ENGAGE

Proposals to Improve the EU's Engagement in Conflict Resolution, Prevention and Mediation

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ENVISIONING A NEW GOVERNANCE ARCHITECTURE FOR A GLOBAL EUROPE

Executive Summary

This working paper offers policy recommendations for more effective, coherent and sustainable engagement of the European Union (EU) and its Members States in conflict resolution, prevention and mediation. The analysis of the EU's engagement in the field of conflict management underscores the importance of coherence and synergies between supranational community-based policies and the intergovernmental CFSP and CSDP instruments. Other key takeaways include the growing importance of foresight in an integrated approach; the growing relevance of nexus issues such as environment, development and gender; and the potential impact of external factors as well as the presence of other major powers, such as the United States or China, in crisis situations. Ultimately, the EU's ability to effectively manage conflicts rests on its capacity to maintain policy coherence, embrace nexus issues to address root causes of conflict, and adeptly respond to external geopolitical shifts.

This document groups the Union's shortcomings in conflict management into four major clusters. The first one corresponds to a fragmented discourse and ambiguity in communication, potentially leading to weakened credibility and effectiveness in peacebuilding efforts. Second, deficiencies in terms of coordination and coherence across policy areas that hinder the comprehensive use of policy synergies and may result in contradicting actions. The third cluster includes struggles to harness comparative advantages, often overlooking local economic and socio-environmental determinants. Finally, the fourth cluster refers to the Union's mere reactivity to geopolitical competition, particularly regarding the influence of major powers like China, which calls for proactive policy monitoring and regional strategies.

To address this diagnosis, a series of policy recommendations are put forward, with a particular focus on: (1) ensuring a clear narrative and strategic communication regarding the Union's engagement in conflict management; (2) improving coordinating mechanisms to increase coherence across EU policy instruments; (3) further anchoring the EU's actions in its comparative advantages; and (4) proactively monitoring and acting on changes in the geopolitical landscape and the (re)emergence of other major powers.

The final part of this working paper proposes assessment criteria for coherent, effective and legitimate EU engagement in conflict prevention, mediation and resolution.

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1 Introduction

In an increasingly complex, interconnected and contested global order, the European Union (EU)'s engagement in conflict resolution, prevention, and mediation stands as a pressing concern, requiring enhanced capacities, sustained coordination, and constant strategic recalibration. The essence of Work Package 9 (WP9) of the ENGAGE project lies in analysing the EU's approach to both near and distant conflicts and crisis situations, emphasising the need for coherent, sustainable, effective, and joined-up action. Recognising the multifaceted nature of global conflicts, this work package integrates insights from previous assessments, including the challenges of the global context (WP2); public and elite acceptability of the Union's external action (WP3); and a comprehensive understanding of the EU's goals, priorities, and capabilities at the levels of Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) (WP4), Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) (WP5), and broader external action and its connection with traditionally internal policy areas (WP6).

De Man et al. (2022a (ENGAGE Working Paper 14)) presents an analytical framework to examine the EU's involvement in conflict prevention, mediation, and resolution. By delving into theoretical insights of conflict management and evaluating the EU's 'capacity to act' in these areas, D9.1 unpacks the Union's ability to act collectively and target specific goals in conflict management. The paper contends that while the EU's actions across the conflict management cycle overlap, they don't always align seamlessly. It therefore emphasises the need for enhanced coherence and coordination, not just internally, but also with external partners. The significance of early warning systems (EWS) and foresight in EU conflict management policies is also highlighted.

Santopinto et al. (2023 (ENGAGE Working Paper 27)) evaluates the EU's capacity for integrated external action across conflict prevention, mediation, and resolution, drawing insights from four case studies: Colombia, Iran, Kosovo, and Somalia. It delves into the EU's motivations, objectives, and tools used in these conflict arenas, while also scrutinising the internal coherence between EU institutions (horizontal coherence) and alignment with Member States' initiatives (vertical coherence) as defined by Sus et al. (2021 (ENGAGE Working Paper 3)). A pivotal aspect is assessing the EU's perceived effectiveness and its ability to function autonomously. The paper highlights a coherence gap between the Union's CSDP and other EU external actions, suggesting that while the EU can navigate diverse crises and achieve certain outcomes, it often struggles to fully convert its potential into tangible influence. External dynamics, especially the roles of third parties like the United States, significantly sway the EU's results and autonomy.

Finally, Sabatino et al. (2023b (ENGAGE Working Paper 30)) investigated the EU's approach towards distinct nexus issues in conflict: gender dynamics and conflict (with a case study of EU action in Guatemala), the links and ramifications of climate change and environmental degradation for conflict prevention and EU external action (on the basis of its Arctic policy), and the intricate interplay between security and development (as in the case of the EU's actions in Serbia). China's expanding global influence emerges as a consistent subplot in all

three case studies: from its escalating stakes in the Arctic and infrastructure investments in Serbia, to its contrasting approach in Central America vis-a-vis the EU's focus on human rights and gender equality.

The present deliverable builds on the analytical framework and case studies of the previous three working papers. It aims to make sense of the EU's strengths and vulnerabilities in the field of conflict management and peacebuilding, and to recommend policies and courses of action that will enhance the Union's capacities in the field as well as the sustainability, effectiveness and coherence of its actions. The following part presents the diagnosis of the Union's engagement in conflict management and peacebuilding, highlighting its strengths, while mostly focusing on what can and should be improved. The third part zooms into more actionable policy recommendations that can address the issues raised before. While both the diagnosis and the recommendations are anchored in the case studies of ENGAGE Working Papers 27 and 30 they have been selected and operationalised in more general terms in order to increase their validity and utility for the whole of the EU's external action. Finally, the fourth and last part proposes assessment criteria for the EU's engagement in conflict management, deriving them from the case studies of Working Papers 27 and 30 as well as the criteria developed in ENGAGE Working Paper 9 on defence cooperation (Sabatino et al., 2022) and 10 on security and intelligence cooperation (Szép et al., 2022).

2   Diagnosis of the EU's Engagement in Conflict Resolution, Prevention and Mediation

This second part distils the diagnosis of the EU's engagement in conflict management and peacebuilding, based on the case studies conducted in ENGAGE Work Package 9. In the first section, it details broad take-aways and insights that derive from observable trends across the case studies and the general literature on the topic as presented in previous deliverables. These take-aways refer broadly to: (a) the Union's capacity to act coherently and effectively; (b) alignments and misalignments between intergovernmental instruments and community policies; (c) an integrated approach to conflict management and nexus issues; and (d) external factors and cooperation with partners in the field of conflict mediation, prevention and resolution. The second section delves into the diagnosis proper, highlighting challenges and obstacles to overcome in four different clusters: discourse and communication, policy coordination and coherence, cross-sectoral approaches, and geopolitical competition.

2.1   The Takeaways from Previous Deliverables

The complex landscape of diplomacy and conflict management reveals that policies of conflict resolution, prevention, and mediation often present intertwined trajectories. These policies, although conceptually distinct, can overlap in their temporal implementation and, at times, become almost indistinguishable from one another. This overlap is accentuated when delving deeper into the broader spectrum of conflict management and peacebuilding. Central to the EU's endeavours in these realms is its *capacity to act* in multiple phases of conflict management and in diverse crisis situations. This capacity is not merely a reflection of its ability to mobilise Member States and resources: it underscores two critical dimensions. First, the ability to act collectively and coherently underlines the importance of a united front and coordinated efforts. Second, and equally important, it implies the ability to pursue and achieve specific goals integral to such engagements, ensuring that actions align with the overarching objectives of promoting peace as an indivisible value worldwide. As such, capacity to act is a compound concept that is linked to the definitions of effectiveness, i.e. the "Union's ability to influence world affairs in accordance with its objectives and to produce a desired result" (Sus et al., 2021, p. 8 (ENGAGE [Working Paper 3](#))), as well as concepts of sustainability and coherence, used across multiple ENGAGE deliverables.

The EU's CSDP and CFSP instruments, in particular, are emblematic of a broader challenge facing the Union's overarching external approach. Specifically, there are discernible gaps between traditional foreign policy instruments and the so-called community policies of conflict management. This divergence often underscores the tensions between the EU's high-level strategic ambitions and the policy mechanisms at ground-level. While CSDP and CFSP instruments direct security and defence actions through intergovernmental decisions, *community policies* — encompassing a broader range of areas including trade and

environmental matters — do not always seamlessly align with the specific objectives laid out by CFSP actions and strategies or, indeed, in specific CSDP mandates. ENGAGE Working Paper 30 for example, shows that the EU's strategic ambitions in the Arctic are potentially contradicted by more stringent environmental policies and regulations, resulting in a loss of partner support (see Sabatino et al., 2023b, pp. 6–12 (ENGAGE Working Paper 30)). These misalignments, from timing to resources to knowledge gaps, raise concerns about the coherence and effectiveness of the EU's endeavours in conflict management and peacebuilding.

The EU, despite its considerable economic resources and potential influence in the realm of peacebuilding and conflict management, appears to lack a *big picture* for its external action. This is compounded by missing links between different policy instruments as well as the connection of this broader perspective to specific engagements. As a result, there is little horizontal coherence across policy areas. This lacuna manifests prominently in the lack of a truly integrated approach that spans the entire policy spectrum of conflict management and peacebuilding. Furthermore, existing coordination tools meant to bridge the gap between CFSP/CSDP and community policies fall short. This is evident in episodes of unilateral measures regulating the common market, such as ban on trade of commercially hunted seal products (Sabatino et al., 2023b, p. 10 (ENGAGE Working Paper 30)) that runs counter to the more strategic objectives of the Union, such as membership in the Arctic Council. A conspicuous disconnect also arises when community policies do not strategically echo the objectives of external action and do not reinforce the Union's goals in conflict prevention, mediation and resolution. This requires ensuring that policies related to trade and development (Christou et al., 2022 (ENGAGE Working Paper 17)), but also competition, health and climate policies (Vandendriessche et al., 2023 (ENGAGE Working Paper 21)), are not operating in silos but are mutually reinforcing. Furthermore, the EU's engagement must align with the engagement of Member States, many of which are unilaterally present in conflict and crisis situations in their own capacity and with their own interests. As such, there should be an effort to converge positions.

The realm of international relations and policy formulation is evolving rapidly, accommodating a plethora of *nexus issues* that converge to influence policy outcomes. Prominent among these issues are the intersections of gender, development, and climate as well as environmental considerations (see Sabatino et al., 2023b (ENGAGE Working Paper 30)). These factors, when analysed through the lens of the EU's strategies for conflict prevention, mediation, and resolution, underscore a holistic approach that the EU must adopt. Gender dynamics, for instance, have profound implications for peacebuilding, with women playing crucial roles in mediation and reconciliation efforts, as shown in the case study of peacebuilding in Guatemala (Sabatino et al., 2023b (ENGAGE Working Paper 30)). Similarly, sustainable development and climate change have direct and indirect impacts on the sources and dynamics of conflicts, necessitating a comprehensive approach that integrates these elements into conflict resolution strategies. Therefore, a significant aspect in the EU's approach to conflict management is the need to address the *root causes of conflicts* rather than just the visible symptoms. Focusing on the superficial manifestations of instability might offer temporary and

palliative solutions. To foster lasting peace, however, the underlying causes must be comprehensively addressed not only with CSDP and CFSP instruments, but also with the whole array of external and internal policy instruments.

Compounding these challenges is the EU's underutilisation of *local knowledge*, experience, and expertise. These insights could enhance the effectiveness and relevance of its interventions in conflict zones and peacebuilding arenas and increase the sense of ownership in the host country (Sabatino et al., 2022 (ENGAGE Working Paper 4)). The case study of the EU's peacebuilding efforts in post-conflict Colombia illustrates that, while the engagement is generally welcomed by the target country, the Union does not make use of the full potential of local expertise, e.g. via involving civil society (Santopinto et al., 2023 (ENGAGE Working Paper 27)). Therefore, the EU should further champion the cause of *local partnerships*. By forging stronger ties with regional entities and grassroots civil society, the Union can harness localised insights and expertise. This not only ensures that interventions are context-relevant but also empowers local stakeholders to tackle pressing nexus issues. Policy areas such as gender mainstreaming, environmental conservation, and sustainable development stand to benefit from such localised collaboration, furthering the EU's overarching goal of holistic peacebuilding. Nevertheless, there are obstacles to fully realising these synergies, including administrative hurdles, as well as insufficient local know-how and capacity to participate and take ownership in EU development actions and related policy fields.

De Man et al. (2022a, pp. 40–44 (ENGAGE Working Paper 14)) offer a glimpse into the EU's CSDP missions. While the EU has made strides in conflict management, both with civilian and military layers, our survey shows that fewer CSDP missions have been initiated in the last decade in comparison to the previous one. Moreover, most missions converge geographically around the EU's neighbourhood and adjacent areas. The trend also goes in favour of civilian CSDP missions rather than military ones, with a focus on the lower spectrum of engagement, as shown in Sabatino et al. (2023a (ENGAGE Working Paper 19)). There is also a pronounced inclination towards a *regional focus*, which is evident in the case of the engagement in the Sahel, but also in the linkage between conflict management and already regionalised policy areas such as trade and development. Therefore, the EU needs to continually align its specific interventions with broader regional policies like those for Central and South America and the Western Balkans. This alignment would ensure that the EU's actions resonate with the larger geopolitical and socio-economic context of these regions, enhancing the effectiveness and legitimacy of its interventions.

The case studies in Working Papers 27 and 30 also demonstrate the EU's ability to act in diverse contexts with a certain degree of effectiveness. From conflict resolution in the Balkans to peacebuilding in parts of Africa and the Americas, the Union's footprint is evident. However, an overarching theme emerges from the analysis of these engagements: the EU's autonomous capacity to act is not solely within its control or that of Member States. *External factors*, often unpredictable and beyond the Union's immediate influence, play a critical role in shaping outcomes. This dependency underscores the delicate balancing act the EU must maintain. On one hand, the EU strives for autonomy and self-reliance, aiming to be a reliable and effective

actor on the global stage. On the other, it must navigate a web of geopolitical complexities (see Müller et al., 2021 (ENGAGE Working Paper 7); De Man et al., 2022b (ENGAGE Working Paper 11)), acknowledging that many variables that influence its success lie outside its control. Szép et al. (2023 (ENGAGE Working Paper 20)), for instance, shows the relevance of external factors in the EU's policies towards the Iranian nuclear program and its engagement in negotiating and attempting to sustain the so-called 'Iran deal'.

The *emergence of China* as a dominant actor on the global stage poses both challenges and opportunities (of recalibration and prioritisation), especially in areas where the EU has traditionally been active. In diverse contexts such as Guatemala, Serbia, and the Arctic, China's growing presence has its own set of implications, with a distinct, sometimes barely recognisable approach to conflict management and nexus issues. While there may not be a direct overlap between Chinese actions and EU initiatives, Beijing's increasing influence cannot be ignored. Actively engaging with this reality is therefore imperative for the EU, which should calibrate its response not in opposition to any one actor but in a way that leverages its own comparative advantages. Recognising the areas where the EU can add unique value, be it through its economic power, development assistance, or diplomatic strengths, can guide the Union in crafting comprehensive strategies.

Finally, *international cooperation* remains a cornerstone of the EU's modus operandi, as shown by the case studies of the EU's engagement with international organisations in Sus et al. (2023 (ENGAGE Working Paper 28)). The Union, however, needs to finetune its collaborations with other global players, ensuring that they are purposeful and impactful, rather than just symbolic. A mere facade of cooperation, bereft of substance, could dilute the EU's efficacy in conflict resolution. A case in point is the approach towards Iran over the years, where the Union has "placed a premium on cooperation through third parties" (Santopinto et al., 2023, p. 23 (ENGAGE Working Paper 27)), but has been particularly dependent on the United States. Therefore, while cooperation with third parties in conflict management is desirable, the EU should strive to maintain this autonomous capacity to act in different scenarios.

Emerging from these reflections is the growing significance of foresight and intelligence cooperation. In a rapidly changing geopolitical environment, the ability to anticipate challenges and collaborate in intelligence gathering and analysis (Szép et al., 2022 (ENGAGE Working Paper 10)) becomes paramount. These proactive measures prepare the Union for imminent challenges and can better inform the – often criticised – initial reactions to crises and conflicts. They also reinforce the EU's commitment to a more peaceful, stable, and cooperative international order by enhancing the capacity to conceive policy in more predictable ways. Such state of affairs can place the onus on the EU to adapt and continually reassess its strategies. While the Union's aspirations of indivisible peace worldwide are commendable, its effectiveness in realising these aspirations is contingent on its ability to navigate the unpredictability in international politics.

2.2 Diagnosis of the Union's Engagement in Conflict Management and Peacebuilding

2.2.1 Fragmentation of Discourse and Communication Ambiguity

The European Union's engagement in conflict resolution, prevention and mediation often suffers from ambiguity and fragmentation in discourse. A discernible lack of cohesive articulation of interests and the absence of a singular overarching narrative have occasionally led to policy mismatches, causing confusion among internal stakeholders, external partners, and local actors. This disjointed approach diminishes the EU's global credibility, as perceptions are moulded not just by intent, but by consistent, clear actions and messaging. Furthermore, in the age of rapid information dissemination, the EU's minimal strategic communication efforts have left a vacuum, often filled by narratives that do not align with the Union's principles or achievements. The cases of the EU's actions in the Balkans, in relation to both Serbia and Kosovo, illustrate these points (Santopinto et al., 2023, pp. 6–11 (ENGAGE Working Paper 27); Sabatino et al., 2023a, pp. 13–21 (ENGAGE Working Paper 19)). Direct engagement with the grassroots level through civil society remains an underutilised avenue, hindering the EU from effectively conveying its contributions and values to the populations it seeks to assist via peacebuilding measures. To address these gaps and enhance its global standing, the EU must refine the articulation of its communication, streamline its narratives, and bolster its strategic communication efforts to clearly convey its general and context-specific interests.

2.2.2 Shortcomings in Coordination, Coherence and Assessment

In its efforts to exercise effective conflict management and external engagement, the Union often grapples with coherence issues both vertically, among Member States, and horizontally, across various institutional and policy instruments. These inconsistencies pose significant challenges, with conflicting stances of individual Member States at times undermining the collective EU position, leading to inefficiencies and dilution of impact on the ground. Additionally, a lack of regular assessment of the impact of policies on the ground risks misalignment with both EU's objectives and the actual needs of recipient countries. Without structured mechanisms to gather feedback from both internal and external stakeholders, the EU runs the risk of operating in an echo chamber, missing out on vital local insights that can significantly enhance the effectiveness of its external engagements. Thus, for a more harmonised, impactful, and adaptive approach, it is crucial that the EU addresses these coherence issues and introduces mechanisms for continuous feedback and assessment.

2.2.3 Insufficient Focus on Comparative Advantages

A pressing concern in EU conflict management and peacebuilding has been the apparent disconnect between policy initiatives and realities on the ground. The origins of many conflicts and crises, especially their economic determinants, often remain inadequately addressed. At times, the EU's policy instruments, like trade agreements, risk to perpetuate the very issues that the Union aims to resolve with its conflict management instruments. Additionally, while

the EU has a cadre of Special Representatives (EUSRs) tailored for specific regions or domains, their quantitative and qualitative potential can be further utilised to increase visibility and coordinated efforts of the EU and signal a commitment to various local and global stakeholders (Adebahr, 2009). Moreover, certain EU agencies with primarily internal mandates, such as the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE), remain detached from broader external actions despite their potential to bring added value. Lastly, the EU's endeavours in gender mainstreaming, economic development, and environmental conservation have occasionally faced challenges due to insufficient engagement with local civil societies, which are instrumental in understanding and addressing intricacies on the ground. To navigate this landscape, it is imperative for the EU to realign its strategies with a holistic approach that bridges these observed gaps.

2.2.4 Reactiveness When Faced with Geopolitical Competition

The EU's approach to other major powers' engagements in world regions and target countries for conflict management often appears reactive rather than proactive. Recent global shifts have seen major powers, like China, play increasingly significant roles in regions where the EU is actively engaged. Without adequate monitoring and recalibration of its policies, there is a risk that these third-party activities may undermine or contradict EU objectives. Moreover, the lack of comprehensive regional strategies marks a missed opportunity. As geopolitical hotspots emerge and transform, the EU's response sometimes seems fragmented, without a cohesive strategy tailored to the unique challenges and opportunities each region presents. Additionally, while the EU champions key norms such as gender mainstreaming and environmental protection, their implementation often seems to follow a 'one size fits all' approach or can be perceived as Western-centric. Without due consideration of the local context and sensitivities, this approach can hinder the EU's ability to form genuine partnerships based on mutual trust and shared values in peacebuilding. As the EU seeks to fortify its position on the global stage and to ensure sustainable peacebuilding, a recalibration focusing on proactive monitoring, regional strategies, and the localisation of norms becomes indispensable.

3   Policy Recommendations for the EU's Engagement in Conflict Management and Peacebuilding

The following part advances policy recommendations aimed at addressing the challenges and issues of EU's engagement in conflict management and peacebuilding as highlighted by the cases studies in ENGAGE Working Papers 27 and 30 and summarised in the diagnosis above.

3.1   Discourse and Communication

Enhance perception and credibility

The EU must be forthright and explicit about its interests in the field of conflict prevention, mediation, and resolution. A clear articulation of its interests and goals not only serves to inform policies but also ensures that the latter align with the stated objectives. With improved clarity, the EU can better persuade local and international partners to rally around a shared, cooperative approach. By creating a clear policy delineation, the EU can improve its credibility and perception on the global stage. Strategic communication campaigns should be further strengthened to better highlight the EU's commitments and achievements in external engagements.

Coordinate clear narratives

The multiple EU institutions involved in conflict management must establish distinct, but non-contradictory narratives for their various policies and implementation. This will allow international partners to engage with the appropriate EU entity in each case, streamlining interactions overall.

Improve strategic communication via engagement with local stakeholders

The EU should strategically communicate its engagements in third countries. A well-thought-out communication plan not only raises awareness about the EU's endeavours and support, but also fosters goodwill and understanding. To this end, EU Delegations and EUSRs should establish direct cooperation with civil society organisations. These entities, deeply embedded in local contexts, can offer channels for disseminating as well as receiving information, thus amplifying the EU's presence and contributions in host nations and better informing its policies (cf. next point).

3.2 Coordination, Coherence and Assessment

Increase alignment between the EU's actions and Member States interests

The EU should prioritise addressing vertical coherence issues in conflict management, avoiding contradictions between the official EU stance and those of individual Member States. When there are clashes, special procedures within the Council of the EU and its Political and Security Committee should be in place to streamline communication and to ensure a unified (re)action.

Sustain targeted periodic engagement reviews

It is imperative for the Council of the EU to schedule regular reviews, with participation and feedback from other institutions (e.g. European Commission, European External Action Service (EEAS)), focused on advancements in conflict resolution, mediation and prevention in *specific* third countries. These reviews should ensure that the progress made on the ground is in alignment with the EU's objectives and that the EU's policies cater to the specific requirements and requests of the recipients. Existing reviews of the enlargement process can serve as a model.

Promote inclusive discussions and impact analysis

The EU should encourage and institutionalise regular open-ended internal dialogues that discuss the impact of the EU's foreign policy and external action instruments on global crises, including unintended consequences. These discussions should be coordinated by the EEAS and would help in evaluating the effectiveness of EU instruments, identifying areas for enhancement, and deciding on strategic shifts in approach.

Enhance feedback mechanisms anchored in EU delegations

Enhance existing feedback mechanisms to gather insights from EU stakeholders, Member States and partner countries. EU Delegations should regularly report on (a) feedback from local stakeholders and (b) links of EU's actions towards the target country with global strategies, including the impact of community policies and policies' unintended consequences.

Synchronise community and CFSP/CSDP instruments

The EU should adopt a synchronised approach to the planning stages of its community policies (e.g. trade and development strategies) and those executed under the CFSP and CSDP. Currently, these policies are often conceived separately in distinct moments in time, leading to discrepancies in their implementation timelines, personnel involved, and duration. By synchronising the planning stages, the EU can enhance policy coordination on the ground, thus maximising overall effectiveness. This would require a stronger effort in evaluating the situation in the host country but also enhance the use of a truly integrated approach.

3.3 Focus on Comparative Advantages

Fully tackle root causes of instability

The EU, leveraging its unique toolkit of trade policy, sustainable development instruments, the green transition, and others, should intensify its efforts towards understanding and addressing the structural causes of instability in regions marked by conflict or crisis. Special emphasis should be placed on economic and socio-environmental determinants as well as on the unintended consequences of policy instruments such as trade agreements and development cooperation on conflict management.

Increase the use of Special Representatives

The EU should maximise the impact of EUSRs, both for conflict situations and specific policy domains such as human rights. The number of EUSRs targeting specific crisis situations can be increased at relatively small costs. These representatives can enhance the EU's visibility in crucial areas, streamline coordination efforts, and demonstrate the EU's unwavering commitment to address regional and global challenges.

Involve internal EU agencies in external action

The EU should integrate agencies that currently have an almost exclusive intra-EU focus, such as the EIGE, into its external action policymaking in order to bridge the gaps between community policies and overarching external actions. Agencies should be invited to reflect on the external impact of their policy domain and to participate in the feedback and assessment of the Union actions in conflicts management.

Strengthen support for comprehensive participation of civil society

The EU should bolster its support to national and local civil society organisations and equip them to fully contribute to addressing nexus issues to conflict management. This not only contributes to realising the objectives of gender mainstreaming, economic development, and environmental protection, but also ensures that policies are grounded in local realities. In practice, the Commission, working with EU delegations, should aim at increasing the capacity of civil society actors to participate in transnational projects.

3.4 Geopolitical Competition

Monitor third-party engagement

The EU should enhance its monitoring mechanisms for third-party strategies, activities and long-term interests vis-à-vis conflict and crisis situations, including but not limited to China and the United States. Without curtailing the agency of these actors, the EU must proactively adjust its own strategies to address the potential impacts of the others' actions.

Formulate comprehensive regional strategies

The EU must invest in the formulation of region-specific external action strategies, as exemplified recently by the 'Indo-Pacific Strategy' and its regional approach to the Sahel. This type of strategies will enhance vertical and horizontal coherence and underscore the EU's commitment to regions affected by geopolitical competition, such as the Arctic. They will then also better relate to policies such as trade and development, which are already largely regionalised.

Adapt and localise norms to target countries and regions

The EU, building on the assessment of EU delegations and EUSRs, should strive to carefully adapt key norms, including but not limited to gender rights and environmental protection and sustainability, to local contexts in target countries of conflict management. By integrating and adapting these norms at the local and regional levels, the EU can foster stronger, trust-based partnerships in peacebuilding endeavours that are more sustainable than the 'offer' of other great powers.

4   Assessment Criteria for the EU's Engagement in Conflict Resolution, Prevention and Mediation

This last part considers the key insights in the field of conflict management and the diagnosis of the EU's respective actions to propose a set of assessment criteria for the Union's engagement in conflict resolution, prevention and mediation. The baseline for these assessment criteria is the analytical framework proposed in De Man et al. (2022a (ENGAGE Working Paper 14)) and the OECD guidelines for evaluating conflict prevention and peacebuilding activities (OECD, 2008). As conflict management is a field that encompasses multiple layers of EU External Action, including community policies as well as CFSP and CSDP, the following criteria should be read in conjunction to those proposed in work packages 4 and 5, respectively on defence cooperation (Sabatino et al., 2022 (ENGAGE Working Paper 9)), and on security and intelligence cooperation (Szép et al., 2022 (ENGAGE Working Paper 10)) *stricto sensu*. The assessment criteria below can be used to analyse the EU's actions in the face of crisis and conflicts and are structured around the concepts of coherence, effectiveness and legitimacy, in addition to sustainability and preparedness. It is worth noting that all aspects have *a priori* mutually reinforcing features: more legitimacy or coherence, for example, will more often than not lead to greater effectiveness, and vice versa.

4.1 Preparedness

1. Do the Union and its institutions have a comprehensive plan of action for different scenarios of (potential) conflict situations?
2. Can the EU anticipate unintended consequences of its engagement in (potential) conflict situations – both of community policies and traditional CFSP and CSDP instruments – and can it develop mitigation strategies for potentially negative effects?
3. Is preparedness for engagement in conflict management adequately supported by intelligence cooperation and foresight?
4. Does the Union have a comprehensive strategy towards the region where a (potential) conflict is located?
5. Does the Union have a clear communication plan to respond to events in the (potential) conflict situation? Does it have a clear division of labour and responsibilities amongst its institutions?
6. Does the Union have a clear strategic view on how distinct, yet interconnected potential conflict situations affect each other, and what might this mean for the big picture of its involvement in the field of conflict resolution, prevention and mediation?

4.2 Effectiveness

1. Have the objectives of the engagement been achieved? Does the EU's engagement promote peace?

2. Does the Union's engagement in a (potential) conflict situation consider regional trends?
3. Does the Union's engagement in a (potential) conflict situation addresses the root causes of conflict? Does the Union cooperate with local authorities and communities?
4. Does the Union's engagement in a (potential) conflict situation contribute to improving relevant nexus issues for the target context (i.e. gender-related issues, security-development nexus, environmental protection and climate change, natural resources, demography and migration, etc.)?
5. Is the EU's engagement in a (potential) conflict situation making use of the Union's comparative advantages in the field of conflict management and peacebuilding?

4.3 Coherence

1. Are community policies aligned with CFSP and CSDP instruments in tackling the root causes of a (potential) conflict (i.e. inequalities and underdevelopment, environmental degradation, climate change, etc.)?
2. Are EU actions towards a country or region of a (potential) conflict situation aligned with and not contradicting the actions and strategies of its Member States?
3. Is the Union's engagement in a (potential) conflict situation aligned with its policies and strategies towards the region where the target country is located?
4. Does the Union's engagement in a (potential) conflict situation efficiently build on Member States' own engagements in the target country or region?

4.4 Legitimacy and Sustainability

1. Are EU actions and engagement strategies vis-à-vis a (potential) conflict situation clearly communicated and do they work towards legitimising the EU's actions or inactions?
2. Does the Union work closely with national and local stakeholders, allowing for ownership of certain aspects of its engagement in the (potential) conflict situation?
3. Does the Union's engagement in a (potential) conflict situation efficiently allocate resources based on a division of labour with international partners and avoid duplication of efforts?
4. Do the Union's actions promote durable, long-term processes, structures and institutions that contribute to reducing or preventing conflict?
5. Does the EU sufficiently adapt its key norms and principles to the local context where possible?
6. Does the Union make cost-efficient use of instruments and existing structures (e.g. EU agencies, EUSRs, EU delegations) in the delineation and implementation phases of its engagement in a (potential) conflict situation?
7. Does the EU's engagement in the (potential) conflict situation efficiently make use of local knowledge and expertise?

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