Role of preventive diplomacy in tackling frozen conflicts around the world – missed opportunity or change for the future?

2023/2050(INI) - 06/12/2023 - Committee report tabled for plenary, single reading

The Committee on Foreign Affairs adopted the own-initiative report by Željana ZOVKO (EPP, HR) on a European Parliament recommendation to the Council, Commission and the Vice-President of the Commission / High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy on the role of preventive diplomacy in tackling frozen conflicts around the world – missed opportunity or change for the future?

The UN defines ‘preventive diplomacy’ as ‘diplomatic action taken to prevent disputes from escalating into conflicts and to limit the spread of conflicts when they occur’. Preventive diplomacy in the EU encompasses political and financial support for the multilateral system, trade, development, humanitarian assistance and human rights, focusing on identifying opportunities to address the causes of conflict and creating spaces for dialogue, often in partnership with international and regional organisations as well as concerned parties.

Recommendations

The recommendations to the Council, the Commission and the VP/HR focus on six main areas where improvements in EU’s preventive diplomacy arsenal should be achieved:

1. Understanding the local and cultural context

The EU should develop preventive diplomacy tools and state-building assistance tailored to the cultural, historical and political context of the country. It should carefully select its envoys and representatives in conflict and post-conflict regions in order to avoid sparking controversy linked to appointments from Member States with historical past in these countries or regions.

The European Council and the EEAS are called on to further enhance the EU’s visibility in other non-EU and partner countries and strengthen the EU’s cultural diplomacy and international cultural relations dimension and activities as a relevant instrument for peace, peacebuilding and conflict prevention, as well as for addressing global challenges, and to demonstrate the EU’s added value and advance cooperation and relations with these countries and international partners.

2. EU Conflict Early Warning System

To ensure that the EU’s conflict Early Warning System is sufficiently proactive, it should be provided with the necessary resources and be based on forward-looking, comprehensive and robust analysis of risk factors that frequently correlate with the outburst of violence, as well as management tools that identify, assess and help to prioritise situations at risk of violent conflict.

3. The role of EU Special Representatives and Envoys in preventive diplomacy, their accountability and overview of their results

Members recommended that the initiatives undertaken by EU special representatives and envoys should be thoroughly assessed, including **scrutiny in Parliament**. The appointment of EU special

representatives, special envoys and ambassadors should only be confirmed after a positive assessment by Parliament's Committee on Foreign Affairs.

4. Lessons learned from EU mediated conflict resolution and frozen conflicts

Looking at the lessons learned from EU mediated conflict resolution and frozen conflicts, in particular in Africa, the Western Balkans, Nagorno-Karabakh, Cyprus, Northern Ireland, Afghanistan and Ukraine, the report recommends that future EU preventive diplomacy actions consider the missed opportunities and avoid similar situations in the future. In particular, the EU should assess and **analyse carefully and continuously the risk factors** and adapt its actions in conflict regions in order to prevent the creation of political vacuum that could be filled by actors that might not be acting in the best interest of the country or region in question, or the spread of false narratives.

5. Strengthening partnerships and international coordination

Partnerships and international coordination are key to successful preventive diplomacy and the EU should continue strengthening its partnerships with international, regional and sub-regional actors, such as the UN, OSCE, the African Union and ASEAN, including what concerns early warning, conflict prevention and mediation. An integrated approach, combining humanitarian, development, peacebuilding, security assistance and diplomatic engagement, in coordination with partners, would be more comprehensive and deliver more favourable results in preventive diplomacy.

Efforts should be stepped up in fighting disinformation, misinformation and foreign interference operations.

6. From strategic autonomy to preventive diplomacy

The EU should step up its strategic autonomy in order to be seen as a strong actor in preventive diplomacy. This can be achieved if the **EU speaks with one voice** and action on the ground is aligned between the EU and its Member States, moving away from individual interests. Building on past experience with joint EU mechanisms, like the EU civil protection mechanism or EU peace keeping missions, the EU can adopt similar approach when developing an integrated and pan-European approach to preventive diplomacy missions. It also remains important to communicate EU's achievements and success stories better. While being the biggest development aid donor in the world, the output from this significant investment in the public diplomacy scene is insignificant and often even overridden by false narratives presented by other major powers present in developing countries.