic and social problems likely to result in a crisis. Without being overly optimistic and in more general terms, it could also be the appropriate place to develop innovative strategies in dealing with the economic and social causes of conflict. The recommendation has been repeatedly and authoritatively stressed over the last few years.<sup>16</sup> Slowly, things might begin to move in this direction.

Coming close to the present, Kofi Annan's 2001 - report on the *Prevention of armed conflict*<sup>17</sup> bears some major points of interest: the need for a deep and careful understanding of local circumstances and traditions is explicitly stated. Subsequently, the Secretary-General presents a list of precise recommendations, the most relevant of which include:

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<sup>16</sup> See e.g. the already mentioned report by the Joint Inspection Unit dating back to 1995 (JIU/REP/95/13); see also U.N. SECURITY COUNCIL (S/PRST/2000/25), *Role of the S.C. in the prevention of armed conflicts*, open debate; U.N. SECURITY COUNCIL, *Peace-building: towards a comprehensive approach*, open debate (New York, 5 February 2001).

<sup>17</sup> KOFI A. ANNAN (A/55/985 – S/2001/574), *Report on Prevention of armed conflict* (New York, 2001).

*(37.) to provide periodic regional or sub-regional reports to the Security Council. The focus would be on cross-border issues that constitute a potential threat to international peace and security.*

*(39) the Security Council could consider establishing an ad hoc informal working group ... to discuss prevention cases on a more informal basis.*

*(53) increase the traditional preventive role of the Secretary-General: [through] ...fact-finding missions, [and]... joint preventive action with the Security Council.*

*(101.) All development policies ... need to be looked at through a conflict prevention lens so that socio-economic inequities and inequalities do not give rise to violent conflict.*

In spite of all talk about a more profitable repartition of competencies, in conflict prevention as well the Security Council remains the most authoritative and one of the most active UN organs: in its recent resolution 1366 (August 2001), it namely expresses its commitment “to take early and effective action to prevent armed conflict including, with the consent of receiving States, missions to areas of potential

conflict.” Provided this resolution is going to be implemented within a reasonable timeframe, it may considerably contribute to improving the UN's potential for early warning. Finally, the Council has decided to consider inclusion of a disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration component in the mandate of UN peacekeeping and peace-building operations. In spite of some major shortcomings, within the UN the so-called “culture” of conflict prevention appears to be yielding some first results.

### 3. The OSCE: short-term preventive engagement

#### 3.1. The 1992 - Conference in Helsinki

When the CSCE was institutionalised by the *Paris Charter for a New Europe* (1990), no concrete functions for crisis or conflict management were given to it. In subsequent years however, and substantially starting with the 1992 conference in Helsinki, what had until then been a process of negotiation between two blocs began to resemble an organisation aimed at conflict-prevention in the broadest sense.

More specifically, the response formulated by the member states at the 1992 Helsinki meeting implied the following:<sup>18</sup>

- a) *existing forums and institutions were strengthened and new ones created. (The Permanent Council for instance, established in December 1992 and strengthened in December 1993, plays a pivotal role in conflict prevention and bears responsibility for early warning within the organisation);*
  
- b) *a separate chapter of the 1992 final act was devoted to early warning, conflict prevention, and crisis management;*<sup>19</sup>
  
- c) *at the Helsinki summit, it was decided to appoint a High Commissioner on National Minorities (HCNM).*

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<sup>18</sup> I here largely draw upon H. GAJUS SCHLTEMA, "Monitoring Minority Conflicts: The Role of the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities", in *Peacebuilding: a field guide* (Boulder, Co: Lynne Rienner, 2001); see also V.-Y. GHEBALI, *op. cit.* and WALTER A. KEMP, *Quiet Diplomacy in Action. The OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities* (The Hague: Kluwer Law International, 2001).

<sup>19</sup> See CSCE: *The Challenges of Change*, Helsinki Document (1992).

### 3.2. Innovation through independence: the HCNM

The High Commissioner on National Minorities is a privileged tool for conflict prevention within the OSCE. The Function was first attributed to Max van der Stoep, former Dutch minister of foreign affairs. He began his activities in January 1993. Since 1 July 2001, the new High Commissioner is Rolf Ekeus, a senior Swedish diplomat.

The HCNM is in fact a very specific instrument of preventive diplomacy. While it can be seen as a tool for conflict prevention, the High Commissioner is actually not an Ombudsman for the defence of national minorities. As expressed by his title, it is a High Commissioner *on* (and not for) national minorities.

The mandate of the HCNM has added a previously unknown dimension to the right to intervene in the domestic affairs of participating states: with few exceptions, the mandate entitles the High Commissioner to decide independently whether to get involved in a minority issue. Involvement by the High Commissioner does in fact not require the approval of the OSCE's Senior or Permanent Council, or of the State concerned. As a consequence he is usually able to intervene early on.

The 1992-document contains some detailed provisions intended to guide the High Commissioner's activities: having substantially a mediating role, the HCNM may issue an early warning if, on the basis of exchanges of communications and different contacts, he/she concludes that there is a “prima facie risk of potential conflict” (Par. 13). As a matter of fact, he should only get involved in minority issues if these carry in them a risk of escalation. Conflicts already marked by violence on the contrary are excluded.<sup>20</sup>

The relatively independent position of the HCNM, quite unique in the field of inter-governmental organisations and within the OSCE itself, does not affect his accountability. Frequent consultations exist with the OSCE chairman in office through confidential reports. Confidentiality is in fact a qualifying feature for most of the HCNM's activities. In recent times however, some of his recommendations have been published at the HCNM web site ([www.osce.org/hcnm/](http://www.osce.org/hcnm/)).

The High Commissioner's early warnings do of course not imply that action follows necessarily: in Kosovo, Max van der Stoel had warned of the imminent danger. His warning was not followed by immediate action, and the international community spent more than \$ 100 billion on a military

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<sup>20</sup> The so-called “terrorism clause” regulating the issue was adopted mainly at Turkey's request.



intervention, a major humanitarian emergency and subsequent reconstruction projects.<sup>21</sup> All in all however, the High Commissioner “silent diplomacy” has been successful in avoiding intergroup conflicts to escalate.

### 3.3. Beyond emergency action

The HCNM is not the only preventive branch within the OSCE. A specific function of vigilance on human rights for instance is performed by the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) in Warsaw. The office can set up missions to monitor elections and require a debate on human rights issues within the organisation’s consultation fora.

In more general terms, the OSCE provides support to newly independent states, supplying recommendations and technical support for the establishment of democratic institutions and free market principles.

Closely related to the G8's field of action, an issue of growing concern for the OSCE has recently been the threat posed by the spread of small arms and light weapons (SALW). At the Vienna Ministerial Council in November 2000, soon after the G8's Miyazaki-decisions had been issued, the OSCE adopted

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<sup>21</sup> See JONATHAN COHEN, *Conflict Prevention in the OSCE: an assessment of capacities* (The Hague: Netherlands Institute of International Relations, 1999); consult also HCNM’s website at: <http://www.osce.org/hcnm/>.

what is in its own terms “arguably the most comprehensive document on small arms agreed by any international organisation.”<sup>22</sup>

The OSCE is engaged in long-term prevention as well: the HCNM for instance – itself first and foremost an instrument of short-term prevention - does closely cooperate with the UNHCR and the UNDP. Within the OSCE area, this allows to better organise donors' activities in support of complex humanitarian situations with implications for inter-ethnic relations. The OSCE Chairman-in-Office has recently stated that “security will always be fragile if not accompanied by sustainable economic and social development, by measures to alleviate poverty...”<sup>23</sup>

This wide array of activities and their relative success have recently led one leading scholar to write that “preventive diplomacy certainly represents the OSCE's trademark” and, at the same time, its most visible comparative advantage vis-à-vis other international organisations.<sup>24</sup> Nonetheless, like all intergovernmental organisations the OSCE remains ultimately dependent on its constituent members' consent for all its activities.

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<sup>22</sup> OSCE, *Interaction Between Organizations and Institutions in the OSCE Area*, Annual report (Vienna, 2001).

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

In this sense, only the High Commissioner on National Minorities has acquired a privileged position of relative independence. He represents a genuinely innovating figure in the field of interstate co-operation.

#### 4. Tackling the root-causes: the OECD/DAC

The OECD Development Assistance has been dealing with the issue of conflict prevention for some years now. Its activities in this area do mostly comprise research, aimed at exploring innovating and more effective approaches, as well as specific policy recommendations.

##### 4.1. The DAC's first specific initiatives

Already in May 1997 the so-called *DAC Guidelines on Conflict, Peace and Development Co-operation* were endorsed at a Ministerial Meeting. Resulting from a long process of negotiation and debate among donor countries, these guidelines dealt with issues of concern to both donor and partner countries regarding the use of Official Development Assistance (ODA) in crisis-prone regions.

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid., p. 8.

On that occasion, a specific task force on *Conflict, Peace and Development Co-operation* was also set up. The underlying belief was clarified in an accompanying policy statement: “Development assistance will have the most impact in conflict prevention when it is designed and timed to address the root causes of violent conflicts ... in ways that are relevant to local circumstances.”<sup>25</sup> Among other activities, the task force has carried out four case studies (on Afghanistan, Bosnia, Rwanda and Sri Lanka) in order to analyse the impact of aid programmes in conflict solutions.<sup>26</sup>

Already in 1997, it was decided to update the first set of Guidelines by December 2000, in order to reflect new circumstances, experiences and lessons learned. In April 2000, a comprehensive update, the OECD *Ministerial Statement on Helping Prevent Violent Conflict: Orientations for External Partners*, was finally approved. An annex of more than 100 pages further provided a series of specific guidelines comprising analytic tools and concrete policy proposals intended to clarify the link between conflict and development. At the G8 Foreign Ministers' meeting in Rome,

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<sup>25</sup> DAC, *Conflict, Peace and Development Co-operation on the Threshold of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (Paris: OECD/DAC Policy Statement, May 1997).

<sup>26</sup> For a summarising report, see DAC, *Report on the Regional Consultation on Conflict, Peace and Development Co-operation* (Paris: DAC Informal Task Force on Conflict, Peace and Development Co-operation, March 2000).

the set of guidance was recognised as an important tool for enhancing the role of development co-operation for conflict-prevention and peace building.<sup>27</sup>

#### 4.1. The April 2001- Ministerial Statement

In the *Ministerial Statement*, the OECD Development Ministers, Aid Agency Heads and other Senior Officials have engaged themselves to increase coherence among all their policies that impact on conflict prevention. Going into more detail, they subsequently stressed the importance of understanding the political economy of violent conflict. In fact, “powerful groups, businesses and individuals, using violent or non-violent means, can acquire a vested interest in sparking and perpetuating violent conflict.”<sup>28</sup> The necessity for better co-ordinated decision making and the promotion of good governance as a means to prevent conflicts was equally stressed. In particular, the report highlights the challenge represented by the integration into society of all people uprooted and affected by violent conflict - which of course includes demobilisation and disarmament of combatants.

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<sup>27</sup> Worth noticing, the holder of the rotating G8 CPOM chair for 2001, Italian senior-diplomat Roberto Toscano, does also chair the DAC task force on conflict prevention since 2001.

#### 4.2. The Guidelines: *Helping Prevent Violent Conflict*

The broader DAC-Guidelines make the conflict-development link unmistakably clear, stressing how “promoting peace is a dynamic process that requires long-term commitment.”<sup>29</sup> Particular focus is put on the need to clearly streamline development aid, since in itself, it may create both incentives and disincentives for peace or for violent conflict. All depends on how it is used and how it is channelled.

Equally important, the Guidelines stress the need, to better understand cross-border and regional linkages in conflicts. Many national conflicts in fact can only be dealt with in their regional context. Strategies for prevention and recovery should consequently be regionally designed. Going further, regional co-operation and integration may contribute to the stabilisation of peace, particularly around scarce common goods – such as water.

Among DAC-proposals for concrete engagement by the international community, the following appear particularly relevant:<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> OECD, *Ministerial Statement on Helping Prevent Violent Conflict*, (Paris, April 2001).

<sup>29</sup> OECD/DAC, *The DAC Guidelines: Helping Prevent Violent Conflict* (Paris, 2001).

1. *Long-term constructive involvement may allow external actors to engage in policy dialogue with local communities and use a wide range of other incentives for peace.*
2. *Negotiated benchmarks should be agreed for improved governance in the context of donors' long-term commitment*
3. *Conditionalities on development assistance may be successful, but when applied, they should be explained as clearly and transparently as possible to minimise misunderstanding.*
4. *Sanctions might be useful if “smart”, that is to say if targeted against those individuals responsible for atrocities (e.g. G8 and UN embargoes such as those on conflict diamonds).*

The OECD's proposals are substantially, though not exclusively, directed at national governments and their decision-making capacities. It is thus states that ultimately bear responsibility for effective development assistance with a preventive focus. In this context

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid., pp. 27-28.

however, and regarding long-term prevention in particular, the European Union is increasingly becoming a major player.

## 5. The EU's Expanding Role

As a matter of fact, the present EU does bear little resemblance to a “multilateral” organisation in the classic sense. The choice to deal with the Union's policies in this place is thus substantially due to its rapidly growing relevance for the prevention of violent conflicts.

The process of European integration can be regarded as a successful example of conflict prevention itself. Today, the EU plays an important role in trying to extend to other areas the stability, prosperity and peace which it contributed to guaranteeing in Western Europe.

### 5.1. Common objectives vs. “national interests”

In recent years, largely as a result of events in the Balkans for which “early warning” had indeed been delivered in abundance, the EU has paid increasing attention to conflict prevention. The EU's role in this field emerged in parallel to the EU's more general growing international role. As a matter of fact however, the Union's aspirations for conflict prevention



and management are still very much the subject of political debate. According to one straightforward position, the most important obstacle in this context “will continue to be the tension between the desire of the Member States that the EU have a common foreign policy and their reluctance at the same time to surrender national prerogatives in this very sensitive area.”<sup>31</sup>

In 1993, the Maastricht-Treaty on the European Union protected the national prerogatives of Member States in the sensitive area of international security policy. Agreement of all fifteen Member States remained the general rule for EU external policy. The subsequent Amsterdam Treaty, entered into force in 1999, provided some new mechanisms to begin

overcoming these difficulties. It created so-called “Common Strategies”, which adopted at the level of the European Council, are to be implemented by the Union in areas where the member states have important interests in common.

## 5.2. “Structural” prevention through conditional aid

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<sup>31</sup> INTERNATIONAL CRISIS GROUP, *EU Crisis Response Capability: Institutions and Processes for Conflict Prevention and Management* (Brussels, June 2001), p. 9.

Regarding the field of conflict prevention in particular, the EU has shown considerable capacity for long-term *structural prevention*. Most measures have been taken – for understandable reasons – in the economic sphere and in regions geographically closest to the EU. In one sense, the entire enlargement enterprise might of course be considered as a major “structural” conflict prevention project. The assimilation of third countries is without any doubt the most powerful conflict prevention tool at the EU's disposal.

The EU has taken a similarly strategic approach to conflict prevention in the Balkan region since 1999, when it helped put in place the *Stability pact* proposal. Perhaps most interesting, the *Cotonou Agreement* that governs relations between the EU and 71 ACP states (replacing the 1975-Lomé Convention) includes for the first time in external EU treaties an explicitly “political dimension.” As a matter of fact, co-operation is linked to conditionality regarding good governance, democracy and respect for human rights.<sup>32</sup>

As a matter of fact, the most immediate preventive tool in the hands of the EU appears to lie in its consistent initiatives on development aid. In April this year, the EU Commission itself

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid., pp.35-37.

stressed that “development policy and other co-operation programmes provide the most powerful instruments at the Community's disposal for treating the root-causes of conflict.”<sup>33</sup> The EU has in fact been the major contributor of official development assistance to post-conflict reconstruction in the Balkans. However, the main aims of EU development co-operation have traditionally been poverty reduction and macroeconomic development rather than conflict prevention as such.

The problem applied to development assistance programmes in more general terms. Recent studies undertaken by the OECD's Development Assistance Committee (DAC) suggest that development co-operation activities need to be carefully structured and monitored (see previous chapter for details). Otherwise, they may as well foster inequities in recipient countries, representing incentives to conflict.

Moreover, development assistance, not only from the EU, is normally provided with the consent of the recipient government. These same governments do also largely direct development co-operation funds through their own agencies. A profound scrutiny of how this actually happens appears to be increasingly necessary. To start with, the Commission

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<sup>33</sup> EUROPEAN COMMISSION [COM (2001) 211 final]: *Communication on Conflict prevention* (Brussels, 2001); See also EUROPEAN COMMISSION, *Conflict Prevention: a Commission contribution* (Brussels, 19 January 2001).

itself has recently proposed “a systematic integration of conflict indicators and the objective of prevention into the programming of Community external aid programmes.”<sup>34</sup>

A key-instrument in the EU’s activities for conflict prevention is the country strategy paper to be established with each partner country. Already in January 2001, the Commission recognised how for countries at risk of conflict, or emerging from it, these papers may also need to focus on supporting democratic state structures.<sup>35</sup> The importance of improved country strategy papers was recalled at the recent European Council in Göteborg. Most important however, the Göteborg summit formally adopted the so-called “*EU Programme for the Prevention of Violent Conflicts*”.

### 5.3. The Göteborg – programme for conflict prevention

The recently adopted “*EU Programme*” for the Prevention of Violent Conflicts” has milestone-character. The fifteen Heads of state did in fact commit themselves to pursue conflict prevention as “one of the main objectives of the EU’s external

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<sup>34</sup> EUROPEAN COMMISSION (IP/01/560), *Conflict Prevention: Commission initiative to improve EU’s civilian intervention capacities* (Brussels, 11 April 2001).

<sup>35</sup> EUROPEAN COMMISSION, *Conflict Prevention: a Commission contribution*, cit.

relations.”<sup>36</sup> In particular, the Council committed itself to schedule a broad consideration of potential conflict issues at the outset of each Presidency, including yearly orientation debates. The Council itself, drawing on contributions from the Secretary General/High Representative and the Commission will monitor the implementation. Moreover, the capacities of the Union will be strengthened by developing instruments and expertise in areas such as human rights and democracy, fact-finding, DDR and demining. On these concrete issues, it seems once again clear how the potential for constructive interaction with the G8 – and with international institutions in general – is indeed substantial.

The final chapter of the Göteborg Programme confronts the question of co-operation and partnerships with other organisations, namely the UN, the OSCE, the Council of Europe and other regional and subregional organisations. Co-operation with the OSCE seems to be particularly delicate, due to some actual overlapping of competences. Up to now however, the foreseen “joint training programmes for EU, UN and OSCE field and headquarters personnel” seem to be among the few concrete results. According to the Göteborg Programme, EU actions “will be undertaken in

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<sup>36</sup> EUROPEAN COUNCIL, *EU Programme for the Prevention of Violent Conflicts*, Endorsed by the Göteborg European Council (June 2001).

accordance with the principles and purposes of the UN Charter.”

EU-UN relations might indeed become a challenging chapter of future international relations. With the gradual expansion of the Common Foreign and Security Policy, the EU's presence and relative weight within the UN system will have to be profoundly reassessed. The issue, hotly debated already, may disclose some considerable potential in the long run: a more cohesive EU with a strengthened CFSP might well be able to advance the international agenda on issues of human rights and international ethics – not least including the prevention of violent conflict.

## 6. Conclusion:

The prevention of violent conflict can be envisaged in a plurality of perspectives: ethical or rational interest-based, focusing upon emergency aid and negotiation, or taking up a long-term perspective, also including the streamlining of official development assistance. In order to operate productively within these largely overlapping realities, smooth co-operation among all major institutional actors has become a necessity.

Achieving the goal of conflict prevention – we know it all-too well - is complicated by the fact that averted conflicts do usually not make headlines; they do not engage people emotionally. This might eventually change once coherent, openly discussed strategies have been clearly set out. The potential “catalytic” role of the G8 in this context can probably not be stressed enough.

The G8 could intervene at different levels: in particular, the suggestion has been advanced for the G8 to make a stronger and more targeted usage of its economic clout. After all, this is where the G7/G8's real comparative advantage might lie.

The introduction of specific reports on progress made should equally be considered. Possibly avoiding duplications and competition with other multilateral fora, conflict prevention should be mainstreamed into areas as different as development assistance, security and human rights. The possibility of a more widespread use of conditionalities on specific governance issues might also be systematically explored.

In more general terms, multilateral structures and institutions need to be given the means for a more targeted focus on our common concerns. Among all actors involved, the U.N. with its after all considerable potential seems to be somehow

lagging behind. On the contrary, the OSCE in the field of short-term preventive action and the OECD/DAC regarding specific advice on structural preventive measures, seem to have taken the lead. The European Union finally is rapidly expanding its potential for conflict prevention, both through the streamlining of its ODA and the strengthening of its CFSP.

In order to overcome what do largely remain sectorial approaches to date, a renewed effort is necessary. Institutional co-operation has to be improved, along with the sharing of information on best practices, specific data and lessons learned. Beyond formal and inter-governmental platforms, civil society networks and organizations should be increasingly included in scenario-building, in the monitoring of progress and the elaboration of specific policy proposals. In particular, civil society's capacities for early warning should be exploited much more systematically.

In some cases however (Bosnia and Kosovo are clear examples) early warning may be less of a problem. On the contrary, problems do usually emerge when it comes to organising and putting in place early preventive action. The present overly *reactive* attitudes within international relations do bear some inherent dangers which go far beyond the sole field of conflict-management. The G8, reuniting some of the



world's most relevant players within a unique flexible setting,  
might actually reverse this trend.

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