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

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The European Parliament adopted, by 533 votes to 64 with 25 abstentions, a 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 United Nations defines 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 do occur'. The EU should actively pursue preventive diplomacy in frozen conflict regions to prevent escalation and promote stabilisation.

Recommendations

Parliament recommended that the Council, the Commission and the VP/HR recognise the **strong link between EU internal and external policy and security dimensions**, place respect for fundamental and human rights at the heart of its preventive diplomacy efforts and strengthen their role and effective participation in conflict prevention and resolution processes, as well as mediation for the implementation of ceasefire agreements concluded under EU auspices.

The Union's preventive diplomacy tools should be integrated into structural prevention mechanisms and actions, such as political agreements between the different actors involved in conflicts, national dialogues for reconciliation, peace-building and transitional justice, as well as truth and reconciliation commissions.

Parliament's recommendations 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 is important to foster open **communication and consultation** with local stakeholders and all parts of society in the relevant country, in particular civil society organisations and non-governmental organisations, to better understand the local and cultural context and build confidence.

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. Role of special representatives and special envoys in preventive diplomacy, their accountability and overview of their results in conflict resolution processes

Parliament recommended taking account of local, cultural and historical backgrounds when **appointing special representatives and envoys** in order to avoid sparking controversy in conflict regions should the appointment come from a Member State with historical ties to the region concerned that could threaten their perception as honest broker. It also recommended to ensure that the appointment of EU special representatives, special envoys and ambassadors can 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

Parliament suggested conducting a study on the lessons learned from the EU's prior actions, missed opportunities for preventive diplomacy and its achievements in the process of peaceful conflict resolution, for example, in the Sahel region, West Africa and the Horn of Africa, the Western Balkans, South Caucasus, Cyprus, Northern Ireland, Afghanistan, the Middle East, Moldova and Ukraine.

It recommended:

- avoiding, in the future, the potential negative consequences of the premature suspension of EU missions in conflict regions;

- improving the range of tools in the field of preventive diplomacy for the Union's civilian and military missions and operations;

- drawing lessons from the lack of progress in implementing ceasefire agreements concluded under EU auspices;

- ensuring that the Union plays an active role whenever a breach of international humanitarian law is committed;

- enhancing the EU's ability to rigorously and continuously analyse and predict the political and security situation in crisis regions and adapt the EU's response to shifting realities on the ground.

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.