



EU Engagement with Local Civil Society in the Great Lakes Region

María Martín de Almagro Iniesta

Abstract

The EU's peacebuilding framework, that is, the ensemble of post-Lisbon programmes, funds and instruments dedicated to peace and security, is unmatched in its social, economic and political potential for resolving conflict. The EU aspires to use a fourth generation, bottom-up framework for peacebuilding, in which respect for local identities, culture and rights trump national security, the market and law and order. However, this normative commitment has not materialized in EU peace operations in practice. At a time when three civilian missions have just been deployed on the African continent, this working paper argues that these shortcomings derive from a gap between the definition of what constitutes local civil society and the practices concerning its involvement in EU policies. Improving the understanding of how local civil society can be a partner for peace for the EU is critical for the success of EU missions in countries such as the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and EU Delegation tasks in countries such as Burundi.

Keywords: *European Union / Peacebuilding / Civil society / Burundi / Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)*

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Introduction

Social capital theory has recently been employed as framework to improve international peacebuilding policies. “[T]he norms and networks that enable people to act collectively” is a widely accepted definition of social capital.¹ The World Bank and other international development organizations have used the social capital argument to justify “social engineering” operations, alongside the usual physical reconstruction and renewal efforts in post-conflict settings.² Indeed, the role of civil society actors in peacebuilding and post-conflict reconstruction has gained increased recognition by EU policy-makers in the last decade and a number of EU instruments, such as the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights, the Civil Society Network facility, the Endowment for Democracy and capacity building programmes for local actors have been designed and put in place in EU missions during the last decade. At the same time, evidence points to somewhat disappointing results regarding local civil society inclusion in post-conflict programmes. This paper argues that this divergence is largely due to the EU’s idealized conception of civil society in post-conflict settings. What is considered “normal civil society”, that is, the civil society that fits those characteristics that experts elaborate and use to describe the average civil society organization, shades into the normative and moral, providing implicit criteria for their inclusion in or exclusion from EU programmes.³

This problem derives not merely from operational and practical shortcomings, but rather from a fundamental lack of clarity and coherence as to the rationale for civil society’s involvement in peacebuilding. At one level, civil society is seen as one of the fundamental elements of the model of social organization that should emerge from the peacebuilding process - civil society as an **end** in itself, that is, the reconstruction of a vibrant civil society as a third power after the state and the market. At another level, civil society is seen as a partner in the process - civil society as a **means** to achieve peace. This dichotomy is the result of the contradiction between a normative conception of EU civilian missions as a bottom-up endeavour and a practical

Paper prepared for the Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI), May 2013.

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¹ Michael Woolcock and Deepa Narayan, “Social Capital: Implications for Development Theory, Research, and Policy”, in *The World Bank Research Observer*, Vol. 15, No. 2 (August 2002), p. 225-249, <http://deepanarayan.com/pdf/papers/woolcock.pdf>.

² Pierre Englebert, *State Legitimacy and Development in Africa*, Boulder and London, Lynne Rienner, 2000, p. 59-60.

³ See a discussion of Foucault’s work *Madness and Civilization*, in Michael Merlingen, “Everything Is Dangerous: A Critique of ‘Normative Power Europe’”, in *Security Dialogue*, Vol. 38, No. 4 (December 2007), p. 435-453.

application of the more top-down global peacebuilding and statebuilding agenda designed by the UN and followed by most of its members and donors.

1. The EU Peacebuilding Framework and the European Security Strategy: towards a bottom-up approach to peacebuilding

The EU has been considered as a peace project⁴ and the Lisbon Treaty recognizes the link between the EU and peace, conflict prevention and security. The European Security Strategy in 2003, revised in 2008, set out an ambitious vision for greater EU coherence between civil and military instruments in the pursuit of external relations. It increasingly confirmed the EU's role as a security provider and gave it further scope for action. Given that EU enlargement brought the EU closer to "troubled areas", the Strategy highlighted the need to promote stability and good governance in the immediate EU neighborhood. Accordingly, regional conflict resolution became a priority within the EU's security agenda allowing it to deploy "the full spectrum of instruments for crisis management and conflict prevention at our disposal, including political, diplomatic, military and civilian, trade and development activities".⁵

The Union has already launched a total of 14 civilian missions since January 2003. It has given priority to four areas within the overall area of civilian crisis management: police, strengthening the rule of law, strengthening civilian administration, and civil protection. These civilian missions incarnate the EU's normative vocation. They are designed to diffuse universal norms through what Manners calls "overt diffusion"⁶ under a liberal peace philosophy based on human rights, good governance, democratic institutions and local ownership.⁷ They do not have military goals nor rely on military means and give priority to institutional-developmental goals over security aims.⁸ Yet many critical voices point to the fact that although the EU has renewed its instruments and legal framework, it has repeated the same mistakes of its formerly top-down approaches to peacebuilding, in spite of its claim to focus on civil society, local ownership and everyday needs.⁹ This emerging post-Lisbon EU framework for peace and security continues to equate building a just and durable peace with building liberal/neoliberal states.¹⁰

To be fair, our interviews did point out the fact that the EU tries to live up to its discourse and strategic partnership with Africa when it comes to promoting a

⁴ Nathalie Tocci, "The European Union, Civil Society and Conflict Transformation", in *MICROCON Policy Working Papers*, No. 1 (July 2008), p. 2, http://www.microconflict.eu/publications/PWP1_NT.pdf.

⁵ Council of the European Union, *A Secure Europe in a Better World. European Security Strategy*, Brussels, 12 December 2003, p. 11, <http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cmsUpload/78367.pdf>.

⁶ Ian Manners, "Normative Power Europe: A Contradiction in Terms?", in *Journal of Common Market Studies*, Vol. 40, No. 2 (June 2002), p. 245, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/1468-5965.00353>.

⁷ C.f. Oliver P. Richmond (ed.), *Peacebuilding. Critical Developments and Approaches*, London, Palgrave Macmillan, 2010.

⁸ Michael Merlingen, "Everything Is Dangerous: A Critique of 'Normative Power Europe'", cit., p. 444.

⁹ Giovanna Bono, "The Perils of Conceiving EU Foreign Policy as a 'Civilizing Force'", in *Internationale Politik und Gesellschaft*, H. 1/2006, p. 154, <http://library.fes.de/pdf-files/id/ipg/03647.pdf>.

¹⁰ Oliver Richmond, Annika Björkdahl and Stefanie Kappler, "The Emerging EU Peacebuilding Framework: Confirming or Transcending Liberal Peacebuilding?", in *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, Vol. 24, No. 3 (September 2011), p. 458.

comprehensive approach to conflict resolution, which involves the local level at all stages of the process. A new division at the heart of the European External Action Service is dedicated to Conflict Prevention, Peacebuilding and Mediation instruments. The unit works closely with civil society organizations (CSOs) as “a privileged partner by method”¹¹ in early warning and consultation throughout the Civil Society Dialogue Network.¹² Most consultations are, however, carried out with partners in Brussels, although sometimes activists from third countries are invited to Brussels to express freely their ideas without being subject to pressure from their own governments.¹³ At the same time, the division works closely with the Mediation and Support Unit of the United Nations Department of Political Affairs and the Bureaucratic Prevention and Recovery Unit of the United Nations Development Programme. Combining the budgetary and administrative needs and priorities of two big organizations in an efficient way while involving the locals can be a very difficult task. As one EEAS official put it: “bringing together drafting papers and working on a budget is not easy”.¹⁴ Nevertheless, throughout its official documents on development and peacebuilding,¹⁵ the EU defends a localized and contextualized model of peacebuilding, based on local needs. Moreover, more than any other international actor, it has the potential to move beyond the liberal UN model given its tendency to use normative power in its diplomatic relations and its internal *modus operandi* based on recognition, multi-level participation and differentiated identities in a post-Westphalian model of governance.

2. EU-Africa Partnership for Peace and Security: a not so easy relationship

The relation between Europe and Africa is heavily marked by its colonial past. The Africa-EU Partnership on Peace and Security was born out of the Joint Africa European Union Strategy signed at the Lisbon Summit in December 2007. The very first aim of the document is to improve structural political dialogue, including within the UN

¹¹ Interview EEAS official, Brussels, March 2013.

¹² CSDN is a three-year project funded by the Instrument for Stability aimed at facilitating dialogue on peacebuilding issues between civil society and EU policy-makers. It is coordinated by the European Peacebuilding Liaison Office (EPLO).

¹³ Interview EEAS official, Brussels, March 2013.

¹⁴ Interview EEAS official, Brussels, March 2013.

¹⁵ See, for example, SG/HR and European Commission, *Improving the coherence and effectiveness of the European Union action in the field of conflict prevention*, report presented to the Nice European Council, Nice, 7-9 December 2000,

http://www.consilium.europa.eu/ueDocs/cms_Data/docs/pressdata/EN/reports/98328.pdf; European Commission, *Participation of non-state actors in EC development policy* (COM(2002) 598 final), 7

November 2002, [http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=celex:52002dc0598:en:not](http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=celex:52002dc0598:en:not;);

European Commission, *Thematic Programme “Non-state Actors and Local Authorities in Development”*, (COM(2006) 19 final), 25 January 2006, [http://eur-](http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=celex:52006dc0019:en:not;)

[lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=celex:52006dc0019:en:not](http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=celex:52006dc0019:en:not); European Commission, *Thematic Programme for the promotion of democracy and human rights worldwide under the future Financial Perspectives (2007-2013)*, (COM(2006) 23 final), 25 January 2006, [http://eur-](http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=celex:52006dc0023:en:not;)

[lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=celex:52006dc0023:en:not](http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=celex:52006dc0023:en:not); Council, European Parliament and Commission joint statement on European Union Development Policy: *The European Consensus* (2006/C 46/01), OJ C 46 24.2.2006, [http://eur-](http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=celex:42006x0224%2801%29:en:not;)

[lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=celex:42006x0224%2801%29:en:not](http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=celex:42006x0224%2801%29:en:not); European Commission, *The roots of democracy and sustainable development: Europe’s engagement with Civil Society in external relations* (COM(2012) 492 final), 12 September 2012, [http://eur-](http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=celex:52012dc0492:en:not)

framework, Contact Groups, and the EU's Political and Security Committee (COPS-PSC) and EEAS structures. Indeed, the Partnership was conceived as an instrument to improve the security landscape both inside and outside Africa, but also to shift from focusing on external conflict resolution to strengthening African capacities to take control of the task itself. Since security was linked to development at the beginning of the 1990s in the dominant discourse of international organizations, local ownership and the partnership with civil society were seen as a prerequisite to legitimize external interventions and avoid the impression of paternalism and neocolonialism.¹⁶

The document lists eight thematic partnerships, one of them being “peace and security”. Its three top priorities are: enhanced dialogue on peace and security challenges, operationalization of the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA) and adequate funding for Africa-led peace support operations, all this with local civil society as a strategic partner.¹⁷ Although there is no specific mention of civil society in the Partnership, it was conceived of as a people-centered strategy and “local ownership” is asserted in several instances. The 2008 implementation report then recognized the “vital role civil society and NGOs might play as actors and partners”. However, despite formal commitments, civil society has not yet found adequate room to express itself and to have real impact on the decision-making process. This situation is exacerbated by considerable differences between the two sides, with African CSOs lagging behind their European counterparts in terms of human and economic resources and organizational and networking abilities. As a consequence, the discourse on engaging with the locals actually provides the EU with renewed legitimacy to retain a leading role in Africa.¹⁸ In addition, in the Great Lakes area, Common Security and Defence Policy missions such as EUPOL DR Congo or EUSEC DR Congo in principle ascribe to the aim of working with local civil society, since their ultimate goal is to ensure the sustainability of peacebuilding after international actors leave by engaging the locals. However, most initiatives remain limited to financial or technical assistance, without providing the opportunity for civil society to engage in the more political discussions about the very nature and aims of the projects presumably carried out for their benefit. As such, the sustainability of these projects ultimately depends on cooperation with local actors on the ground, in a situation where a clear mandate with determined, strategic and feasible objectives for achieving sustainable peace are most often lacking.

When analyzing EU policy towards third countries, Nicolaïdis and Howse¹⁹ point to a certain lack of reflexivity on the part of EU decision-makers who forget the Union's normative vocation while disseminating norms abroad. Conducting a micro-political analysis of EU programmes aimed at engaging civil society partners in the Great Lakes region reveals that although the EU aspires to use a fourth generation approach to

¹⁶ Simon Chesterman, “Ownership in Theory and in Practice: Transfer of Authority in UN Statebuilding Operations”, in *Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (March 2007), p. 9, <http://ssrn.com/abstract=969559>.

¹⁷ Interview EEAS official, Brussels, March 2013.

¹⁸ Bruno Charbonneau, “What Is So Special about the European Union? EU-UN Cooperation in Crisis Management in Africa”, in *International Peacekeeping*, Vol. 16, No. 4 (August 2009), p. 546-561.

¹⁹ Kalypso Nicolaïdis and Robert Howse, “‘This is my Eutopia...’: Narrative as Power”, in *Journal of Common Market Studies*, Vol. 40, No. 4 (November 2002), p. 767-792, <http://users.ox.ac.uk/~ssfc0041/Nic-Howse2002.pdf>.

peacebuilding, in practice it relies at best on a third-generation form of peacebuilding in which the Westphalian sovereign state, security and the rule of law are first priorities and where civil society acts only as a feedback partner engaged at the latest stages of the decision-making process. Two country snapshots will show the downside associated with this approach.

3. EU policy (in)coherence: civil society discourse and practice

When analyzing political discourses and official documents, it is clear that the EU has understood that local ownership is critical to root reforms and must engage in dialogue with local stakeholders. In its latest Communication related to the topic, the Commission defined CSOs as “all non-State, not-for-profit structures, non-partisan and non-violent, through which people organise to pursue shared objectives and ideals, whether political, cultural, social or economic. Operating from the local to the national, regional and international levels, they comprise urban and rural, formal and informal organisations. The EU values CSOs’ diversity and specificities”.²⁰ Nevertheless, few are the guidelines regarding when and how to work in practice with local actors on the ground. Interviews and participant observation at the operational level reveal that a certain type of local civil society is constructed, professionalized and privileged in order to be able to disburse EU funds and complete projects as smoothly and rapidly as possible. Efficiency is prioritized and the same civil society partners are always selected.²¹ Although investigating where this problem comes from appears to have been set aside as secondary in the quest for legitimacy in EU missions and delegations, we consider it of the utmost importance. Therefore, this section examines the policies and instruments put into practice in two countries of the Great Lakes area: Burundi and the Democratic Republic of Congo. After examining key official documents, I conducted a series of interviews with EU officials and local civil society partners in Burundi, DRC and Brussels in order to get a complete picture of the puzzle. In doing so, this paper focuses on the three categories used by the authors of a recent *IAI Research Paper* to analyze the limited achievements in CSOs’ participation in the Joint Africa-EU Strategy (JAES): the CSOs’ capacity and functions, the mechanisms for participation and the type of funding allocated²². It examines two cases: EUPOL DRC and the Oscar platform in Burundi. EUPOL DRC assists the Congolese authorities in Security Sector Reform (SSR) in the field of policing. But it also operates in cross-cutting areas of SSR, particularly human rights, gender, the protection of children in armed conflicts and the fight against impunity for sexual violence, areas traditionally requiring assistance from local civil society and local knowledge. The Oscar platform is a programme established by the EU Delegation in Burundi for capacity building and training dedicated to CSOs that also works in the areas of human rights, gender, children protection, agriculture and health. These are two different

²⁰ European Commission, *The roots of democracy and sustainable development...*, cit. para. 1(2).

²¹ An interviewee at the EEAS talks about 10 to 15 CSOs with whom the EEAS Conflict Prevention Division works on a daily basis.

²² See Valérie Vicky Miranda, “The Africa-EU Peace and Security Partnership and the Role of Civil Society”, in Nicoletta Pirozzi (ed.), “Strengthening the Africa-EU Partnership on Peace and Security. How to Engage African Regional Organizations”, in *IAI Research Papers*, No. 6 (October 2012), p. 87-92, <http://www.iai.it/content.asp?langid=2&contentid=803>.

bottom-up approaches to tackle critical issues in post-conflict settings for building sustainable peace.

4. EUPOL DRC and the Integrated Police Unit: local ownership by whom?

In close cooperation with the UN and local actors, the EU currently has two CSDP missions in the DRC: EUPOL and EUSEC. Their goal is to help restore a sustainable public and social order in the DRC, including the appropriate working of justice, police and army on the national territory. EUPOL DRC mostly offers technical advice, monitoring and overview of the implementation of the recently created Integrated Police Unit (IPU). This IPU was itself partly financed and trained by the UN, with support of the European Commission. For its part, EUSEC DRC is essentially concerned with issues of corruption in the Congolese Security Sector Reform (SSR). Its primary objective is to collaborate with local authorities to establish a proper chain of payment for the soldiers incorporated in the Congolese armed forces after the Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration programme comes to a close. Interestingly however, EUSEC was set up upon request of the Congolese government, unlike EUPOL, which was initiated under the United Nations Mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo (MONUC) mandate. This difference is important because it allows for a different engagement with local actors, donors and partners. EUPOL needs to work under the guidelines of MONUC, which can have a strong influence when deciding who the local partners are. This restriction does not exist in the case of EUSEC.

In the next months, 155 CSO representatives and community leaders of 7 neighborhoods in Kinshasa will organize a sensibilization session for the development of mutual trust between the police and local citizens and will participate in radio programmes. The aim is to instruct the community on what the Integrated Police Unit is and the importance of a partnership between the police and the population to ensure security. The main problem is that by engaging in Kinshasa only with CSOs from Kinshasa, not only does EUPOL forget the most marginalized groups who have suffered most from police abuses and who do not have the same conception of what constitutes security. Indeed, EUPOL interviewers kept on referring to “NGOs” when meaning civil society at large, forgetting a whole world of small business groups, women’s groups and church leaders from all rural areas of Congo, that do not fall into the NGO category and which have ambiguous relationships with the police. The effectiveness of the EUPOL mission will to a great extent depend on the inclusion of marginalized actors in its civil society partnership, rather than promoting the status quo and using only urban and English or French speaking NGOs that have been to a great extent co-founded by Western donors. On the same line, Pearce highlights the problems that a lack of engagement of local actors in decision-making and implementation can create, and claims that “rather than facilitating activities in each context that supported civil society actors to open up new spaces, build relationships in and across society, and advocate to the state, these actors have been drawn into implementing particular models of peace by the availability and steering effects of funding”.²³ However, early warning is the only function attributed to civil society

²³ Jenny Pearce, “Civil Society and Peace”, in Michael Edwards (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Civil Society*, Oxford and New York, Oxford University Press, 2011, p. 413.

partners by the Council in its conclusions on conflict prevention,²⁴ forgetting about implementation, monitoring and decision-making.

Furthermore, politics has also to do with the organizations' bias. CSOs that are in regions favored by the government usually receive more support than those that are out of the favored areas of the local power wielders. This has been a critical issue in terms of post-conflict resolution and the use of local civil society. Again, international donors seem reluctant to fund groups that have an uneasy relationship with the government. Indeed, local civil society groups are encouraged to promote reform, but not to upset the social-political order²⁵. In theory, missions such as EUPOL are generally supportive of the roles played by civil society, especially their balancing of the power of the state, checking its abuses, and organizing and supporting public acceptance of EUPOL. Nevertheless, in practice they are worried about being accused of interfering too much in the internal affairs of the country by the host government and that is why, for instance, no EU delegations are sent to the east of the country.²⁶ Therefore, the local ownership of the EU mission remains highly restricted. EEAS officials admit that "local ownership is very constraining and that there has to be a common understanding between local and international state and non-state actors about what these missions need to achieve. If there is not then it would be better to disengage from SSR in general, CSDP missions in particular, and better to disengage from United Nations Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO), because otherwise MONUSCO is going to stay forever and it is basically favoring the status quo rather than favoring change".²⁷

Another problem is that although it was made clear that the reconfiguration of the EU External Action Service would allow for a much closer link between security and development, and that the two CSDP missions would be transformed into development projects mainly directed by the EU Delegation, the coordination of projects on the ground working with civil society is still very limited. Separate budgets mean separate projects working with different actors. Interestingly, official documents by the European Council and the European Commission recognized this,²⁸ alongside the fact that there needs to be a comprehensive conflict analysis that understands the root causes of conflict and who the locals are.

²⁴ Council of the European Union, *Council Conclusions on Conflict Prevention*, 3101st Foreign Affairs Council meeting, Luxembourg, 20 June 2011, para. 5, http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/docs/pressdata/EN/foraff/122911.pdf.

²⁵ Darren Kew, *The Role of Civil Society Groups in Strengthening Governance and Capacity: Avenues for Support*, Paper presented at the conference on "Aid, Governance, and Development in Africa", Northwestern University, 12-14 May 2005, <http://www.northwestern.edu/africanstudies/docs/conference/May2005Conference/kew.pdf>.

²⁶ Interview with EEAS official, March 2013.

²⁷ Interview with EEAS official, March 2013.

²⁸ See for instance the ADE concept study *Thematic Evaluation of the European Commission Support to Conflict Prevention and Peace Building*, September 2010, http://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/how/evaluation/evaluation_reports/2010/1277_docs_en.htm.

5. The EU Delegation and the OSCAR programme in Burundi: towards the construction of civil society

One of the biggest EU projects in Burundi is the OSCAR platform. It was conceived as a place where local, small grassroots CSOs could meet, share ideas and receive training. The programme was born out of the observation that the application requirements and the reporting duties to access to EU funding are so cumbersome that only experienced and fully institutionalized CSOs can eventually receive EU funds. As one official in Brussels put it, “the priority is to fund international NGOs to build the capacity of local NGOs in order [for] those NGOs to be eligible for EU funding and have their own professional standards and records and start having a track record that makes them eligible for international funding”.²⁹ Up until now, all grassroots groups could register to participate in OSCAR. However, according to the Delegation, the considerable diversity and quantity of groups registered have impeded a smooth working of the programme, and revisions are being considered to concentrate only on CSOs working on strategic sectors for the EU - health and agriculture. The aim is to share best practices and provide training for those CSOs working on areas and projects of interest to the EU so as to improve the projects’ results. There are two important points to highlight here: 1) there is a need for a professionalization of CSOs before cooperation with the EU and its partners, and 2) CSOs are again understood exclusively as service providers: NGOs that are independent from the government and lack a clear political identity. Aid earmarked for civil society thus risks contributing to a profound transformation of the social and political fabric of local societies.³⁰

The difficulties that CSOs have in understanding the jargon of different EU calls for proposals as well as endless reporting duties for CSOs benefiting from EU funding³¹ makes it more difficult for EU projects to actually have an impact on the ground. OSCAR was born out of this frustration and a need to diversify funding allocations. However, the reverse trend currently being considered towards a professionalized managerial approach of aid allocation to civil society is detrimental to the variety, dynamism and rootedness of local civil society group,³² preventing the achievement of a durable peace and provoking an artificial and random distinction between what constitutes civil society and what does not. The overall impression is that NGOs and CSOs that are able to comply with technical requirements and paperwork will be the receivers of EU funds. The EU is thus somehow stuck in its own discourse on African civil society. The idea of partnership with local civil society legitimizes external interventions and avoids the impression of paternalism and neocolonialism, yet in practice EU aid policies bolster only local actors characterized by their efficiency and apolitical/technical approach.

²⁹ Interview EEAS, Brussels, March 2013.

³⁰ Benoît Challand, “Coming too late? The EU Mixed Approaches to Transforming the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict”, in MICROCON Policy Working Papers, No. 12 (June 2010), p. 5, http://www.microconflict.eu/publications/PWP12_BC.pdf.

³¹ Interview, EEAS, Brussels, March 2013.

³² Benoît Challand, “The Evolution of Western Aid for Palestinian Civil Society: Bypassing Local Knowledge and Resources”, in *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 44, No. 3 (May 2008), p. 397-417.

For Pouligny,³³ there are three main consequences of this approach to civil society: First, it limits the variety of organizational forms considered. Second, it conveys the idea of a clear distinction between what is political and what is not. Third, it tends to hide the distinctions made between indigenous and external NGOs. The major driver of the EU's approach - as evident from a scrutiny of official documents and interviewees in Brussels - is a quest for homogeneity, for ease, for a "common view" that does not exist in any society, even less in a post-conflict environment. As this homogeneity in civil society at home is not found, then it is constructed through a partial reinvention of a "local civil society" abroad. Programmes such as OSCAR are reminiscent of this approach.

6. Opportunities, procedural shortcomings and the EU interest

The conclusions we can draw from this micro analysis confirm that the procedures related to EU engagement with local civil society in post-conflict contexts have several shortcomings. These shortcomings come from an impossibility to find in practice an idealized conception of civil society and the consequent need to create one. Interviews with international officials in Brussels and in the field have shown that often they are under an external pressure to produce results quickly. The temptation to do things in order to build civil society instead of working with civil society is high, and so is the possibility of working with the thin segment of the population that has a specific set of Western credentials, such as education and English language proficiency.³⁴ What is meant by local participation and ownership in practice is therefore most often limited to elite NGOs. An elite which in many cases has little or no contact at all with the reality that the majority of the local population and grassroots groups are facing. In the case of the Great Lakes area, we find the same difficulties identified by Miranda³⁵, that is, the difficulty experienced by grassroots activists to join the institutional framework without transforming themselves first. The tendency to fund only professional NGOs comes at the expense of another type of funding: small-scale funding favouring grassroots organizations more in tune with a bottom-up approach. The gradual bureaucratization of aid also introduces technical criteria at the expense of political support. There is therefore great disillusion generated by the gap between EU rhetoric and its acts and facts on the ground. EU delegations are certainly aware of these criticisms and they have acknowledged these shortcomings, but seem paralyzed by an underlying unwillingness to change a status quo based on comforting quantifiable results and box checking.

The vital problem of this approach is the inability of EU officials to identify the associational ties that link a post-war society together. Therefore, the EU feels the need to create organizations similar to the apolitical and voluntary natured Western CSOs through platforms such as Oscar, in order to involve these organizations in so-

³³ Béatrice Pouligny, "Civil Society and Post-Conflict Peacebuilding: Ambiguities of International Programmes Aimed at Building 'New' Societies", in *Security Dialogue*, Vol. 36, No. 4 (December 2005), p. 495-510.

³⁴ Jens Narten, "Dilemmas of Promoting 'Local Ownership': The Case of Postwar Kosovo", in Roland Paris and Timothy D. Sisk (eds.), *The Dilemmas of Statebuilding. Confronting the Contradictions of Postwar Peace Operations*, London and New York, Routledge, 2009, p. 261.

³⁵ Valérie Vicky Miranda, "The Africa-EU Peace and Security Partnership and the Role of Civil Society", cit.

called bottom-up projects. That is, in order to enable local ownership as the best means to achieve durable peace, European peacebuilding must first create and shape the “local” to its liking. Therefore, the (re)construction of a local civil society becomes an end in itself for the EU. Programmes such as Oscar are then viewed as a way of helping civil society manage its autonomy. Through these institutionalist practices, external intervention is aimed at building or constituting civil societies “as a basis upon which the problems of societal development, inclusion and security can be resolved”.³⁶ Consequently, the process of peacebuilding and reconstruction that is understood in official documents and discourses as the self-(re)constitution of a demos, is now transformed into a technical task put into the hands of experts such as “governance professionals” or “gender mainstreamers”.³⁷

By focusing on the procedures carried out on the ground, this paper has analyzed the EU’s compliance with the values and principles of its peacebuilding strategy in its engagement with local civil society through its missions and delegations. Many local interviewees appreciated the various consultation forums and discussion platforms offered by the EU, such as OSCAR (previously ARCANE).³⁸ However, they do not believe that the input offered to the EU by them is seriously taken into account.

7. Recommendations for more effective EU engagement with local civil society via EU civilian operations

In this paper, we argue that the EU peacebuilding framework and its bottom-up approach has a lot of potential. The international success of the European model of peacebuilding will depend on how the civilian missions’ dynamics of involvement with civil society facilitate local peace processes and integration, without creating patterns of arbitrary domination³⁹ between Europeans and locals. Working with local civil society is essential for achieving durable peace, but only if the EU is prepared to break the rule of associating civil society with a certain local elite and NGOs. Of course, some might argue that if EU officials need to work on a case-by-case basis, this can mean becoming enslaved to hidden rules and local power dynamics. The key is in the elaboration of tools that allow EU personnel in the field to recognize which kind of existing civil society is truly able to make a difference in peacebuilding efforts on a case-by-case basis. Several recommendations here below can help in this complicated but worthy task.

Differentiate between civil society actors. Local civil societies are diverse. Hence, the EU should begin by making a pre-assessment of the socio-political context (at local level) to identify current postwar collective life organization systems, such as the local security “employees” in the Kivu area or women’s cooperatives at the Burundian

³⁶ David Chandler, “Race, Culture and Civil Society: Peacebuilding Discourse and the Understanding of Difference”, in *Security Dialogue*, Vol. 41, No. 4 (August 2010), p. 384, http://www.davidchandler.org/pdf/journal_articles/Security%20Dialogue%20-%20Civil%20Society.pdf.

³⁷ Michael Neocosmos, “Transition, human rights and violence: rethinking a liberal political relationship in the African neo-colony”, in *Interface*, Vol. 3, No. 2 (November 2011), p. 362, <http://www.interfacejournal.net/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2011/12/Interface-3-2-Neocosmos.pdf>.

³⁸ Interview, Bujumbura, December 2012.

³⁹ Michael Merlingen, “Everything Is Dangerous: A Critique of ‘Normative Power Europe’”, cit.

frontier with Congo. Additionally, civil society needs to be redefined during the different phases of a mission, so as to give room for improvement and rectification, and not only at the very end of a project. When carried out at the end of a project, actors which have not performed as required will have a very hard time getting funding or engaging in a partnership with international organizations and donors in future. This ends up in the exclusion of small partners that are not used to donor values and practices. In this regard, true local ownership through genuine partnerships is more important than homogenization. A conscious diversification of funds that prevents allocating funding to the same mid-to-top level CSOs over and over again is urgently needed.

Support public participation and sustainable livelihoods. Provide opportunities to local civil society to make proposals without the constraints set by EU guidelines and priorities (this is what local ownership should be about, beyond the implementation of EU priorities and the limited feedback to EU institutions). In addition, the EU should consider special funding for local groups dealing with land issues - particularly important in the Great Lakes. As we have seen before, rural grassroots groups are mainly peasants organizing themselves for collective work and revenues. Land is scarce and a lack of resources is the cause of stagnation in a “no war no peace” situation that prevents development. The Instrument for Stability offers the possibility of funding activities without setting the budget in advance, provided there is some urgency to address, and therefore this flexibility offers a clear opportunity to engage with these groups that are unable to respond to more structured calls for proposals.⁴⁰ Furthermore, for missions working on the rule of law and on police reform, the focus should be on promoting security and justice for the people. A detailed understanding of conflict dynamics is therefore needed and local civil society is particularly well positioned to provide it. This means that involving them throughout the whole process can lead to more efficient and sustainable policies.

Privilege long-term results. Following the recommendations of the Busan Declaration⁴¹, aimed at enhancing long-term impact instead of short-term results in donor policies is of the essence. Yet it is rarely done in practice. This is due to the fact that up until now EU delegations and missions have not engaged with local actors in a strategic way. There has been a lack of analysis sufficiently grounded on dialogue with local actors. It is essential that EU actors engage in a clear conflict analysis in order to identify the root causes of conflict, the different existing actors as well as the remaining gaps in order to build a more sensitive and politically refined approach for a durable peace. The recent EC Communication on engagement with civil society in external relations⁴² is a good first step in this direction. It stresses the role of civil society in inclusive policy-making and highlights the need to develop roadmaps for engagement

⁴⁰ Following the same line of reasoning, in its proposal for a regulation establishing common rules and procedures for the implementation of the Union's instruments for external action, the European Commission also acknowledged the need to facilitate the availability of EU assistance to CSOs by simplifying rules, reducing the costs of participation and accelerating the award of funds. See European Commission, *Proposal for a regulation establishing common rules and procedures for the implementation of the Union's instruments for external action* (COM(2011) 842 final), 7 December 2011, <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=celex:52011pc0842:en:not>.

⁴¹ *Busan Partnership for Effective Development Co-operation*, outcome of the 4th High Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness, Busan, 29 November-1 December 2011, <http://www.effectivecooperation.org/resources.html>.

⁴² European Commission, *The roots of democracy and sustainable development...*, cit.

with civil society at the country level which should then guide EU activities in the specific country and support collective action on behalf of the EU.

In sum, by using two empirical cases we brought into focus the deep ambiguity between the discourses and practices of EU missions, which technocratize local politics and actors. The legitimacy and the effectiveness of EU missions and programmes abroad can be seriously damaged by a poor inclusion of local civil society and local ownership.

Updated: 7 May 2013

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