

Assessing Progress on Security Sector Reform in South East Europe – a View from the Finnish EU Presidency

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Introduction

The European Union (EU) of today is a global actor in promoting respect for human rights, fundamental freedoms, good governance and the rule of law. Conflict prevention and resolution are part of the efforts of the Union in reducing insecurity in fragile states and paving the way for stability and security for all. The topic of this seminar, security sector reform, is of paramount importance in conflict prevention, post-conflict peace building and democratisation, not to mention sustainable development.

The European Union's coherent, comprehensive and cross-pillar approach to Security Sector Reform (SSR) was finalised in June 2006 with the Council Conclusions on a Policy Framework for Security Sector Reform. This framework brings together two concepts. The Concept for ESDP Support for Security Sector Reform, adopted during the UK presidency in November 2005, was complemented in May 2006 by the European Commission Communication 'A Concept for European Community Support for Security Sector Reform'.

Together these two concepts contribute to a coherent approach, an approach, which the policy framework wraps together and under which it allows the EU to more coherently take part in SSR related work. Security Sector Reform processes are increasingly important in rebuilding failed institutions in conflict-torn states and key in strengthening governance reforms. This work must be seen as a multi-sector, long-term process and an area in which the EU will remain active in the future.

As the policy framework was finalised, the Council invited future Presidencies and the Commission to progressively translate this policy framework for EU engagement in SSR into operational actions by the European Community and in the framework of ESDP in order to provide effective, coherent and sustainable support to EU partner countries and regions. It was agreed that during the Finnish Presidency, jointly with the Commission, an EU approach to Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration (DDR) as part of a broader SSR support would be developed, being consistent with the EU policy framework for SSR. The Finnish Presidency, together with the European Commission and International Alert as part of the EU-financed Conflict Prevention Partnership, held an expert seminar ‘EU and DDR: Supporting Security and Development’ in Brussels on 13 July 2006.

The seminar discussed the strengthening of EU’s contribution to DDR, enhancing its policy and practice vis-à-vis the enormous challenges on the ground. Its focus was both on actions to improve the security of local populations through peaceful demilitarisation and on how external assistance instruments can be used to support the reintegration of ex-combatants into these communities. The outcome of the seminar, an EU approach to DDR, is expected to become subject to approval in December 2006. The Finnish Presidency, jointly with the Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces (DCAF), will also be holding a seminar on SSR in Zagreb, towards the end of our Presidency.

The EU policy framework for SSR is an important contribution to EU’s external action. Preventing and resolving violent conflict and addressing fragile states are part of the EU’s efforts to reduce insecurity and eradicate poverty through strengthening good governance and the rule of law in third countries; finding solutions to existing problems; thus helping to achieve the commitments of the Millennium Declaration and the Millennium Development Goals, sustainable development and global security and to implement the EU’s Development Policy Statement “The European Consensus on Development”, including the security objectives of the EU as set out in the European Security Strategy.

The EU is unique in having a wide range of instruments designed both for long-term and for short-term conflict-sensitive preventive actions. The long-term instruments include development co-operation, trade, arms control, human rights and environmental policies as well as political dialogue. For short-term prevention, the EU can take advantage of diplomatic and humanitarian instruments.

During the last years, growing emphasis has been placed on the shorter-term measures of both civilian and military crisis management within the framework of the ESDP. In the area of Civilian Crisis Management, significant progress has been made in the development of civilian personnel deployment capacities. It is important to further pursue the development of civilian crisis management priorities and tools in relation to conflict prevention, in particular in the fields of policing, rule of law and civilian administration. We should continue to study the needs and identify ways to strengthen EU's capacities and instruments in areas such as human rights and democracy, fact-finding missions, monitoring, SSR and Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration of combatants to ensure stabilisation of post-conflict societies.

The EU must use these instruments in a more targeted and effective manner in order to address potential conflicts and promote conflict prevention. It is also important to consider the coherent use of EU's other instruments and the need for comprehensive planning. The aim is to take into account a comprehensive approach of the security sector, including also questions regarding development and reconstruction – as well as human rights perspectives. Effectiveness and coherence are key values here. A case-by-case analysis based on a situation-specific approach is always needed to assess whether any proposed activities are most appropriately carried out through ESDP or community action or a combination of both, with the objective of ensuring effective and coherent EU external action in this area.

Conclusion

The EU is committed to the European perspective of the Western Balkan countries. The Western Balkans is one of the topical issues in external relations of the Finnish EU Presidency. The movement of the Western Balkans countries towards the EU depends on their performance in meeting the criteria set by the EU. The reform of the security sector in the Western Balkans is part of a broader agenda set out at the Thessaloniki Summit in 2003. The Stabilisation and Association Process will remain the framework of the European course of these countries. Security Sector Reform is understood as part of the long-standing requirement regarding fostering rule of law and democratic institutions in the region and does not by any means create a new conditionality for the region. An effective security sector will also contribute to fighting organised crime.

The EU has continued its engagement in the Western Balkans through its ESDP operations and is currently planning its future engagement in Kosovo. The Commission has maintained a number of programs aimed at supporting Justice Reform and Internal Security, Police Reform and on Financial Management of SSR related expenditure.

On SSR, the EU is not the only actor. A number of bilateral and regional initiatives play a valuable role. International actors like the UN, NATO and the OSCE are also active in this field. Despite the number of international actors involved, the responsibility and ownership for the reform of their security sector lies in the end with the countries in the region themselves; the EU will continue to play a supporting role. The EU support, including through civilian crisis management operations, will continue to contribute to fighting organised crime in individual countries and in the region as a whole.

In the EU we see democratic accountability and parliamentary control of the security sector as paramount for the development of stable democratic societies. Parliamentary contacts are useful in this regard and we strongly encourage fostering them.