

## EU Non-Proliferation and Disarmament Consortium

*Promoting the European network of independent  
non-proliferation and disarmament think tanks*

The Twelfth European Union  
Non-Proliferation and Disarmament Conference,  
04-05 December 2023  
*Comprehensive Conference Report*  
By  
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The twelfth EU Non-Proliferation and Disarmament Conference (EUNPDC) was held on 04 and 05 December 2023 in a hybrid format at the Thon Hotel Brussels City Center in Brussels (Belgium). The Conference was organised by the Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI) on behalf of the [EU Network of Independent Non-Proliferation and Disarmament Think Tanks](#), gathering experts on non-proliferation, disarmament, arms control and conventional weapons from public institutions, governments, international organisations, independent think tanks and civil society. Over 400 experts, On-line and in presence, from more than 50 countries – EU members, associated states and third countries – attended the conference.

The EU Non-Proliferation and Disarmament Conference is one of the flagship events of the European Network of Independent Non-Proliferation and Disarmament Think Tanks. The Network was established in July 2010 by the Council of the European Union to support the implementation of the [EU Strategy Against the Proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction](#). The Network, which also focuses on the implementation of the [EU Strategy Against Illicit Firearms, Small Arms & Light Weapons & Their Ammunition](#), brings together more than 100 research entities and is coordinated by a Consortium of six institutes: La Fondation pour la recherche stratégique (FRS), International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS), Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI), Peace Research Institute Frankfurt (HSFK - PRIF), Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) and the Vienna Center for Disarmament and NonProliferation (VCDNP).

Since 2012, the Annual Conference has been one of the key non-proliferation and disarmament meetings worldwide. It has contributed to promoting strategic discussion on measures to combat the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) and their delivery systems, as well as to address challenges related to conventional weapons, including their illicit trade and the excessive accumulation of small arms and light weapons (SALW) and their ammunition. The 2023 edition

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addressed numerous topics of central importance for the work of the EU, notably the [European External Action Service \(EEAS\)](#), as well as several pressing arms control, non-proliferation and disarmament issues.

## **Welcome Remarks**

Ettore Greco, *Executive Vice-President, Istituto Affari Internazionali*

Sibylle Bauer, *Chair of the EU Non-proliferation and Disarmament Consortium and Director of Studies, Armament and Disarmament at the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI)*

Executive Vice President Greco started his remarks addressing the contents and goals of the conference. He then addressed the role of the EU in the non-proliferation and disarmament field, specifically he acknowledged the role of the EU in advocating and supporting multilateral solutions to security issues, its aim to preserve the existing WMD regimes, their universalization and effective implementation, as well as its role in innovating mechanisms and agreements to keep up with new challenges. Then he addressed the need to look at the change in the strategic landscape, specifically in Europe, the Middle East and the Indo-Pacific, pointing out that a stable security environment can only emerge from a mix of deterrence postures and functional arms control agreements. He concluded his speech by saying that a top priority remains the launch of bilateral talks for the entry into force of a new strategic arms control treaty when New START expires in 2026, that the chances to extend strategic talks to other nuclear powers remain very small, and that the prospect for intensifying engagement of the P-5 on nuclear risk reduction in a period of heightening tensions between nuclear powers looks promising.

Director of Studies, Armament and Disarmament Bauer followed by thanking the support of the EU to the Consortium, which has enabled the creation of the European Network of Independent Non-Proliferation and Disarmament Think Tanks. The Network includes research institutes and university departments, breaches the gap between academia and the policy-research world, and it also includes a mix of technical, natural sciences and social sciences disciplines. She continued her intervention by saying that the EUNPDC is tasked with encouraging political-security related dialogue to raise awareness of proliferation and disarmament challenges and to develop expertise and institutional capacity on these issues in think tanks and governments in Europe and beyond.

## **Opening Speech**

Josep Borrell, *High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy*

High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Josep Borrell stressed the fact that the paradigm of the global and European security architecture have changed drastically as a result of Russia's aggression against Ukraine, something which also affects the non-proliferation and disarmament agreements. He continued by saying that Russia has withdrawn from multilateral approaches, suspending the New START Treaty, withdrawing from the Treaty on Conventional Forces in Europe, de-ratifying the Comprehensive Nuclear Test-Ban Treaty, and blocking the work

in non-proliferation and disarmament fora. He then pointed out that Russia is not the only challenger: there is Iran and North Korea, something which damages even more the international system and increases polarization. Many third States around the world don't want to take sides and claim that they are trapped between narratives. However, he said, for the EU, it is not just a battle of narratives, but a battle of values. As a consequence, the EU is isolating Russia and fighting its disinformation campaign by reaching out like-minded and non-aligned States, in order to join forces to preserve together the global multilateral framework.

Marjolijn van Deelen, *Special Envoy for Disarmament and Non-Proliferation at the EEAS*

The Special Envoy for Disarmament and Non-Proliferation at the EEAS, Marjolijn van Deelen, stressed the fact that the current trend of competition between big powers is having a negative effect on non-proliferation and disarmament, specifically the Russian withdrawal from multilateral solutions was pointed out as a big part of the problem, while China was presented as a challenge due to its narrative on peaceful uses of dual-use technology and its attacks on the integrity of multilateral institutions. She then focused on the ways to deal with these challenges in order to safeguard and improve the non-proliferation and disarmament architecture, but also what it means for the prospects of further developing this architecture.

Robert Floyd, *Executive Secretary of the Comprehensive Test-Ban Treaty Organization*

Executive Secretary of the Comprehensive Test-Ban Treaty Organization, Robert Floyd, pointed out that it is important to acknowledge how far humanity has come vis-à-vis non-proliferation and disarmament. For instance, before 1996 there was more than 2,000 nuclear tests, from 1996 onwards fewer than one dozen tests have taken place. The core reason that a norm is so powerful is because the international community has confidence in the CTBT and confidence that any test will be detected as the CTBT International Monitoring System (IMS) can detect anywhere in the planet an explosion less than half of a kiloton. He then followed by saying that over the last few years there has been a worrying shift in tone and in rhetoric and that Russia's decision to de-ratify the CTBT has come as an unwelcome surprise. He followed by saying that entry into force of the CTBT has never been more important than it is now as this will unlock all its verification tools and proceeded to explain the full treaty verification regime. He concluded by saying that in case a NWS decides to proceed with a nuclear test, the global moratorium on nuclear tests would be at risk, as well as the long track-record of nuclear non-proliferation.

## FIRST PLENARY SESSION

EU's non-proliferation and disarmament agenda

The speakers emphasized the EU's strong commitment to non-proliferation and disarmament, highlighting its leadership potential and influence on third countries. Despite being two decades old, the EU WMD Strategy remains relevant, aligning with other strategic European documents. They stressed the importance of adapting these strategies to the current international system and supporting

organizations like IAEA, OPCW, and CTBTO. The EU champions civil society participation, gender issues, youth, and education for disarmament. Financially supporting non-proliferation projects and engaging with regions like Southeast Asia are key strengths. However, internal differences hinder quick and decisive action, making the EU appear confusing and weak. Proactiveness, understanding diverse global visions, and leveraging strengths in technical and financial support can address these weaknesses. In the face of multilateral challenges, the EU may strategically embrace orchestration, focusing on technical assistance, enhancing epistemic practices, and convening forums to promote effective multilateralism.

## SECOND PLENARY SESSION

### Nuclear Proliferation and Disarmament Challenges

The speakers commenced by addressing the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), highlighting its origins rooted in concerns of nuclear proliferation, arms races, and the aspiration to harness nuclear energy for third-world development. Today, the NPT remains relevant amidst proliferation crises involving North Korea and Iran, and despite Russia's, China's and US nuclear modernization. Despite challenges, the NPT boasts universal membership and strong norms against proliferation, coupled with robust verification by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). While nuclear disarmament progresses slowly, the NPT commits recognized nuclear-armed states to this goal. Then they tackled the Iranian nuclear issue, which they acknowledge it poses challenges, impacting NPT dynamics and future review cycles. Concerns include the erosion of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) and escalating tensions. On another topic they pointed out that the international community emphasizes nuclear strategic dialogue, but challenges persist, with emerging technologies and geopolitical shifts complicating the disarmament landscape. Finally, Africa was discussed as a case of continental commitment to disarmament and non-proliferation, however faced with challenges in balancing nuclear aspirations with developmental needs. The continent's concerns include potential proliferation risks from free trade agreements and the presence of nuclear-armed states. The EU's involvement in Africa is noted, but challenges persist, highlighting the need for a holistic and inclusive approach to nuclear energy and materials.

## FIRST PARALLEL SESSION

### Chemical Disarmament After the Fifth Review Conference of the CWC

Speakers discussed the lack of consensus at the fifth Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) Review Conference (RevCon) as a result of geopolitical tensions and Russia's stance on Syria. Despite perceived failure, the RevCon was acknowledged as part of a broader process with limited impact on daily OPCW operations. The newly formed open-ended working group played a crucial role, addressing key topics. Achievements included adopting a tenure policy, action plans for diversity, and industrial verification methodologies. On another issue, while chemical weapons stockpiles have been destroyed, ongoing threats require vigilance. Future OPCW priorities should involve preventing re-emergence of chemical weapons, destroying non-CWC Parties stockpiles, and promoting universalization of the Convention amid challenges from evolving technologies. The speakers acknowledged OPCW milestones like the inauguration of the ChemCenter but emphasized the need

for knowledge retention and engagement with non-CWC countries. Achievements also encompassed adapting the verification regime and counteracting chemical terrorism. Ongoing challenges include new technologies' impact, requiring a special team's assessment. Finally, they pointed out that the Scientific Advisory Mechanism faces challenges in sharing information on registered chemicals, monitoring bio-toxins, and addressing bio-technology issues.

## SECOND PARALLEL SESSION

### Outer Space: Realm of Conflict or Cooperation?

The speakers underscored the EU's role as a global space technology provider and the strategic significance of space for European autonomy. They acknowledged the growing reliance on space services for the economy and security, advocating for infrastructure protection. Emphasis was placed on the need for a behaviour-based approach to prevent conflicts in space and preserve its peaceful use. Regarding arms control in space, a distinction was made between militarisation and weaponisation, highlighting geopolitical divisions and stressing the importance of international cooperation. They also highlighted the coexistence of cooperation and conflict in space, with disagreements in lunar exploration and discussions on space security. There was an emphasis on the polarisation between legal and soft-legal approaches, advocating for standards of conduct and thresholds to ensure space security. In summary, speakers underscored the complexity of space challenges and the necessity for cooperative, behaviour-based approaches to maintain a secure and peaceful space environment.

## THIRD PARALLEL SESSION

### Artificial Intelligence and the Future of Warfare

The speakers addressed the impact of artificial intelligence (AI) on contemporary warfare, framing it within the evolution of society, economy, politics, and technology. They highlighted the current seventh military revolution, where the integration of AI and big data analytics could replace human involvement on the battlefield. Three key pathways in which AI affects warfare were explored: transforming its character by improving decision-making and tactical effectiveness, changing dynamics in hybrid conflicts through advanced disinformation campaigns, and opening new possibilities for virtual societal warfare. The current use of AI in ongoing conflicts like Armenia-Azerbaijan and Russia-Ukraine was mentioned. Ethical, legal, and strategic concerns are emphasised, including the use of fully lethal autonomous weapons and challenges in governance with private sector involvement. The importance of a strategic approach to AI was underscored, prioritising reliability and responsible development in military applications.

## FOURTH PARALLEL SESSION

### Diversion of Conventional Arms

The speakers covered various aspects of arms trade regulation, focusing on the Arms Trade Treaty (ATT), the European Union's Common Position on arms exports, and the role of technology in countering weapon diversion. The ATT, as the first global legal instrument, aims to prevent illicit conventional arms trade by establishing shared responsibilities among State Parties. A sub-group on

diversion was formed to enhance treaty implementation, offering tools like voluntary documents to assess and prevent diversion risks. The ATT emphasizes effective communication and information exchange among State Parties. The EU Common Position outlines criteria for assessing exports of military technology, including the risk of diversion. Member States are encouraged to share information on activities and entities of concern. However, the lack of a comprehensive EU strategy for addressing diversion throughout the arms life cycle is noted. The discussion on tracing components vital for weapon production emphasized the challenges in tracking electronic components due to their dual-use nature. The need for documentation tracing and identification was stressed, and there was a call for technology to strengthen existing measures. However, the speakers were cautious against viewing technology as a panacea, emphasizing its complementary role with other measures.

## FIFTH PARALLEL SESSION

### Conflict Dynamics and Security Cooperation in East Asia

Japan underwent significant changes post the February 2022 Russo-Ukrainian war. Former Prime Minister, Shinzo Abe, suggested nuclear sharing with the U.S. on Japanese soil, but anti-nuclear norms prevailed, leading Japan to maintain its nuclear stance. In contrast, North Korea adopted a dual-track nuclear strategy, prompting South Korea to enhance deterrence and consider nuclear options. Australia, prioritizing sovereignty, actively supports Ukraine and addresses Indo-Pacific challenges. China's maritime expansion in the South China Sea impacts Japan's trade and security. Japan supports a Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP), aligns with ASEAN, and emphasizes maritime safety. The Japan-U.S. alliance remains vital, with efforts to enhance partnerships in Europe and NATO. The speaker urged joint efforts to address power vacuums in the South China Sea, enhance maritime awareness, and tackle global threats, emphasizing collaboration between QUAD and Europe.

## SIXTH PARALLEL SESSION

### Bio-Technology and Weaponizations Risks

The speakers covered crucial aspects of biosecurity, dual-use tools, and biotechnological risks. They addressed the insufficient awareness among European researchers regarding biosecurity and dual-use implications, proposing solutions such as practical webinars and training courses. Emphasizing the need for continuous attention throughout the research cycle, ethical committees, and dual-use protocols were deemed essential. The discussion delved into the threat of weaponization, categorizing actors into state and non-state entities and examining historical challenges in compliance verification. Ongoing concerns were expressed about states potentially weaponizing biology in light of evolving science and technology. Acknowledging the positive role of the scientific community during the Covid-19 pandemic, speakers raised alarms about pathogen re-weaponization and the disease's controversial origin. Challenges in implementing regulations at the laboratory level were discussed, stressing scientist involvement in controls and addressing gene synthesis security. Lastly, the fast-paced development of biotechnologies was explored, highlighting interdisciplinary collaboration, environmental considerations, and the influential role of the private sector. Recommendations

included establishing an international code of conduct, fortifying global frameworks, and engaging NGOs to address challenges and raise awareness about the dual-use nature of biotechnology.

### THIRD PLENARY SESSION

#### Testimonies of Non-Proliferation and Disarmament – A Conversation with the Next Generation

The Young Women Next Generation Initiative (YWNGI) had a profound impact on one speaker's career, emphasizing active participation and providing mentorship that boosted confidence and engagement. Events like the EUNPDC Annual Conference and the Next Generation Workshop offered exposure to knowledgeable peers, visibility, and funding opportunities. Skill-building workshops, including mindful communication, were part of the program, changing the speaker's career trajectory positively. For another speaker, the Next Generation Workshop marked their first conference during their PhD, offering a safe space for research presentation, valuable feedback, and contributing to their first publication. While not altering their career trajectory, the workshop facilitated an easier entry into the academic world. Integrating the Next Generation Workshop with the Mentorship Programme created a lasting network of individuals who share mentorship experiences, fostering connections throughout their careers.

### FOURTH PLENARY SESSION

#### The War in Ukraine and the Future of Arms Control in Europe

The speakers discussed Russia's use of nuclear weapons in the conflict with Ukraine and its impact on arms control. Russia employed aggressive deterrence, covering its aggression with nuclear threats and attempting to prevent outside interference. While initially successful in deterring support for Ukraine, the credibility of coercive threats diminished over time. The destruction of arms control treaties, including the suspension of the New START Treaty and de-ratification of the CTBT, showcased Russia's willingness to escalate strategically. The war led to increased military investments in Europe, raising concerns about arms exports and export control regimes. The OSCE's role in conventional arms control was hampered by Russia's suspensions, and the erosion of the arms control environment poses challenges. NATO faces evolving security dynamics, including engagement with China and other global players, and emphasizes the importance of credible partners, adapting arms control arrangements, and fostering trust in data for effective arms control and non-proliferation efforts.

### FIFTH PLENARY SESSION

#### Arms Control and Global Power Dynamics

The speakers discussed the current global geopolitical landscape, focusing on challenges such as the complexity of international relations, the decline of trust both within and between states, emerging centers of power, and increased competition among major powers. The discussion highlighted the shifting dynamics in the rules-based order, with a particular emphasis on the risks associated with nuclear weapons. Concerns included the qualitative and quantitative arms race, the potential use of nuclear weapons as tools of coercion, and regional conflicts with nuclear implications. The need for

arms control and disarmament efforts was stressed, with a call to reinforce treaties like the NPT and CTBT. The role of non-state actors, the impact of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, and the importance of multilateralism were also discussed. The speakers expressed a sense of urgency in addressing these challenges to prevent further deterioration of the global order.

## **Closing Remarks**

*Sibylle Bauer, Chair of the EU Non-proliferation and Disarmament Consortium and Director of Studies, Armament and Disarmament at the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute*

In her concluding remarks, Sibylle Bauer, Chair of the EU Non-proliferation and Disarmament Consortium and Director of Studies, Armament and Disarmament at the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) pointed out that the world is in full crisis mode as a result of great power tensions and wars. However, much of the lamenting linked to this scenario didn't take place in the Annual Conference nor in other EUNPDC activities. On the contrary, she said, there was quite a lot of problem-solving willingness and attitude. She followed by saying that hope and positive thinking are present in many of the participants of EUNPDC activities and that allows to meeting each other as humans. She was also convinced that is important to listen to different perspectives and different voices as a commitment to dig deep, think critically, get to the facts and try to navigate this mist of misinformation/disinformation, and this makes education in non-proliferation and disarmament issues even more important. As a consequence, she committed the EUNPDC to continue bridging the gap between the policy world and researchers, between policy and science, between natural and social sciences and also within these sciences.

The EU Non-Proliferation and Disarmament Conference proved to be, once again, a central event for the international discussion on the future of arms control, non-proliferation and disarmament. It also contributed to reaffirming the strong EU commitment towards a rules-based global order and showed the increased awareness of EU non-proliferation and disarmament policies among government officials, academics and civil society representatives of third countries. Moreover, the debate explored new ways and means of improving capacities in areas of the world with limited expertise in countering the threats stemming from SALW, WMD and their means of delivery. Finally, as every year, the Conference served as a venue to highlight the role played by European think tanks specialised in non-proliferation and disarmament and the efforts undertaken by the EU Consortium to promote and coordinate their work.

For more information and to watch the videos of the Conference, please visit the Consortium's website: [www.nonproliferation.eu](http://www.nonproliferation.eu)





Funded by the European Union