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## THE EU/WEU SYSTEM OF CONFLICT PREVENTION

by Christopher Hill

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## Introduction

'Somebody once wrote that you knew when you had successfully "arrived" in academia; others adopted your ideas, misunderstood them, presented them as their own and then made extravagant claims for their relevance and effectiveness. Something of the sort has happened to conflict analysis and resolution...as mainstream scholarly attention has switched from issues of threat manipulation, deterrence and military security and the intellectual problems presented by a loosely bipolar global political system....the language and concepts of the discipline, if not their exact original meaning, are thus becoming increasingly familiar in the mouths of media pundits, political leaders and policy advisers' (Mitchell, 1994, p128).

*Meno male*. Academics should not moan too much if the wheel finally turns to the point whereby their theoretical abstractions and idealistic prescriptions suddenly seem more relevant to the hard-headed policy community. On the other hand, if a new discourse is simply to be appropriated to provide cosmetic disguise for the same old banalities of power, then there is a real cause for complaint.

In the case of conflict analysis we are faced more with enthusiastic extrapolations from the basic concepts than with cynical exploitation, while it is liberal rationalism which lurks behind the new language, not immutable realism. 'Conflict prevention' for example, which is our concern here, is undoubtedly one of the buzz-phrases of the last few years in circles where the post Cold War order is discussed, and where a new degree of optimism is evident about the possibilities of transforming the old certainties of Thucydidean international relations (Saferworld 1996). And the very idea of conflict prevention seems to convey the beliefs that conflicts are undesirable, that they can be prevented and that the application of reason will help us to engineer political solutions. All these notions are typical of the enlightenment rationalism which has been a counterpoint to realism for the last two hundred years of European history, while at the same time being expressed in the language of modern applied social science. Unfortunately even this language is an over-simplified version of that used by the specialist students of conflict themselves.

All this is not intended to suggest that we should not take the idea of conflict prevention seriously. What it does mean is that we should contextualise it more seriously and discriminate between what can seriously be expected of any international actor (here the 'EU/WEU system') and what cannot.

There are three dimensions of conflict analysis, which can in fact be expressed as chronological phases: conflict prevention looks to prevent violent trials of strength from even breaking out; conflict (and/or crisis) management has been directed towards preventing escalation, and has been a familiar part of conventional strategic thought since

1962; <u>conflict resolution</u> is concerned with trying to re-establish peace, preferably on a permanent basis. This has been the main preoccupation of academic peace researchers and conflict analysts. It is conflict prevention which has attracted the least attention of the three, perhaps because of its association with an idealist, even pacifist view of the world, in which disputes can be resolved peacefully and through negotiation - the view which produced appeasement, and was so discredited between 1939 and 1991.

Since the end of the Gulf War, however, and the growing awareness of a post-bipolar age, there is a dual sense that conflicts may be proliferating, albeit on a smaller scale than that envisaged during the Cold War, and that they can be headed off, by a combination of expert understanding and political determination. The assumptions evident in this approach to the international system should be subjected to criticism, although this is not the place. Suffice it to say that we should be well advised to distinguish, in terms of preventability, between different kinds of conflict, and not to be too utopian about what can be achieved by any third party intervention in complex and deep-rooted conflicts of the kind we have witnessed in recent years in Bosnia, Algeria and Sri Lanka. That in turn, however, is a long way from saying that we should not put our best efforts into the prevention of serious violence. We shall never stop conflict in human society, nor should we attempt to - conflict is closely allied to the difference principle and to the competitiveness which has produced much of humanity's development. But no sane person would deny the benefits, humanitarian, political and economic, of stopping inter-communal disputes from escalating into sustained, anarchical violence in which victory rather than compromise becomes the superordinate goal. This is as true of intra-state conflict as of disputes between states. Indeed it is never easy to make a clear distinction between the two types of conflict, as the history of revolutions readily demonstrates. What, then, can the EU and WEU do towards conflict prevention?

**The EU/WEU System**

It is doubtful whether the EU and WEU deserve to be described jointly as a 'system' in terms of either their policy-making capacity or their operational mechanisms. A system denotes a regular pattern of interactions between separate units, and the relations between the EU and WEU are both too overlapping and too asymmetric to justify the label. Still, there is no doubt that the two institutions have grown together over the last fifteen years, and that there is now a 'possibility of the integration of the WEU into the Union, should the European Council so decide', as the Treaty of Amsterdam put it (J.7.1) (even if this 'possibility' is now rather more remote than many had hoped two years ago). What resources and instruments, then, do the two institutions dispose of, that might enhance efforts towards conflict prevention?

Article J.7 of the Treaty of Amsterdam, with its associated Protocol and Declaration, is a development of Article J.4 (and its associated Declarations) of the Treaty of European Union of 1993, and indeed the Western European Union's Petersberg Declaration of 1992 and Hague Platform of 1987. It provides for the 'progressive' framing of a common defence policy (Maastricht referred only to the 'eventual' framing), which if achieved would certainly give the EU the capability of military intervention in the vicinity of its borders, if not beyond. Such a capability might in turn have a certain **deterrent effect** on parties vulnerable to

European intervention, so long as they were convinced that the will existed to use it. There is also a provision for cooperation, 'as Member States consider appropriate...in the field of armaments', but this is so vaguely worded as to make common policies on arms exports or procurement, important capabilities in terms of leverage over third parties only a distant prospect. This the more so given the Treaty's continued genuflections before NATO and national defence policies.

The one genuinely innovative aspect of J.7 is the incorporation of the 'Petersberg tasks' (although not explicitly referred to as such), which seem to bear directly on the task of conflict prevention. In fact on close inspection these tasks are less to do with prevention than with crisis management and conflict resolution, as J.7.2 explicitly acknowledges. It is true that by relieving humanitarian problems, acting as barrier forces and in particular by 'peacemaking', European forces would be **preventing escalation** and laying down some of the conditions for a more permanent peace in the post bellum. But strictly speaking this is not the same as the kind of early-warning, nipping in the bud kind of activity which the new Policy Planning and Early Warning Unit of CFSP is designed to facilitate. Indeed there has to be some question as to whether the WEU half of the EU/WEU 'system' is appropriate for prevention at all. While the two institutions remain separate, it might be best to conceive of a division of labour, with the EU's CFSP having the purpose of (and some capacity for) prevention, and the WEU serving the needs of intervention when prevention fails. If a merger ever occurs, then the two functions will simply be divided within a European foreign and defence policy, conceptually and operationally.

Even now, the EU taken as a whole has some attributes of a preventive capability. The most obvious of these is what Gabriel Munuera has called '**the power of attraction**' (Munera, 1994, p91). Munuera's analysis hits the nail on the head. He shows that the lure of membership can help to prevent conflicts outside the EU's borders by suggesting the advantages of good behaviour to eager candidates (as with the Copenhagen Council's membership conditions) and by giving the EU leverage where they do not take the hint. He cites the case of Slovakian-Hungarian detente as an example. Munuera also rightly notes, however, that this effect wears off if countries become disillusioned with the pace of their accession, and if geography makes them less than plausible candidates. For some states indeed, membership is not an option at all, and for them the attraction factor is weaker, working only in terms of wanting to be associated with EU positions (eg through the CFSP). They are the EU's new 'out of area' problems, a 'far abroad' with fewer incentives to follow EU prescriptions.

The creation of the **structured dialogues and the 'WEU family'**, of course, have helped to blur sharp dividing lines between the 'potential ins' and the 'always outs' - this has been a key part of EU enlargement policy over the last four years, perhaps not pursued with sufficient resolve, bearing in mind the relatively uncritical acceptance of the need to move to an EU of 20 states, perhaps 25, within a decade. Guido Lenzi has pointed out that the WEU has developed 'a comprehensive and multilateral process of conceptual exchanges, political consultation and some operational cooperation between more than thirty countries of Europe and the Mediterranean, a process that has somewhat blunted the military alliance implications of the Brussels Treaty' (Lenzi, 1998 forthcoming). Insofar as it creates hopes of eventual membership and feelings of being sheltered by an umbrella of common security,

this might damp down incipient conflict both within the 'family' (a wish-fulfilment metaphor if ever there was one) and between members and outsiders. The Slovenian-Italian example cuts one way on this; Greece-Turkey the other.

The assumptions behind this kind of approach, whereby states are gradually drawn into civil or 'constitutional' relations (Jones, 1979) even if not into a single political enterprise, derive from two variants of liberalism. One is the familiar 'moralism-legalism' of the Wilsonian era; here law and institutions help to bind states in observance of common rules which increasingly mimic the principles of domestic (democratic) society. Membership of the United Nations is still an important, if today very diluted example of this outlook. The second is the paradigm which has become dominant in western foreign policy thought since the end of the Cold War, namely the **'democratic peace'**, or the notion that since democratic states appear not to wish to fight each other, the best way to pacify the anarchical society of international relations is to promote the spread of democracy. Further, the emergence of international groupings of democratic states such as the European Union will in itself create islands of peace and help to create a bandwagon effect.

The difficulty with the democratic path to conflict prevention is that even if states can be brought into a condition of rudimentary democracy sufficient to justify their entry into the EU, there can be no certainty that they will stay that way or indeed that they will not dilute that very stability which made the EU so attractive in the first place. If the democratic peace hypothesis holds, it does so on the basis of relations among states whose liberal institutions and close collaboration were reinforced if not created by the Cold War (**Gleditsch, 1995**); to extrapolate this solidarity to a much larger group of states in a wholly new geo-politics would be to divorce political science completely from history.

It is true that democracy in at least Greece and Spain might have proved vulnerable without membership of the EC, and that Greek and Italian foreign policy (and perhaps British fishing policy) might have been rendered less militant by their collective responsibilities. But the credit could just as well go to NATO, and the effect might simply wear off in an EU which became more of a framework organisation, like OSCE, than the action organisation which even its anti-federalist members wish it to be.

None of this is to imply that bringing, say, the states of the old Soviet bloc into the net of organisations like OSCE, the Council of Europe, NACC and PfP, and into the orbit of the EU/WEU is a waste of time. On the contrary, this kind of overlapping institutionalism fosters communication, the spread of common values and the acceptance of some shared obligations. The instinct for a politics of inclusion over exclusion is generally correct. The point is rather that both democracy and the membership of the IGOs created by democracies are necessary but not sufficient means of preventing conflict. New, brittle democracies herded together into regional organisations which may become quickly overloaded by their very accession will not be any the less prone to involvement in conflict - indeed it is possible that they will be more prone to internal upheavals if the new dispensations fail to meet the soaring expectations they have engendered. Equally, an over-officious human rights foreign policy outside Europe might turn out to incite conflict rather than prevent it - as we have seen over relations with Malaysia and Indonesia.

Thus far in its history the EC/EU has proved remarkably free of conflict; Northern Ireland and the Basque country have been savage exceptions, but compared to Bosnia or Algeria they have been sideshows and they have barely spilled over into inter-state tension. It is not, however, clear what is the chicken and what the egg: did the EC cause peace or did peace make possible the EC? The answer is, as usual, that both egg and chicken have been necessary. The EC has created unusually civilised relations among its member-states, to the point where they have come close to choosing integration on some of the most crucial attributes of statehood. But it has only been able to do so because of the security stockade provided by NATO. Moreover solidarity has been fostered nearly half a century, not an insignificant elapse of time.

Neither a long time-frame, nor a structured security environment are available for the new Europe, where around twenty states are now searching urgently to come in from the cold. This applies *a fortiori* to the rest of the world, which figures just as prominently on Europe's conflict-prevention horizon if not on its enlargement agenda. Current decision-makers are acutely aware that if too many states are granted entry to the EU too soon, it will endanger not only 'deepening' but such capacity for action as the CFSP has painfully acquired. For the time being new members (and candidate-members) will follow the lead in foreign policy given by the established states; in the longer run it may prove even more difficult to establish consensus on delicate questions of external conflict management when the constituency has doubled in size and become infinitely more varied.

If the EU represents a working peace system in its internal relations, and may be expected to continue as such, its capacity to prevent conflict outside its borders - themselves in flux - remains much more dubious. The only clear way in which to structure third countries' external environments is to provide **security guarantees**. This the EU in itself cannot furnish, but since new EU members have the right to join the WEU and to avail themselves of Article V protection it can be argued that the EU does indirectly provide the kind of guarantee that represents serious deterrence to an external aggressor. The WEU represents the kind of black letter law not present in the CFSP. Yet (since Maastricht) no state can enter the WEU fortress if it does not join the EU. The situation is inherently ambiguous, given the separateness of EU and WEU, the fact that not all Member States wish to be inside WEU, and the evident contrast between even WEU's commitment and the practical ability to live up to it. Insofar as a security guarantee is the best way of avoiding attack, and involvement in an unwanted conflict, membership of NATO must seem the better option for the vulnerable outsider. On the other hand, the United States itself has been quick to emphasise the importance of EU enlargement, and evidently recognises the more subtle and wide-ranging contribution that the civilian power can make to the prevention of conflict on the old continent. EU enlargement is virtually an instrument of contemporary American foreign policy.

Thus insofar as security guarantees, collective or bilateral, are an important part of conflict prevention, the EU has for the time being no choice but to accept the semi-detached status of WEU and to work with NATO in deciding the perimeter of the region which will be defended against any outside attack and within which a democratic peace is expected. It must also accept the graduated nature of individual Member State commitments on the

security front. Opt-outs, both for particular countries and for the whole system on conflicts like that between Greece and Turkey, are likely to continue for the foreseeable future.

There are further **instruments of soft power** which the EU has at its disposal, and which it associates with its civilian and civilising role. Indeed the whole ethos and rationale of EPC/CFSP since 1970 have been about conflict prevention and conflict resolution, even if it has only been expressed in these terms in the last five years or so, for the reasons suggested at the beginning of this paper (although Reinhardt Rummel considers, *per contra*, that EPC/CFSP have largely been about conflict *management* [Rummel, 1996, p24]). The well-established and doggedly pursued policy lines in the Middle East and Central America are cases in point. In the 1990s, however,  potential conflicts have proliferated closer to home and the EU's instruments have become rather sharper (Smith, 1998). For example:

-         Economic sanctions should be more easy to use given Maastricht's new Article 228a, which gives them a specific legal basis and clarifies their link to the political process of CFSP.

-         Conditionality has become a regular part of the EU's foreign policy actions, whereby there is now no embarrassment about creating linkages between the granting of aid or privileges and the expectation of better behaviour (Smith, 1997).

-         The arrival of Joint Actions, Common Positions and now Common Strategies in the CFSP has spawned new diplomatic initiatives such as the Stability Pact, while the Treaty of Amsterdam has heightened the element of diplomatic personality by creating a version of Mr/Ms. CFSP, and making it possible for the Presidency to negotiate agreements (J.8.3 & J.14; also Schröder, 1997). A start has been made on a common recognition policy.

In sum, as Michael Smith has said, 'the EU has the economic capacity to reward and to punish; it has the technical and administrative capacity to support and stabilise; and it has the capacity to negotiate in ways unknown to many of the other participants in European order' (Smith, M., 1997). The limitations of these instruments are fairly well known. Budgetary constraints, national sensitivities and a proper fear of the quagmire effect all serve to inhibit EU actions and sometimes to bring them into disrepute. Nonetheless, the EU has an honourable record of trying to address the root causes of international conflict long before this became a fashionable discourse, and it still has some comparative advantages in the sisyphean task over other IGOs, and particularly over individual states. Although only the long-term can tell whether conflict prevention in this sense is successful, that is no reason for not attempting it.

Yet at one level the EU's concern with long-term prevention is faute de mieux, and we might question - with policy scientists like Charles Lindblom - the whole planning approach which is implied in the notion of 'addressing the long-term causes of conflict'. Perhaps disjointed incrementalism would have a better chance of success, and we are just deluding ourselves that the EU's combination of aid, sanctions, diplomatic links and the promise of brotherhood can really prevent conflict breaking out in the face of the atavistic nationalism and geopolitical contradictions that exist in the Balkans, in Cyprus or in Northern Ireland. The alternatives to conflict prevention/resolution may be worse, but that does not mean that the

expenditure of scarce resources on such policies is automatically justifiable. It is difficult to agree with Oxfam's recent argument, for example, that 'Lomé has potentially a key role to play in conflict prevention' (Oxfam, 1997, p1). This really would be stretching a cobweb across the mouth of the cannon.

Conclusions

The reservations which have been expressed here about the language, the philosophy and the practice of the EU's conflict prevention policies do not mean that I under-estimate what might be done through the various means at the EU's disposal, and in fact what has already been done. There is no doubt that, at many different levels and with a range of partners, the EU has engaged fundamentally with the project of stabilising central and eastern Europe (Smith 1998B). The Commission, particular Member States, CFSP, the WEU, the European Parliament have all taken detailed and concrete measures to help promote the twin conditions of democratisation and development which are seen as central to peace-building in the region. And so far, even if they have not always pulled in the same direction, these units of the European 'system' have had a remarkable degree of success, ex-Yugoslavia apart. NATO, the OSCE and the Council of Europe are also key elements of the new mediaevalism which has emerged in Europe since the Cold War, and some comfort can be taken from the fact that all the major actors, including Russia, seem to share the same basic assumption, namely that there is no need for the shadow of inter-state conflict to hang over the continent as it did for four decades. The best form of conflict prevention is the spread of the belief that other priorities and values are more important, and that violent conflict is counter-productive. Sadly, the EU and WEU are likely to have little impact in promoting this belief on a global scale, but in their own vicinity they have already begun to harness the tide of history.

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