

## Conference on Civilian Conflict Prevention Preventing Escalation of Conflicts, Addressing the Causes of Conflict – Strategies and Perspectives

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### The Situation of Civilian Conflict Prevention Today

1. The growth, diversification and institutionalisation of strategies, instruments and actors of what we in German call Zivile Konfliktbearbeitung are one of the major successes of civil society advocacy and project work in the past 15-20 years.<sup>1</sup>
2. Those working on conflict transformation are usually very conscious of the gender dimension which at least in the sphere of development cooperation preceded conflict awareness. It relates to the different access men and women usually have to (violent) conflict, how they are made victims of it, and which options they have to deal with it. Just one prominent example: In many exogam societies it is women who move from clan to clan and thereby are almost natural peacemakers.  
One critical remark: We sometimes much too quickly assume marginalisation of women, and reduce them to the status of passive victims. Some years ago an initiative collected the names of 1.000 women for peace and suggested them collectively for the Nobel Peace Prize – most of these are women from countries where our prejudices assume that women do not play a role.
3. Conflict prevention (or conflict transformation, or whatever term is preferred) started out as an alternative to military-based strategies and instruments. It is about: Prevent wars by early action, offer carrots instead of sticks, true mediation instead of power and interest-driven negotiation, civilian peacekeeping instead of military one, and all the different instruments of post-conflict reconstruction that not only build a formal democracy with its institutions, but deal with the past and injustice, help to overcome trauma and help people to define a common future.
4. Essential in this view is the primacy of those in conflict and respect of their freedom to choose or to reject how they would like to see their society develop: The primary actors of conflict transformation are the people in the country or region where the conflict takes place. International support may be useful but such actors do never have the capacity nor the legitimacy to prescribe the contents of social change, no matter how convinced they may be that their values are the better ones. That conviction, shared with missionaries of the past 2000 years and with colonialists of the past 500, must be questioned. The interest of those in conflict comes first, not the interests of those who are intervening.
5. However, instruments of conflict prevention – as well as gender – have lost their innocence. With their mainstreaming they have become a brick in the wall of a grand strategy with definite political goals and targets (market economy, democracy of the Western kind, protection of what is considered the prerogatives of the Northern hemisphere). This goes for the German Action Plan as for the EU, at least if judging the latter's politics from what their think tank 'European Union Institute for Security Studies' writes. In its paper 'What Ambitions for European Defence in 2020?' they make it very clear what foreign and security policy should be in their eyes in the future: the total

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<sup>1</sup> While in English the term "conflict prevention" is often used and understood to refer to violent conflict, the term should not be translated to "Konfliktprävention" in German, because in German conflict is broader than violent conflict, and practitioners love to point out that conflict work is about changing the way how conflicts are handled, not to suppress them. Conflicts are necessary, it is the violence that is the problem.

control of the world in defence of the interests of the industrialized world.<sup>2</sup>

And 'gender' aspects occasionally comes up in the public debate as new legitimization of such military policy, e.g. when the war on Afghanistan is retrospectively legitimized by women liberation or the number of girls permitted again to go to school after 2001.

## Conflict Prevention and Military Intervention

This return of 'real politics' means only too often that civilian instruments are supported and implemented as elements of 'comprehensive security' (German: Vernetzte Sicherheit). There are three main problems here, and these in turn also formulate the first points on "what should be different":

6. The focus on military-based security has led to a prioritisation in politics in Germany as well as the EU on those countries and conflicts where international interventions or international war took place. (By the way, I distinguish the two – Afghanistan and Iraq were not conflict interventions but plain and ordinary attacks by a coalition of states on another state.) There are many other places in the world which are neglected though in need of support.  
More openness in the Ministry for Development and the Foreign Office for work in countries that are not defined as priority countries is needed. We need to discuss the need for support in its own right, not in regard to what it helps German or European economic or strategic interests.
7. Second: It is a development causing much concern that the international military assumes more and more civilian tasks. It does so as part of the strategy "Winning Hearts and Minds", but it also seems that sometimes they prefer to do it themselves rather than leaving to NGOs that are considered as unreliable and critical of the military.
  - a. Qualification of the military is insufficient.
  - b. Where international military is a conflict party or seen as one, aid is not only not sustainable but the lack of clear distinction between military and civilian actors makes them legitimate targets as well.
  - c. The principle of neutrality of aid is not reconcilable with a military mandate that defines certain parts of a population as enemies.
  - d. The Do-no-harm principle is seriously offended: The symbolic message of „only violence counts“ is very strong.
8. Third: The often voiced assumption that military is at least always needed to create a secure environment for civilian helpers must also be questioned. Security has many sources. The work of NGOs in those countries where there is no military intervention, and a number of purely civilian peace-keeping missions bear witness to that.  
Often military is sent because it has the material and personnel resources available, is ready to be sent at short notice, and has much expertise on security-relevant behaviour in conflict areas. But all these resources could be transferred to civilian organisations: Material resources could be made available in pools, law could provide much more

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<sup>2</sup> „By 2020 we can expect the ESDP to need to perform several tasks. Towards the TNC [Transnational Corporations], high technology enticement. Towards the SMS [Struggling Modern States - SMS Much of the Arab World], military assistance, from Security Sector Reform (SSR) to crisis resolution and peace support operations. Towards the AMS [Alienated Modern States - AMS North Korea, Burma, Russia?], a capability to support hard power politics, both for Clausewitzian influence and possible direct military confrontation. Towards the PMS [Premodern Societies - PMS The Bottom Billion], support for state building. Finally, towards the less developed parts of the world generally, a capability to contain the transnational problems. This includes barrier operations against migration and smuggling and evacuation of EU citizens from crisis areas. These do not remove the root causes of the problem, but will be increasingly necessary as long as the problems are not solved.”(Tomas Ries, p. 69)

possibility for people to leave their job for a limited time to go abroad to civilian missions others than THW or the like, and training resources and opportunities could be made available.

Some more suggestions:

9. Do not let grow together what must be separate: Rather experiment with completely civilian projects and missions. The EU in fact is doing so – the majority of its ESDP missions have been civilian in character.<sup>3</sup>
10. We need a dialogue on the ethics of politics. In regard to technology today many recognize that not everything must be done that can be done. But after the Cold War and a short period of ‚political spring‘ it seems that we are back to hard core realist thinking that defines politics as ‚what serves me best‘. That is very short-sighted thinking not only for ethical reasons, but because ‚the others‘ are not passive on-lookers. A new arms race, this time with countries that were called ‚developing‘ not so long ago, with the possibility of new wars which may be termed world wars with much more right than the first two in the 20th century are just around the corner. We need a return to the thinking of ‚common security‘. Globalization has made us experience what we earlier only knew intellectually – that the world is one. That goes for climate, environment in general as well as for crises and conflict. Therefore we need to find the solutions together.
11. To summarize: The ‚primacy of military intervention politics‘ can be broken by a two-legged strategy: On the one hand pointing out the catastrophic consequences of military interventions and wars, and the risks military-based power politics have for the future. On the other hand the creation, widening and stabilization of alternative civilian strategies and instruments. What we need is a re-civilisation of conflict prevention.

### **What does this mean in Germany?**

12. Ongoing revision of the Action Plan, create separate sub-plans for certain crisis regions, be serious about gender as an important factor in analysis and implementation.
13. Do not only talk about the EU, but also get more engaged at the UN level (e.g. the Peacebuilding Commission). Germany must stop being a global back water in this regard!
14. We need better institutionalised cooperation within the government, and between the government and NGOs
15. Conflict sensitivity is a need not only for development cooperation. It is far more important to apply to economic aid programmes (including those in Europe), export and import policies, human rights issues, counter-terrorism strategies, etc.

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<sup>3</sup> See Grevi, Giovanni; Helly, Damien and Keohane, Daniel (2009) European Security and Defence Policy. THE FIRST 10 YEARS (1999-2009). Paris: European Union Institute for Security Studies. [www.euiss.europa.eu](http://www.euiss.europa.eu) [13.5.2010]