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PEACEBRIEF₁₄₁

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Toward a European Institute of Peace

Innovative Peacebuilding or Excessive Bureaucracy?

Summary

- The bulk of the European Union's peacebuilding capacity resides within the European External Action Service or EEAS, a diplomatic corps led by High Representative Catherine Ashton. The EEAS and relevant U.S. civilian agencies face similar challenges and opportunities in their effort to operationalize conflict prevention.
- Several European leaders and members of the European Parliament propose the creation of a European Institute of Peace (EIP) as an innovative and cost-effective approach to enhance Europe's peacebuilding capacity.
- This European version of the U.S. Institute of Peace (USIP) could practice more flexible diplomatic initiatives by engaging as an independent facilitator or participant in Track 1.5 dialogues, and serve as a knowledge center for training, best practices, and conflict analysis.
- Considering the financial and political climate in Brussels, a EIP is unlikely to materialize in the next two years. Once the economic storm has passed, the creation of an EIP variant appears very likely.

“Whether this growing normative support and institutional capacity for preventive action can result in decisive and coordinated action, however, remains uncertain.”

In Brussels, the Euro crisis continues to dominate conversations both on the street and in the hallways of the European Union's institutions. One would almost forget that, since the Lisbon Treaty came into force in 2009, Europe has taken meaningful steps toward a more visible, coherent, and effective foreign policy. Even though foreign policy remains one of the slowest pillars of the integration process, the EU engaged militarily in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Chad, and the Central African Republic, created a diplomatic corps with almost 4,000 staff upon completion, and remains the largest development donor worldwide.

As an increasingly significant actor in international peacebuilding, the European Union continues its search for new instruments to prevent violent conflict. The creation of a European Institute of Peace (EIP), based on the template of the U.S. Institute of Peace (USIP), represents one of the considered proposals.

EU Conflict Prevention

For the most part, the EU's peacebuilding capacity resides within the recently created European External Action Service or EEAS, a diplomatic corps led by High Representative Catherine Ashton. The

operational leverage of the EEAS is crucial for the EU's prevention capacity as it combines various development, human rights, military, and crisis management tools, applying both national and supranational resources. The EEAS features a functional division dedicated to conflict prevention and peace building, which prioritizes 1) early warning and early action systems, 2) conflict analysis, and 3) mediation. This focus seems appropriate given the EU's primary reliance on analytical, diplomatic, and economic instruments.

The presence of a dedicated unit and budget line illustrates that, like in the United States, the case for prevention is well-received by senior policymakers operating amid fiscal challenges. Whether this growing normative support and institutional capacity for preventive action can result in decisive and coordinated action, however, remains uncertain. The creation of the EIP alone does not guarantee a coordinated EU prevention policy. Furthermore, as both Brussels and Washington now consider the operational options for conflict prevention policies, they face a tough selection of geographic priority areas. The conflict prevention challenges within the EEAS mirror those faced by relevant U.S. civilian agencies, most notably the State Department's Bureau for Conflict and Stabilization Operations (S/CSO) and USAID's Bureau for Democracy, Conflict, and Humanitarian Assistance (DCHA):

- Which criteria drive the case selection for conflict analysis and prevention engagements?
- How to organize joint analysis and preventive action between disparate institutional entities?
- How to ensure short- and long-term prevention activities are complementary?

Toward a European Institute of Peace?

In search of new instruments and peacebuilding tools, EU Member States Finland and Sweden tabled the idea to create a EIP in 2010. An assessment study conducted by consultants under EEAS guidance in late 2012 considered how the EIP, based on the example of USIP, could fill the gaps in the EU's mediation capacity. As a first step, the European Parliament agreed to create a legal basis which would allow for partial funding of the Institute. Advocates within the European Parliament, member states, and civil society appreciate the role a publicly funded yet functionally independent Institute could play in complementing the activities of the External Action Service. The EIP would practice more flexible diplomatic initiatives and engage as an independent facilitator or participant in Track 1.5 dialogues. Advocates particularly value the potential of this innovative peacebuilding entity to engage with proscribed armed groups, while maintaining the required legitimacy through close association with the EU. With a European Institute of Peace in place, European engagement in Sri Lanka, the Kurdish question, and the Arab-Israeli conflict could have been more effective. In Washington, foreign affairs agencies have long recognized the added value of such organizations, like USIP. Given its hybrid identity, USIP can highlight conflict areas that do not appear prominently on the U.S. government's radar, anticipate structural tensions or triggers of violence to balance the dominantly reactive culture, and serve as a knowledge center for training, best practices, and conflict analysis.

EIP: The Right Initiative at the Wrong Time

While the EIP proposal gradually takes hold, severe impediments remain. Internally, EU officials emphasize the strengthening of nascent foreign policy actors like the EAS over the creation of new entities that may compete for scarce resources. A number of vocal critics question the added value of the EIP compared to agencies like the European Institute for Security Studies (EU-ISS) and peacebuilding nongovernmental organizations like the Crisis Management Initiative (CMI).

ABOUT THIS BRIEF

Jonas Claes is a program officer in USIP's Center for Conflict Management. This Peace Brief follows a series of interviews conducted with senior EU officials and civil society representatives on the role of the European External Action Service in conflict prevention, and Claes's participation in consultations on the feasibility of a European Institute of Peace.

Considering the financial and political climate in Brussels, a European Institute of Peace is unlikely to materialize in the next two years. But the creation of an EIP variant, once the economic storm has passed, appears very likely given the political capital senior European officials have invested together with the innovative and cost-effective role quasi-official actors can play in today's complex and evolving security environment.



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