

EU Global Peace Diplomacy

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The Norwegian Nobel Committee awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for 2012 to the European Union for its contribution over the last six decades “to the advancement of peace and reconciliation, democracy and human rights in Europe”. This is, indeed, a marvellous honour and a much-needed boost for an integration project that is currently suffering grave economic difficulties and considerable social unrest.

The Nobel Committee has focused on what it sees as the EU’s most important achievement, namely the successful transformation of Europe “from a continent of war to a continent of peace”. To a large degree, the Union’s success story has been built on a strategy of wielding its ‘soft power’ to impose durable peace on aspirant members. The Cyprus issue stands out as a notable exception. Yet, EU enlargement continues to be an effective tool for peace-building, most vividly by way of the Union’s so-called ‘Stabilisation and Association process’ for the Western Balkans.

Without implying any criticism of the Committee’s decision, it is a pity that the growing role of the European Union to act as a peacemaker beyond its geographical borders was not acknowledged in the award announcement.

There is, of course, an explanation for this. So far, the EU has played only a minor role as a successful mediator between third parties and its record has been mixed. The highest-profile failure was perhaps when the EU, freshly endowed with a Common Foreign and Security Policy and boasting with confidence that ‘the hour of Europe has dawned’, proved unable to stop the violent implosion of former Yugoslavia in the early 1990s. At the end of that decade, the EU again failed to prevent an eruption of armed conflict in the Balkans, this time in Kosovo.

Yet, in a few cases, the Union has been able to resolve status disputes in a peaceful manner. Among the noteworthy cases in point, one might mention the Russo-Georgian ceasefire agreement brokered by the EU Presidency in 2008, implementation of the 2005 Aceh Peace Agreement, the 2002 Belgrade Agreement that introduced a 3-year cooling-off period before Serbia and Montenegro could hope to peacefully separate, and the 2001 Ohrid Framework Agreement that prevented violent clashes between the Macedonian government and Albanian militias from spiralling out of control.

The EU is currently facilitating a dialogue to normalise relations between Serbia and Kosovo. By way of its High Representative and supported by the European External Action Service (EEAS), the Union is also leading international efforts in the Quartet to get the Middle East peace process going again, and in the so-called ‘E3+3’ to prevent nuclear proliferation in –

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and possibly war with – Iran. These efforts, however, have yet to produce positive results. Farther afield, the EU has been instrumental in nudging the Sudanese towards a peace agreement, and has assisted efforts to broker peace in Mindanao.

The picture that emerges from the EU's mediation efforts is roughly one of concentric circles emanating from the Union's bureaucratic centre: as the ripple effect expands, its impact weakens.

The EU's soft power works best for states that could theoretically meet its membership criteria. Thus, the EU is likely to get more traction when it throws its weight behind peace talks in its eastern neighbourhood (e.g. to settle the dispute over the breakaway republic of Transnistria), than when it does so in order to resolve disputes in or between its non-'European' brethren on the southern shores of the Mediterranean order (cf. Arab uprisings, and Western Sahara). Arguably, the EU's power of attraction wanes once outside the European periphery and is really only defined in terms of development assistance and trade relations.

Whereas the EU's track record in peace diplomacy is rather modest, it is not the result of a lack of effort. EU actors, both at the highest political level but also at diplomatic level in-country, have worked towards the peaceful settlement of disputes in various corners of the world. These efforts include the granting of financial and technical assistance, the imposition of restrictive measures on parties unwilling to cooperate in the search for a peaceful solution, the deployment of EU 'blue helmet' missions of various kinds to keep or build the peace, and much more. Yet, for all these initiatives, good offices, 'carrots' and 'sticks', none of these instruments has served as a strong leverage for securing sustainable dispute settlement beyond the EU's immediate neighbourhood.

With a history of colonial domination, the EU's diplomatic slate is less clean than that of the Norwegians and the Swiss. However, some member states' familiarity with previously held overseas territories may play to the Union's advantage in bringing a political *savoir faire* to the negotiation table. The combination of the perception of absolute neutrality and a deep knowledge of local affairs may be the key to success for a future 'European Institute of Peace', an initiative jointly launched by Sweden and Finland and now spurred by the EEAS with the financial support of, inter alia, Norway and Switzerland.

The EU is firmly intent on using its mediation (support) services whenever relevant and as part of its comprehensive approach to conflict prevention and resolution. This, of course, needs to be done in full coordination with member states and global actors like the United Nations, regional organisations such as the African Union, OSCE and the League of Arab States, national, local and civil society actors.

As part of a comprehensive approach to conflict prevention and resolution, the EU should strive to optimise the use of existing tools and instruments within the Union. The EEAS plays a particularly important role in the coordination of these instruments so as to develop coherent and effective external action.

It is hoped that, in spite of tight budgets, the Nobel Peace Prize will motivate the new Laureate to redouble efforts to develop its mediation and dialogue capacities on the global scene.