

The EU's preventive diplomacy: Practice makes (not yet) perfect?



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IN-DEPTH ANALYSIS

The EU's preventive diplomacy: Practice makes (not yet) perfect?

ABSTRACT

The EU's approach to preventive diplomacy is embedded in a wider ambition to 'preserve peace, prevent conflicts and strengthen international security'. Given deteriorating security and increasing geopolitical tensions worldwide, it is evident that preventive diplomacy requires sustained and enhanced attention by the EU. Regarded as a credible and reliable partner – as well as an international frontrunner in preventive diplomacy – continued violence and conflict in Ukraine, Nagorno-Karabakh, Kosovo, and Israel/Palestine over the past months, increasing geopolitical tensions and competition, weakening multilateralism, and the complexity of violent geopolitical contexts worldwide prove that the EU must reassert its commitment to preventive diplomacy. The recommendations contained in this analysis chart a path forward to address implementation gaps, provide greater political steer to the EU's preventive engagement, contribute to more effective use of this tool, and ensure it is more centrally positioned in the integrated approach.

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List of abbreviations

ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
AU	African Union
CARP	Coordinated Annual Review on Prevention
CASs	Conflict Analysis Screenings
CFSP	Common Foreign and Security Policy
CIVCOM	Committee for Civilian Aspects of Crisis Management
DG ECHO	Directorate-General for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations
DG INTPA	Directorate-General for International Partnerships
DG NEAR	Directorate-General for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations
EEAS	European External Action Service
EP	European Parliament
EOM	Election Observation Missions
EUMM	EU Monitoring Mission
EUSRs	EU Special Representatives
FPI	Service for Foreign Policy Instruments
HRVP	High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy
IDA	In-Depth Analysis
IGAD	Intergovernmental Authority on Development
IPRM	Incident Prevention Response Mechanism
MEPs	Members of the European Parliament
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NDICI	Neighbourhood, Development, and International Cooperation Instrument
OSCE	Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe
SCAs	Structural Country Assessments
TEU	Treaty on the European Union

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Executive summary

The EU's approach to preventive diplomacy is embedded in a wider ambition to 'preserve peace, prevent conflicts and strengthen international security'. Given deteriorating security on several fronts and increasing geopolitical tensions, it is evident that preventive diplomacy requires sustained and enhanced attention by the EU.

The EU's preventive vocation is typically embedded in its policies in the fields of enlargement, trade, development cooperation, and humanitarian assistance, as well as its support for specific areas of work, such as human rights and migration. Following an overview of the EU's guiding documents and strategies, as well as indications on the options for action it has available, the following analysis discusses the strengths and gaps of the EU's preventive engagements. What is eminently clear is that the broad scope of the EU's work, its commitment to support local, national, and international actors, and its willingness to invest in preventive diplomacy are a core element of its integrated approach. An increased emphasis on conflict analysis and early warning, election support, and human rights, the appointment of EU Special Representatives, and the diplomatic work of the European Parliament are also significant factors in the EU's approach to preventing the outbreak or escalation of conflict. The EU uses different strategies and approaches as reflected in the case examples herein: taking a leading role in Kosovo and Colombia, contributing to a broader coalition approach in Georgia (where it works closely with the United Nations (UN) and the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE)), and through partnership with the African Union (AU) in the Horn of Africa. The prospect of EU accession is regarded as a key tool and has contributed to improvements in both Kosovo and Georgia, despite challenges in both contexts. The EU is regarded as a credible and reliable partner, as well as an international frontrunner in preventive diplomacy, due to its perceived impartiality and commitment to upholding core values and principles, as well as its willingness to stay involved and invest in the long term.

Yet, the EU also increasingly faces challenges in its efforts to prevent conflict, with external factors, such as increasing geopolitical tensions and competition and weakening multilateralism, exacerbating the challenges of engaging with complex, violent geopolitical contexts worldwide. The contexts the EU engages preventively in are ever-changing, with both structural risks that enable violence as well as a plethora of internal and external incentives to diverge from pathways towards sustainable peace. Furthermore, as the EU takes on a greater role as an international actor, specifically in security and defence matters, there are emerging tensions between its desire to project influence by taking on greater strategic responsibility and the EU's longstanding nature as a values-oriented, diplomatically focused actor grounding its external action in multilateral cooperation (lending to its reputation as legitimate and impartial). There is also the view that preventive work is not given sufficient attention, with the primary focus instead lying with crisis management, that there is a difficulty in 'selling' the need for preventive engagement, both internally and externally, and that funding programmes geared towards more long-term interventions could benefit from being complemented by bolstering short- to medium-term tools.

The analysis identified several gaps and deficiencies related to coordination and coherence, and it is recommended that the EU should consider several approaches to address these. The recommendations in this paper are intended to enhance and strengthen the EU's approach to preventive diplomacy, to contribute to more effective use of this tool, and to ensure it is more centrally positioned in the integrated approach.

Based on identified gaps and lessons learned, the four main recommendations stemming from this analysis are that:

1. The EU should politically renew its emphasis on prevention and preventive diplomacy;
2. The EU must improve the coordination, consistency, coherence, and sensitivity of its preventive engagements;
3. The EU must enhance political buy-in to the logic of prevention and reinforce the culture of prevention among EU Member States;
4. The EU must build its internal capacity and enhance its partnerships on matters of peace and prevention.

To give renewed emphasis and momentum to prevention and preventive diplomacy, the EU should consider institutionally upgrading preventive diplomacy. This should be done by establishing a new EU Peace and Prevention Hub reporting directly to the EEAS Secretary General that acts as a single-entry point for matters of prevention within the EEAS, enhanced regional cooperation, and increased capacity to engage on topics of conflict, peace, prevention, and diplomacy. Tasked by the European Council under the auspices of the incoming HRVP, this Hub should subsequently formulate an EU Agenda/Compact/Guidelines for Peace and Diplomacy that makes an effective case for joined-up preventive diplomacy and defines the scope and purpose of the EU's engagement. Institutional coherence and cooperation should be further developed by creating a Council Working Party/Committee on prevention and mediation and the establishment of an Integrated Political Preventive Action arrangement under its aegis. In addition, the rhetoric of a Team Europe approach implies the need to enhance cooperation with other actors, such as the European Parliament and EU Member States (as well as among EU Member States), by sharing analysis, lessons learned, good practice and success stories. The analysis lastly points to the need for increased collaboration with the UN and OSCE – in particular, to generate increased synergy and address common challenges.

Résumé

L'approche de l'UE en matière de diplomatie préventive s'inscrit dans une ambition plus large de 'préserver la paix, prévenir les conflits et renforcer la sécurité internationale'. Compte tenu de la détérioration de la sécurité sur plusieurs fronts et de l'augmentation des tensions géopolitiques, il est évident que la diplomatie préventive doit faire l'objet d'une attention soutenue et renforcée de la part de l'UE.

La vocation préventive de l'UE s'ancre dans ses politiques en matière d'élargissement, de commerce, de coopération au développement et d'aide humanitaire, ainsi que dans son soutien à des domaines d'action spécifiques, tels que les droits de l'homme et l'immigration. Après un aperçu des documents d'orientation et stratégiques de l'UE, ainsi que des indications sur les possibilités d'action dont elle dispose, l'analyse qui suit met en évidence les points forts et les lacunes des engagements préventifs de l'UE. Ce qui est éminemment clair, c'est que la vaste portée d'action de l'UE, son engagement à soutenir les acteurs locaux, nationaux et internationaux et sa volonté d'investir dans la diplomatie préventive constituent des éléments centraux de son approche intégrée. L'accent mis sur l'analyse des conflits et l'alerte précoce, le soutien aux élections et les droits de l'homme, la nomination de représentants spéciaux de l'UE et le travail diplomatique du Parlement européen sont également des facteurs importants dans l'approche de l'UE visant à prévenir le déclenchement ou l'escalade d'un conflit. L'UE utilise différentes stratégies et approches, comme le montrent les exemples suivants : elle joue un rôle de premier plan au Kosovo et en Colombie, contribue à une approche de coalition plus large en Géorgie (où elle travaille en étroite collaboration avec les Nations unies et l'Organisation pour la sécurité et la coopération en Europe (OSCE)), et s'appuie sur un partenariat avec l'Union africaine (UA) dans la Corne de l'Afrique. La perspective d'adhésion à l'UE est considérée comme un outil essentiel et a contribué à l'amélioration de la situation au Kosovo et en Géorgie, malgré les difficultés rencontrées dans ces deux contextes. L'UE est considérée comme un partenaire crédible et fiable, ainsi que comme un précurseur international en matière de diplomatie préventive, en raison de son impartialité perçue et de son engagement à respecter les valeurs et principes fondamentaux, ainsi que de sa volonté de rester impliquée et d'investir à long terme.

Cependant, l'UE est également de plus en plus confrontée à des défis dans ses efforts de prévention des conflits, avec des facteurs externes, tels que l'augmentation des tensions et de la concurrence géopolitiques et l'affaiblissement du multilatéralisme, qui exacerbent les défis liés à l'engagement dans des contextes géopolitiques complexes et violents dans le monde entier. Les contextes dans lesquels l'UE s'engage de manière préventive sont en constante évolution, avec à la fois des risques structurels qui favorisent la violence et une pléthore d'incitations internes et externes à s'écarter des voies menant à une paix durable. En outre, alors que l'UE joue un rôle plus important en tant qu'acteur international, en particulier dans les domaines de la sécurité et de la défense, des tensions apparaissent entre son désir de projeter son influence en assumant une plus grande responsabilité stratégique et la nature de longue date de l'UE en tant qu'acteur axé sur les valeurs et la diplomatie, qui fonde son action extérieure sur la coopération multilatérale (ce qui lui confère une réputation de légitimité et d'impartialité). Il est également estimé que le travail de prévention ne bénéficie pas d'une attention suffisante, l'accent étant plutôt mis sur la gestion des crises, qu'il est difficile de 'vendre' la nécessité d'un engagement préventif, tant à l'intérieur qu'à l'extérieur, et que les programmes de financement axés sur des interventions à plus long terme gagneraient à être complétés par un renforcement des outils à court et à moyen terme.

L'analyse ci-dessous a mis en évidence plusieurs lacunes et insuffisances liées à la coordination et à la cohérence, et il est recommandé à l'UE d'envisager plusieurs approches pour y remédier. Les recommandations formulées dans le présent document visent à améliorer et à renforcer l'approche de l'UE en matière de diplomatie préventive, à contribuer à une utilisation plus efficace de cet outil et à faire en

sorte qu'il occupe une place plus centrale dans l'approche intégrée. Sur la base des lacunes identifiées et des enseignements tirés, les quatre principales recommandations découlant de cette analyse sont les suivantes:

1. L'UE devrait politiquement remettre l'accent sur la prévention et la diplomatie préventive ;
2. L'UE doit améliorer la coordination, la cohérence et la sensibilité de ses engagements préventifs ;
3. L'UE doit améliorer l'adhésion politique à la logique de la prévention et renforcer la culture de la prévention parmi les États membres de l'UE ;
4. L'UE doit renforcer ses capacités internes et ses partenariats en matière de paix et de prévention.

Pour redonner de l'importance à la prévention et à la diplomatie préventive, l'UE devrait envisager d'améliorer la diplomatie préventive sur le plan institutionnel. Pour ce faire, elle devrait créer un nouveau centre européen pour la paix et la prévention, directement rattaché au secrétaire général du SEAE, qui servirait de point d'entrée unique pour les questions de prévention au sein du SEAE, de coopération régionale renforcée et de capacité accrue à s'engager sur les thèmes des conflits, de la paix, de la prévention et de la diplomatie. Chargé par le Conseil européen sous les auspices du futur HRVP, ce centre devrait ensuite formuler un Agenda/Pacte de l'UE pour la paix et la diplomatie qui plaiderait efficacement en faveur d'une diplomatie préventive commune et définirait la portée et l'objectif de l'engagement de l'UE. La cohérence et la coopération institutionnelles devraient être renforcées par la création d'un Instance préparatoire du Conseil de l'UE sur la prévention et la médiation, et la mise en place d'un dispositif intégré de l'UE pour une action politique préventive intégrée sous son égide. En outre, la rhétorique de l'approche 'Team Europe' implique la nécessité de renforcer la coopération avec d'autres acteurs, tels que le Parlement européen et les États membres de l'UE (ainsi qu'entre les États membres de l'UE), en partageant analyses, les enseignements tirés, les bonnes pratiques et les réussites. Enfin, l'analyse souligne la nécessité d'une collaboration accrue avec les Nations unies et l'OSCE, en particulier pour générer une synergie approfondie et relever des défis communs.

1 Introduction: The case for preventive diplomacy

With the end of the Cold War, the international community (led at the time by the collective West) observed that conflict around the world had not subsided and mass atrocities persisted. In fact, at the first-ever Summit of the UN Security Council (UNSC) Heads of State and Government in 1992, the rotating Security Council President (United Kingdom, then an EU Member State) wrote, on behalf of the 15 UNSC Heads of State and Government:

‘The absence of war and military conflicts among states does not in itself ensure international peace and security. The non-military sources of instability in the economic, social, humanitarian and ecological fields have become threats to peace and security. The United Nations membership as a whole, working through the appropriate bodies, needs to give the highest priority to the solution of these matters.’¹

Shortly thereafter, the entire international community’s shock at globally transmitted images of genocide in Rwanda and war in the Balkans gave way to more political calls of ‘never again’. At this time, the belief that prevention and peaceful conflict resolution required significant investment began to take hold, leading to a significant change in thinking among academic and policymaker communities regarding the merits and challenges of preventive diplomacy.²

Most recently, the resurgence of conflict in Europe, spanning from growing tensions in the Western Balkans, violent flare-ups in Nagorno-Karabakh with thousands of casualties, and increased violence in Israel and the occupied Palestinian territories, to a large-scale Russian war of aggression against Ukraine, have once again reminded policymakers of the worthy investment that preventive diplomacy entails – and perhaps, where the EU still has room to improve its preventive engagement.

Beyond geopolitical circumstances, the case for preventive engagement remains strong. In conflict settings, early prevention intervention between 2020 and 2030 could save 100 000–300 000 lives and generate a peace dividend of 3.2–9.9 billion USD, considering the cost of war, peacekeeping operations, and lost economic growth.³ According to estimates by the Institute for Economics and Peace, for each US dollar invested in prevention, 16 US dollars associated with the cost of conflict is saved in the long run.⁴

Considering the moral, geo-strategic and, economic imperatives of engaging to prevent the occurrence, escalation, re-emergence and spread of violence and conflict, this In-Depth Analysis (IDA) aims to provide input in the form of analysis and recommendations to the European Parliament’s Committee on Foreign Affairs’ (AFET) Recommendation to the Council, Commission, and High Representative/Vice President for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy (HRVP) assessing the EU’s approach to preventive diplomacy and suggesting a path forward for the improvement of the EU’s capacity and effectiveness in this field.

¹ UN Department of Public Information, Yearbook of the United Nations, Vol. 42, Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, New York (1992), p. 34: <https://www.un-ilibrary.org/content/books/9789210578097/read>.

² Lund, M., ‘Operationalising the Lessons from Recent Experience in Field-Level Conflict Prevention Strategies’ (January 2023), pp. 136–161.

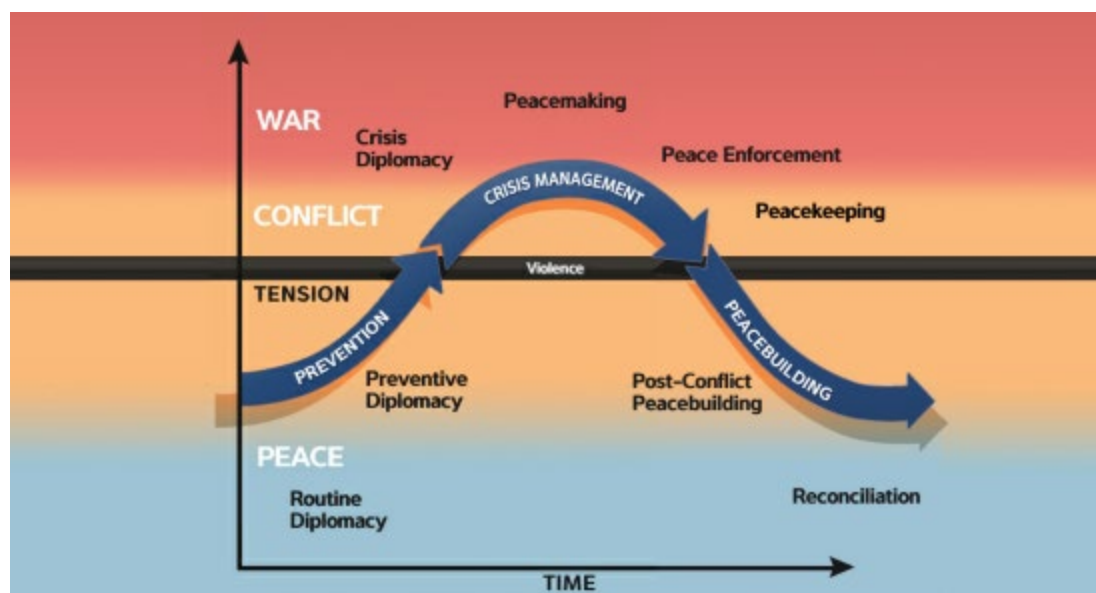
³ Pathfinders for Peaceful, Just and Inclusive Societies, ‘Forecasting the dividends of conflict prevention from 2020–2030’, *SDG16.1 Notes*, Vol. 1, Center on International Cooperation, New York (2020): <https://reliefweb.int/report/world/forecasting-dividends-conflict-prevention-2020-2030>.

⁴ Institute for Economics and Peace, ‘Measuring Peacebuilding Cost-Effectiveness’ (2017): https://www.visionofhumanity.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/Measuring-Peacebuilding_WEB-1.pdf.

2 EU preventive diplomacy goals and objectives

The shift observed in the 1990s entailed moving away from narrow understanding of conflict as the moment in which force is used or violence manifests, toward expanding the scope of analysis that views conflict as a cycle or curve that can generate a context-specific policy response at any point in the process (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. The curve of conflict



Source: United States Institute of Peace

According to the UN, preventive diplomacy is 'diplomatic action taken to prevent disputes from escalating into conflicts and to limit the spread of conflicts when they occur'.⁵ The conceptual focus of the definition blurs the lines of what could appear to be a linear conflict curve, referring to ways of preventing the emergence, re-emergence, escalation, and spread of violence and conflict. These watershed moments of the 1990s caused the perceived importance of preventive diplomacy (as well as peacebuilding and reconciliation) to gain traction alongside more traditional channels, such as routine diplomacy, crisis diplomacy, peace-making, peace enforcement, and peacekeeping. Just like the UN and other countries in the collective, the EU also took a similar view that diplomacy should be deployed as a key preventive action along the curve of conflict.

The logic of preventive diplomacy is in the genes of the EU – indeed at its very genesis – and elements of prevention emerge in all major strategy and policy documents of the EU in the realm of common foreign and security policy. Article 3 of the Treaty on the European Union (TEU) states that 'the Union's aim is to promote peace, its values and the wellbeing of its peoples', further specifying in Art. 21(2)(c) of the TEU that, among its purposes, the EU shall work to 'preserve peace, prevent conflicts and strengthen international security, in accordance with the purposes and principles of the United Nations Charter, with the principles of the Helsinki Final Act, and with the aims of the Charter of Paris, including those relating to external borders'.

⁵ UN Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs, 'Prevention and Mediation' (n.d.): <https://dppa.un.org/en/prevention-and-mediation>.

Since the Lisbon Treaty entered into force in 2009, the European Union has established and operationalised its diplomatic service, the European External Action Service (EEAS), to reinforce its pursuit of these objectives. Building on the EU Programme for the Prevention of Violent Conflicts, also known as the 'Gothenburg Programme', the Council of the EU adopted Conclusions on Conflict Prevention in 2011, which called for efforts to strengthen EU early warning, reinforce conflict risk analyses, and translate these efforts into the early design of 'viable, operational, coherent and realistic options for preventive action', including mediation.⁶ In doing so, the Council reaffirmed the importance of working with partners such as the UN, OSCE, NATO, World Bank, and African Union, among others.

In the 2016 EU Global Strategy, then-HRVP Federica Mogherini re-stated the idea that following up on early warning with early action (inter alia, preventive diplomacy) requires:

'Regular reporting and proposals to the Council, engaging in preventive diplomacy and mediation by mobilising EU Delegations and Special Representatives, and deepening partnerships with civil society. We must develop a political culture of acting sooner in response to the risk of violent conflict'.⁷

In doing so, the HRVP suggested that the EU 're-double [...] efforts on prevention, monitoring root causes such as human rights violations, inequality, resource stress and climate change, [...] pandemics and displacement'. It also recommended that the EU strengthen situational awareness and targeted preventive approaches; partner up with the UN, international financial institutions, and regional organisations; and deepen calls for local ownership of prevention measures.

The EU's 2017 Joint Communication on 'A strategic approach to resilience in the EU's external action' further elaborated on root causes and partnership, stating that the EU should:

'Strengthen its work on conflict prevention and peacebuilding through introducing a resilience dimension that puts a stronger emphasis on a more complete, shared analysis, engagement at community and state level, and, where appropriate, the rolling out of the integrated approach to conflict and crisis set out in the EU Global Strategy'.⁸

An emerging emphasis on early warning and analysis upstream was accordingly mirrored by the importance given to socio-economic development cooperation, under the heading of resilience, in the European Commission's funding instruments (programming) in third countries.

The diplomatic angle, however, had not been left by the wayside. The importance of mediation was once again recalled by the January 2018 Council Conclusions on the Integrated Approach to External Conflicts and Crises.⁹ In these Conclusions, the Council of the EU highlighted the work carried out by the EU, notably through the EU conflict Early Warning System. The Conclusions again pointed to the importance of diplomatic engagement, particularly mediation, stating that the EU should 'further build up the mediation capacities of the EEAS to assist in prevention and resolution of local and national conflicts and further work on the ability to rapidly deploy mediation expertise to EU Delegations and in support of other international

⁶ Council of the European Union, 'Council Conclusions on Conflict Prevention', 3101st Foreign Affairs Council, Luxembourg (20 June 2011): https://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/docs/pressdata/EN/foraff/122911.pdf.

⁷ European Union External Action Service, 'A Global Strategy for the European Union's Foreign and Security Policy', *Shared Vision, Common Action: A Stronger Europe* (June 2016): https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/global-strategy-european-unions-foreign-and-security-policy_en.

⁸ European Commission, 'A Strategic Approach to Resilience in the EU's external action', JOIN(2017) 21 (7 June 2017): https://www.eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/join_2017_21_f1_communication_from_commission_to_inst_en_v7_p1_916039.pdf.

⁹ Council of the European Union, 'Council Conclusions on the Integrated Approach to External Conflicts and Crises', 5413/18, Brussels (22 January 2018): <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-5413-2018-INIT/en/pdf>.

and regional organisations'. The December 2018 Council Conclusions on Women, Peace and Security consider the importance of approaching preventive diplomacy through a gender lens.

In terms of better tailoring EU early action (formulated based on its early warning tools), the 2021 Neighbourhood, Development, and International Cooperation Instrument for a Global Europe (NDICI) has further required the EU to conduct in-depth conflict analysis to ensure that EU programming and external action in fragile and conflict-affected contexts is context- and conflict-sensitive.

The March 2022 EU Strategic Compass for Security and Defence also reiterated the importance of preventive diplomacy, and called on the EU to translate analysis capacities and early warning systems (including through horizon scanning and gender-responsive conflict analyses) into preventive engagement, including enhanced partnerships with the UN, OSCE, African Union (AU) and ASEAN.¹⁰ One of the Strategic Compass's deliverables, the recently-published Civilian Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) Compact¹¹, aims to address how the EU can enhance the effectiveness of its civilian CSDP missions. By formally recognising that preventive diplomacy can also occur under the auspices of and through civilian capacity building, the Compact has added a civilian (non-military) operational dimension to the EU's conflict prevention toolkit.

And yet, despite the political commitment of EU Member States expressed in the Treaties and confirmed in strategic documents and Council Conclusions, observers from civil society and academia alike have pointed to several areas of improvement for the EU's preventive engagement. Specifically, the EU has faced limits in deploying its full prevention toolkit because of a persisting early warning–early action gap, insufficient cooperation with other international partners, poor intra-EU coordination (including on civil–military matters), and a lack of local ownership for EU initiatives.¹² Furthermore, structural challenges, such as internal contestation (e.g. diverging or 'heterogeneous' views within the Council and between EU Member States in third countries¹³), regional fragmentation (e.g. spillover of conflict, or limited regional governance mechanisms), and multipolar contestation (e.g. competing narratives and foreign interference) can serve to limit the full deployment of the EU's prevention toolkit.¹⁴

Considering the EU's keen interest in preventive diplomacy (and the need to update the analysis of the EU's approach), the urgency of geopolitical circumstances, and the clear, quantifiable benefits of preventive action, this IDA pursues three objectives.

First, it will outline the EU's preventive diplomacy toolbox in a structured way, including identifying all relevant actors (European Commission, EEAS, Council of the EU, European Parliament, relevant EU Member States, and international partners) involved. The IDA will examine where there has been an effective integrated approach, what the gaps are, and how to strengthen this type of internal collaboration.

Second, basing itself off a review of the literature, as well as 12 one-hour interviews with EU officials, key informants, and international stakeholders, this analysis will investigate how these key building blocks

¹⁰ Council of the European Union, 'A Strategic Compass for Security and Defence' 7321/22, Brussels (21 March 2022): <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-7371-2022-INIT/en/pdf>.

¹¹ Council of the European Union, 'Conclusions of the Council and of the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States', Meeting Within the Council, on the Establishment of a Civilian CSDP Compact, 9588/23, Brussels (22 May 2023): <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/64515/st09588-en23.pdf>.

¹² Juncos, A. E., Blockmans, S., 'The EU's Role in Conflict Prevention and Peacebuilding: Four Key Challenges', *Global Affairs*, Vol. 4, No 2-3, University of Amsterdam (2018), pp. 131–140.

¹³ European Institute of Peace, 'Time to step up EU mediation?' (June 2020): <https://www.eip.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/817-EIP-Mediation-FINALpdf.pdf>.

¹⁴ Crosson, D.M., Bargués, P., Paikin, Z., Blockmans S., 'Multi-Layered Actions? Sustaining Partnerships in the EU Integrated Approach to Conflicts and Crises', *JOINT Research Papers*, No. 7 (December 2021).

(e.g., conflict analysis, early warning, partnerships, mediation, etc.) contribute to the EU's preventive diplomacy efforts. This analysis will seek to assess the strengths and weaknesses of the approach, with illustrative case examples showing how these different instruments can form part of an integrated preventive diplomacy approach. This assessment will inevitably lead to identifying gaps in the EU's foreign policy where its preventive diplomacy efforts can be reinforced.

Thirdly, based on identified gaps, lessons learned, and the identification of tools and practices of international organisations engaged in preventive diplomacy – such as the UN, the OSCE, and the AU – this analysis will provide recommendations on how to improve the effective deployment of the EU's preventive diplomacy toolbox.

3 The EU approach to preventive diplomacy on paper

3.1 Scope of analysis

The EU's approach to preventive diplomacy is embedded in a wider ambition to 'preserve peace, prevent conflicts and strengthen international security'. Through the lens of the integrated approach, conflict prevention entails several levels of action, spelled out by the EU Global Strategy as follows:

'The EU will act at *all stages of the conflict cycle*, acting promptly on prevention, responding responsibly and decisively to crises, investing in stabilisation, and avoiding premature disengagement when a new crisis erupts. The EU will act at *different levels of governance*: conflicts such as those in Syria and Libya have *local, national, regional and global dimensions* which must be addressed. Finally, none of these conflicts can be solved by us alone. Sustainable peace can only be achieved through comprehensive agreements rooted in *broad, deep and durable regional and international partnerships*, which the EU will foster and support [*emphasis added*].'¹⁵

The EU's work in conflict prevention and preventive diplomacy is extensive, and encompasses its political and financial support for the multilateral system (e.g., support for the UN, and regional organisations such as the AU and ASEAN), its overall policies in trade, development, and humanitarian assistance, as well as its support for specific areas of work, such as human rights and migration. Indeed, prevention is central to the work of the EU and, as one EU official put it, 'almost everything [the EU does] is preventive diplomacy'.¹⁶

Conflict prevention may broadly include 'any structural or intercessory means to keep intrastate or interstate tensions and disputes from escalating into significant violence and use of armed force, to strengthen the capabilities of potential parties to violent conflicts for resolving such disputes peacefully, and to progressively reduce the underlying problems that produce those issues and disputes'. As such, conflict prevention is 'not a specific policy sector in itself', but rather a transversal lens that should be applied to major policy sectors and associated institutions/services: development, democracy-building, human rights, military affairs, environment, education, health, agriculture, and so on, as well as commercial activity, such as international trade, finance, and natural resource development.¹⁷ As such, this definition takes a

¹⁵ Council of the European Union, 'Conclusions of the Council and of the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States', Meeting Within the Council, on the Establishment of a Civilian CSDP Compact, 9588/23, Brussels (22 May 2023): <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/64515/st09588-en23.pdf>.

¹⁶ Interview 7.

¹⁷ Lund, M., 'Operationalising the Lessons from Recent Experience in Field-Level Conflict Prevention Strategies' (January 2023), pp. 136–161.

more expansive view to preventive engagement compared to notions such as the Humanitarian-Development-Peace nexus and the Security-Development nexus.

The EU's conflict prevention action can, and should, therefore be described as multi-dimensional (involving several policy fields – see Table 1), multi-level (from the broader region to the local level), multi-actor (involving several partners, including EU Member States and international organisations), and intended to be deployed sustainably over time across the conflict curve.

Table 1. Areas of implementation of the EU's conflict prevention toolbox

1.	Political–diplomatic
2.	Developmental–societal
3.	Economic–financial
4.	Climate–environmental
5.	Security–defence

This IDA focuses on the *preventive* element (see Figure 1) via *political-diplomatic means* (point 1 in Table 1). Because the EU often engages externally via an integrated approach that combines more than one policy field along a conflict curve that is non-linear, it can sometimes be difficult to discern the 'preventive diplomacy' approach from the EU's wider external action. Preventive diplomacy actions can also be carried out by a series of EU institutions and bodies, or a combination thereof: the EEAS, the European Commission, the European Parliament, the European Council, and EU Member States. Furthermore, given the range and complexity of contexts in which the EU is operating and the number of international actors engaging in preventive diplomacy, the analysis will focus on a select number of EU efforts in this area, both where it takes the lead, as well as where the EU has partnered or supported broader coalitions of actors.

Preventive diplomacy in the EU mainly refers to two intertwined action areas: 1) identifying opportunities to address the structural and proximate causes of conflict and 2) creating spaces for dialogue. The former seeks to identify, and indeed implement, preventive measures to mitigate the risk of conflict deriving from fragilities related to legitimacy, rule of law, security, inter-group relations, human rights, civil society and media, climate and environment, economic factors, and regional stability. The latter aims to gather information about entry points for mediation activities or support for those activities. These actions can, in turn, be undertaken in partnership with international and regional organisations and project implementers.

Evaluating the effectiveness of preventive work is inherently difficult. First, from a practitioner's standpoint, it is hard to measure the counter-factual outcome of non-preventive diplomacy and linking continuous engagement – political consultations, development cooperation programming, and specific projects – to specific outcomes of non-conflict or non-violence. While some preventive diplomacy interventions contribute to a clear result, such as a ceasefire or a signed agreement, many are focused on building trust, defusing tensions, and encouraging and supporting the parties to engage in dialogue or negotiations.

The idea of 'preventive diplomacy' can also be broadly interpreted with no clear consensus, partially due to differing institutional interests on what activities are included under this umbrella term, where most activities (trade, development cooperation, humanitarian assistance, democracy and human rights promotion, etc.) are to some extent preventive, as the EU aims to address the root causes of conflict. Given an overwhelming focus of the EU on crisis *management* rather than prevention, and because of challenges

with attribution and scarcity of data on preventive action, interviewees noted that prevention is ‘hard to sell’ (in-house and externally).¹⁸

The direct link between process and outcome is therefore more difficult to assess. The UN recommends that, in cases where results are difficult to identify, greater focus should be placed on ‘how the intervention was conducted, whether it was appropriately designed and implemented’. UN Guidance on Assessing preventive diplomacy¹⁹ outlines differing perspectives on how to assess the effectiveness of preventive work, and on the timeframe in which the assessment should take place to strike the right balance between embedding it in longer-term structural reform programmes or focusing efforts on urgent needs. In this sense, it argues that²⁰:

‘In the context of imminent violence, too much focus on structural factors, root causes and institutional weaknesses may overlook the immediate interests of the political and military elites capable of driving a situation towards or away from large-scale human suffering. Preventive diplomacy does and should remain largely focused on agency and the core tasks of persuasion and political deal-making with the protagonists of the conflict’.²¹

In assessing the effectiveness of the EU’s work in preventive diplomacy, this analysis focuses on two main criteria: the process itself (how intervention is designed, conducted, and implemented) and its sustainability (the extent to which efforts are sustained and linked to more long-term strategies).

3.2 EU preventive diplomacy methodology

The EEAS – with the support of European Commission services such as the Directorates-General for International Partnerships (DG INTPA) and Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations (DG NEAR), and the Service for Foreign Policy Instruments (FPI) – is the chief protagonist of the EU’s preventive diplomacy engagements. Within the EEAS, an important driver of preventive diplomacy efforts is the Conflict Prevention sector within the Division on Peace, Security, and Defence Partnerships, operating in tandem with units working on peace, security, and resilience in DGs INTPA and NEAR, as well as ‘rapid response’ teams in FPI.

Methodologically speaking, the EU’s efforts to prevent conflict were most recently updated in September 2023, with a new joint staff working document, the ‘Updated toolset for EU Conflict Analysis and Conflict Early Warning: Objectives, processes and guidance’.²² The identification of opportunities for preventive diplomacy begins with the evidence-based prioritisation of countries for analysis via the Global Conflict Risk Index, which assesses the risk of conflict over the next four years based on 22 structural risk factors; Armed Conflict Location and Event Data conflict and protest trends²³; the intelligence reporting produced by the divisions of the Single Intelligence Analysis Capacity; and other internal reporting, such as monthly Horizon Scanning notes identifying trends and triggers of violence over a six month period (soon to be complemented by a Dynamic Conflict Risk Model), and the input of conflict prevention focal points across the Commission services. Following inter-service consultation, countries/regions presenting a latent or

¹⁸ Interviews 3 and 4.

¹⁹ United Nations University Centre for Policy Research, ‘Assessment Framework for UN Preventive Diplomacy: An Approach for UN Mediators and International Policymakers’ (April 2018).

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid, p. 13.

²² European Commission, ‘Updated Toolset for EU Conflict Analysis and Conflict Early Warning Objectives, Processes and Guidance’, SWD(2023) 295 (1 September 2023): <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-12580-2023-INIT/en/pdf> https://www.eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/eugs_review_web_0.pdf.

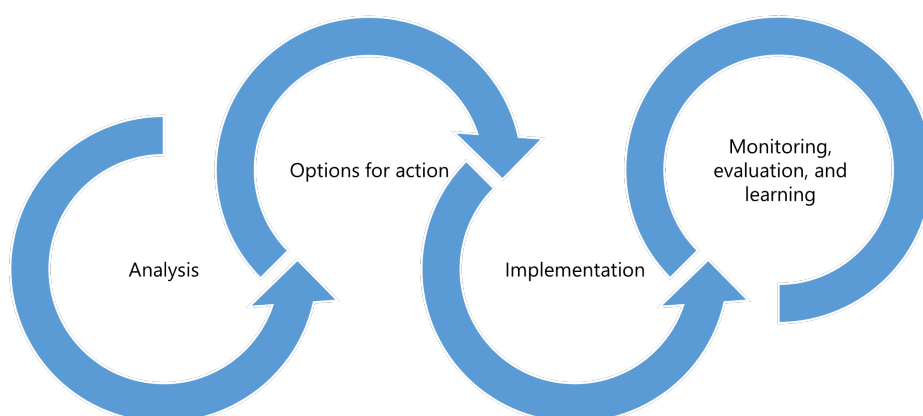
²³ Joint Research Centre, Global Conflict Risk Index: <https://science4peace.jrc.ec.europa.eu/mapping/Home/About-GCRI>; Armed Conflict Location and Event Data project: <https://acleddata.com/>.

acute risk of conflict and where the EU carries an interest, presence, leverage, and financial programming are then selected by EEAS and European Commission management as opportunities for preventive engagement.

Once opportunities (i.e. countries/regions) have been identified and communicated to EU Member States, analysis is carried out by EU Delegations, primarily in the form of Structural Country Assessments (SCAs) for countries/regions with a latent risk of conflict over the following four years, and Conflict Analysis Screenings (CASs) for countries with an acute risk or ongoing conflict, with the participation of EU Delegations around the world. SCAs aim to identify options for medium- to long-term preventive engagement, while CAS exercises aim to form a joint understanding of conflict drivers, stakeholders, scenarios, and risks to the conflict sensitivity of the EU's engagement, in order to frame short- to medium-term options for EU preventive engagement.

Regional conflict analyses aim to assess 'transnational threats, inter-state tensions, actual or potential spillovers and options for regional EU engagement' based on the CAS methodology. Analyses on other thematic issues, such as climate, violent extremism, electoral violence, hybrid threats, economic fragility, and women, peace, and security, may also be provided on request.²⁴

Figure 2. Cyclical steps leading to preventive engagement



Based on this evidence-based and inclusive process, country/regional/thematic action plans are drawn up that prioritise policy areas of engagement, outline the main risks of engagement, and provide recommendations for preventive and peacebuilding action. The types of actions carried out in the political-diplomatic realm to address identified structural and proximate causes of conflict and create opportunities for dialogue are manifold. As such, their resourcing is also variable, ranging from standard diplomatic engagement to development and technical assistance programmes that also serve as confidence-building mechanisms, as well as civilian CSDP missions meant to build the capacities of third countries. Based on an overview of the EU's activities and policies, see Table 2 for examples of possible options for preventive diplomacy that may be undertaken.

Monitoring of the implementation of these action plans by EEAS headquarters, Commission services, EU Delegations, and thematic field offices (e.g. FPI or DG ECHO offices) is subsequently carried out over two

²⁴ European Commission, 'Updated Toolset for EU Conflict Analysis and Conflict Early Warning Objectives, Processes and Guidance', SWD(2023) 295 (1 September 2023); <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-12580-2023-INIT/en/pdf>
https://www.eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/eugs_review_web_0.pdf.

years to ensure the ‘recommendations lead to timely and effective action, shape political engagement, inform strategic planning, steer conflict-sensitive programming and trigger concrete action’.²⁵ The EEAS is subsequently in the lead in terms of providing political steer to preventive diplomatic engagement, which can take several forms in the action plans. In turn, many of these potential actions require EU Delegation input and buy-in, DGs INTPA and NEAR’s development cooperation and accession funding, as well the implementation of FPI actions in a joined-up way that matches the spirit of the EU’s integrated approach to conflicts and crises.

The EU’s cooperation with EU Member States on this prioritisation of opportunities and identification of options for preventive diplomacy includes information sharing in the selection phase within (geographic) Council Working Parties, involvement in the analysis *in loco* between EU Delegations and EU Member State diplomatic representations, and a general discussion of the options for action, as well as follow-up again within the Council Working Parties. The EEAS and interested EU Member States also engage in a semi-regular exchange of knowledge and best practices on conflict prevention through the Early Warning/Early Action Forum.

Table 2. Examples of possible diplomacy-related actions for EU preventive engagement (involved actors italicised in parentheses)

Human rights, rule of law, civil society, democracy, and legitimacy
EU election observation and expert missions (<i>EEAS, European Parliament</i>)
Electoral assistance and democracy support (<i>EEAS, European Commission, FPI, European Parliament</i>)
Inter-parliamentary exchanges (<i>European Parliament, EU Member State parliaments</i>)
Human rights monitoring and support of human rights defenders (<i>EEAS, FPI, European Parliament</i>)
Support to peace education (<i>EEAS, FPI</i>)
Rapid response financial support to civil society organisations and media (<i>FPI, EEAS</i>)
Support to rule of law reform, alternative dispute resolution, and transitional justice mechanisms (<i>EEAS, European Commission</i>)
Mediation, dialogue, negotiations, and international law
Mediation and dialogue support, including support to insider mediation (<i>EEAS, European Council, European Parliament</i>)
Deployment of EUSRs/Special Envoys (<i>Council of the EU, EEAS</i>)
Providing good offices (<i>EEAS, European Council</i>)
Political consultations (<i>EEAS, European Council, European Parliament</i>)
Shuttle diplomacy (<i>EEAS, European Council</i>)
(Temporary) deployment of thematic attachés to Delegations (<i>EEAS, European Commission</i>)
Evidence collection and initiation of international legal cases (<i>EEAS, European Commission</i>)
Negotiating and concluding international agreements (e.g., arms control agreements) (<i>EEAS, European Commission, Council of the EU</i>)
Support to inter-party dialogue in third country parliaments (<i>European Parliament</i>)
Public diplomacy
Strategic communications and joint messaging with international partners (<i>EEAS, FPI, EU Member States, European Council, European Parliament</i>)
Countering dis-/misinformation campaigns (<i>EEAS, FPI, EU Member States, European Parliament</i>)

²⁵ Ibid.

Promoting people-to-people exchanges (e.g., Erasmus+, Horizon Europe) (<i>European Commission, European Parliament</i>)
Awareness-building
Support for establishing local early warning systems (<i>EEAS, FPI</i>)
Sharing best practices and lessons learned (<i>EEAS, European Commission, FPI, European Parliament</i>)
Support to evidence/data collection, violence mapping, witness accounts, and situational awareness (<i>EEAS, FPI</i>)
Sensitisation campaigns on children in armed conflict and sexual/gender-based violence (<i>EEAS, FPI</i>)
Technical support, development cooperation and capacity building
Providing support on good governance (<i>EEAS, European Commission</i>)
Technical assistance and public administration capacity building in support of confidence-building mechanisms (<i>EEAS, European Commission</i>)
Support to land governance reform processes (<i>EEAS, European Commission</i>)
Support to security sector reform processes and disarmament, demobilisation, and reintegration (<i>EEAS, European Commission</i>)
Establishing civilian and military CSDP missions (<i>EEAS, Council of the EU</i>)

The identification of some preventive diplomacy options for action, however, originates in separate processes. While the Conflict Prevention sector of the EEAS conducts electoral violence risk assessments, some of which inform the decision to undertake an election observation, expert, or follow-up mission in a third country, the selection of election-related missions primarily occurs in the absence of such an assessment, based on 'invitations received from countries and recommendations from geographical units within the EEAS' and deliberated within the 'Values and Multilateral Relations' directorate of the EEAS. Subsequently, 'the HRVP decides on the annual priorities and on the missions to be deployed, after consultation with both Member States [via the Council of the EU] and the European Parliament'.²⁶ The decision to take a mission is made based on an exploratory mission that aims to assess '[...] Consistency with the EU policy in the country, particularly regarding structured and continued support to democratisation; added value of an EU Election Observation Mission (EOM) to an electoral process by increasing voters' confidence and enhancing transparency; and follow-up to previous electoral observation missions'. If observation moves ahead, a Member of the European Parliament is nominated as Chief Observer. Often involved in this regard is European Commission-funded Election Observation and Democracy Support to train election observation specialists (including third country nationals), as well as conduct media monitoring to assess the information environment in the third country.

EOMs are also viewed as a successful preventive diplomacy tool, with over 200 missions deployed in more than 75 countries since 2000. These missions 'enhance the EU's engagement with partner countries, including in support of their efforts to fulfil their international human rights obligations, and are a concrete example of the EU's commitment to supporting democracy and promoting human rights around the world'.²⁷ For example, the 2015 EOM in Tanzania convened a roundtable for government, policy, and political parties to prevent electoral violence, a strategy that was also applied in Kenya in 2017. In the 2023

²⁶ European Union External Action Service, 'Election Observation and Democracy Support to EU EOMs' (7 August 2023): https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/eu-election-observation-missions-1_en#54477.

²⁷ European Union External Action Service, 'Election Observation and Democracy Support to EU EOMs' (7 August 2023): https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/eu-election-observation-missions-1_en#54477.

Zimbabwe elections, the EU EOM co-ordinated with the AU and Southern Africa Development Community on statements about the inadequacy of the electoral progress.²⁸ Interviewees highlighted the contribution of the EU in the Nigerian election process in 2019 and the Sierra Leone elections in 2023, presenting these as models of good practice in preventive diplomacy.²⁹ Also of relevance are European Parliament-initiated programmes on promoting inter-party dialogue in third country national parliaments, inter-parliamentary assemblies and exchanges, parliamentary capacity-building, and peace education in non-EU countries, all of which may help mitigate risks of electoral violence.³⁰

Mediation and dialogue support, too, may have a distinct genesis. Like their colleagues in the Conflict Prevention team in the Peace, Security and Defence Partnerships Division, the Mediation team prioritises opportunities for mediation support on a yearly basis through the EEAS Mediation Task Force and oversees the implementation of mediation engagements. These activities are supported by internal expertise developed through the EEAS Pool of EU Peace Mediators, focal points working throughout the EEAS, and funding to the European Resources for Mediation Support project that can provide 'assistance to conflict parties, third party mediators and groups participating in inclusive peace processes on short notice'.³¹ The types of mediation functions that can be carried out for preventive diplomatic ends are manifold: leading mediation, facilitating mediation, opening dialogue spaces, accompanying mediation, co-ordinating mediation, supporting the mediation efforts of third parties, funding mediation, and promoting mediation good practices. To do so, the EEAS provides operational support, deploys mediation experts, delivers training on mediation and peace processes, provides guidance on mediation (based on lessons learned), and collaborates with partners to provide similar mediation support services.

The mediation team also supports the work of EU Special Representatives and EU Delegations, and Track 2 mediation (such as engagement with local authorities in Somalia³² and a range of mediation work in Yemen). In fact, the bulk of the EU's activities are in support of those led by other parties: 'Between 2014 and 2019, the EU sponsored more than 60 initiatives by third parties in the domain of mediation and dialogue through its (former) Instrument contributing to Stability and Peace (IcSP), and another 33 mediation and preventive diplomacy efforts by African regional organisations through its Early Response Mechanism of the African Peace Facility between 2012 and 2016'.³³ The European Council, specifically the current President of the European Council, has also been involved in providing mediation support services, particularly as a facilitator of dialogue regarding conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh.

Further preventive diplomacy activities take place through the offices of EU Special Representatives (EUSRs). Numbering 10 as of October 2023 – 9 geographically focused and 1 thematic EUSR for Human Rights – EU Special Representatives may be appointed by the Council of the EU 'with a mandate in relation to particular policy issues' (Art. 33 TEU) and report back to the HRVP. Each of the 10 EUSRs have preventive diplomacy elements in their mandate, including maintaining regular political dialogue, shuttle diplomacy, providing good offices, and facilitating and supporting mediation efforts. Unclear, however, is each EUSR's specific mandate, the qualifications required to fill such a position, and the procedures surrounding EUSR

²⁸ The European Parliament's response to queries.

²⁹ Interviews 4, 8 and 9.

³⁰ European Parliament, 'Global Democracy Support', L015442 (May 2019): <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/cmsdata/212240/GDS-Brochure-EN-REV-web.pdf>.

³¹ European Union External Action Service, 'Integrated Approach for Security and Peace Directorate' (20 February 2021): https://www.eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/isp2_mediation_factsheet_for_publication_20022021.pdf.

³² Interview 8.

³³ Müller, P., Bergmann, J., 'Orchestrating Peace in South Sudan: Exploring the Effectiveness of the European Union's Mediation Support', *European Security*, Vol. 29, No. 2 (23 April 2020).

office staffing. Interviews noted the importance of appointing the right person to the post of Special Representative or Envoy, highlighting the need for regional credibility and knowledge.³⁴ Members of the European Parliament have also taken part in some past mediation exercises (e.g., the naming of North Macedonia).

As suggested by the EU's standing Special Representative for Human Rights, attention towards human rights and efforts to protect and promote justice and respect for the rule of law is another core element in the EU's preventive diplomacy toolbox. Human rights abuses are often a cause and a driver of tension and conflict, and there is a strong connection between human rights and conflict prevention, as set out by a UN thematic paper on this issue.³⁵ The EUSR for Human Rights, the only thematic EUSR, engages in high-level bilateral discussions with 34 countries 'on matters ranging from the broad strategic progress to individual cases of concern' and has 'co-chaired or participated in 15 formal Human Rights Dialogues and Consultations, including the first human rights dialogue with Saudi Arabia'.³⁶ Protection and promotion of human rights is mainstreamed across all EU initiatives and interventions, including trade agreements, preferential trade concessions, Neighbourhood and enlargement policies, in electoral observation missions, and private diplomatic démarches and public declarations which exert diplomatic pressure.³⁷ The EU also promotes human rights through its participation in multilateral forums, such as the UN General Assembly's Third Committee, the UN Human Rights Council, the OSCE and the Council of Europe, and through the International Criminal Court.³⁸

Another case in point for the application of a transversal lens to prevention are military and civilian CSDP missions and operations that may include a conflict prevention angle after duly assessing the conflict sensitivity risks thereof *ex ante*. For example, EU training missions are not mandated to intervene directly in stabilisation efforts, the prevention of conflict, or the protection of civilians. However, their overarching goal is to contribute to security sector reform and enhance EU partners' military capacities to deliver security within the rule of law, which involves a preventive element that can serve to mitigate, reduce, or prevent the future occurrence, re-emergence, escalation, and/or spread of violence. Implementing these mandates requires the political engagement, capacity building mechanisms, and technical expertise inherent to preventive diplomacy.

Many public diplomacy initiatives, such as combatting dis-/misinformation, promoting people-to-people exchanges, exploring strategic communications strategies, and fostering joint messaging with partners, take place on a frequent basis in coordination with EU Delegations and third country partners. The need to ramp-up or scale-down such initiatives may be identified in the above-mentioned action plans. Longer-term prevention initiatives to share expertise, foster socio-economic growth, and promote the values of open dialogue – such as various technical assistance mechanisms, capacity building, development cooperation, and people-to-people exchanges – are generally funded through the European Commission as part of the NDICI or other programmes, such as Technical Assistance and Information Exchange, Erasmus+, and Horizon Europe. Formulated in a conflict-sensitive manner, these initiatives aim to address the multiple structural risks of conflict, foster ongoing diplomatic engagement, and frame political engagement. As such, funding priorities (often pre-determined and following on from previous

³⁴ Interviews 1 and 12.

³⁵ UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, 'The contribution of Human Rights to Peacebuilding and sustaining Peace', *2020 Review of the UN Peacebuilding Architecture* (2020).

³⁶ European Union External Action Service, 'EU Special Representatives' (15 May 2023): https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/eu-special-representatives_en#10852.

³⁷ European Parliament, 'Human Rights', *Factsheets on the European Union* (2023): <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/factsheets/en/sheet/165/human-rights>.

³⁸ Ibid.

programmes) are usually decided at the beginning of each seven-year programming cycle, with limited margin for manoeuvre apart from mid-term reviews around three and a half years into programming. The ability to identify rapid response actions lies instead with FPI, with a dedicated pot of funding available to support short-term preventive diplomacy opportunities.

The EU and its Member States also partner up with or support international and regional organisations, such as the UN, OSCE, Council of Europe, and AU. For example, they discuss how to enhance evidence-based decision-making (particularly on the identification of preventive diplomacy opportunities and monitoring of effectiveness) through the OECD's International Network on Conflict and Fragility and, in the past, the UN Development Programme's International Dialogue on Peacebuilding and Statebuilding. The EU and EU Member States also fund the work of the OSCE and the High Commissioner on National Minorities to identify and deliver analysis of triggers of ethnic-/minority-related conflict and the structural drivers thereof, suggesting recommendations on how to address it, as well as and providing support for projects to enhance local ownership of prevention initiatives. Through its Conflict Prevention Centre, the OSCE also aims to build confidence among its participating states (including all EU Member States) by 'organising, collecting, archiving, and reporting on 16 annual exchanges on politico-military activities', and provides support to dispute resolution mechanisms agreed upon with the OSCE.³⁹

4 Applying EU preventive diplomacy in practice

To complement this overview of the EU's main policy documents pertinent to preventive diplomacy and processes leading to preventive engagement in some areas, the following section examines how these apply in practice to several particularly challenging 'case examples': Kosovo's status, violent contexts in the South Caucasus, instability and conflict in the Horn of Africa, and the Colombia peace process.

4.1 The EU in the lead: The Belgrade-Pristina Dialogue and Colombia peace talks

The normalisation of relations between Kosovo and Serbia has been high on the EU's foreign policy agenda since the Belgrade-Pristina Dialogue began in 2011 under the auspices of HRVP Catherine Ashton, and is embedded in the context of European integration. The role of the EU in Kosovo and the link between normalisation and accession to the EU (for both Serbia and Kosovo) has been recognised in several EU strategies and declarations, including the 2018 Western Balkan Strategy⁴⁰, which stated that all Western Balkan Countries would have 'a chance to move forward on their respective European paths'. The Brussels Agreement (2013) provided a framework for normalisation and the EU-Kosovo Stabilisation and Association Agreement (2015) has guided the EU's relationship with Kosovo. The European Parliament has also stressed that the 'enlargement process fosters and strengthens capacities to resolve bilateral disputes and strives for reconciliation between societies in the region'.⁴¹ The prospect of EU membership has been a significant factor for Serbia and appears to have shaped its policy towards Kosovo and the Belgrade-

³⁹ Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, 'The OSCE Conflict Prevention Centre' (n.d.): https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/e/3/13717_0.pdf.

⁴⁰ European Commission, Directorate-General for Communication, 'A Credible Enlargement Perspective for an Enhanced EU Engagement with the Western Balkans – Six New Flagship Initiatives to Support the Transformation of the Western Balkans', Publications Office (2018): <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2775/902991>.

⁴¹ European Parliament, 'Report on a European Parliament recommendation to the Council, the Commission, and the Vice-President of the Commission/High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy on the Western Balkans following the 2020 summit', Committee on Foreign Affairs (12 June 2020): https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/A-9-2020-0091_EN.html.

Pristina Dialogue. Bergmann and Niemann have found that 'enlargement is the big pull factor, the main carrot the EU has to offer in the context of Serbia'.⁴² The Belgrade-Pristina dialogue aims to achieve a comprehensive normalisation agreement between Kosovo and Serbia addressing outstanding issues for both parties to progress on their respective European path, create new opportunities, and improve the lives of their citizens. As such, it has been key to discuss the sensitive issues at the core of Kosovo-Serbia relations.

Despite sustained efforts by the EU and other international partners to bring about a resolution, dialogue between Serbia and Kosovo remains at a deadlock. Delays in the enlargement process have contributed and limited the EU's capacity to incentivise the two parties to engage more constructively.⁴³ This stalemate has negatively impacted the lives of citizens in both Serbia and Kosovo, generated tension in the Balkan region, and become intertwined with increased tension related to Russia's invasion of Ukraine. While there was progress in early 2023, this has not been sustained, and in September 2023 the EU expressed its 'concern over the lack of implementation by the Parties of their commitments under the Agreement on the Path to Normalisation and its Implementation Annex, which both Parties agreed to earlier this year'.⁴⁴

The overall assessment of the dialogue process and the EU preventive diplomacy efforts is mixed. Critically, the presence of an EU perspective has often served to prevent or mitigate an escalation of violence and has addressed some of the issues, which have driven tension and conflict.⁴⁵ While there are challenges and regular escalations in tension, there is evidence that the efforts of the EU have been quite effective in building relationships and addressing a range of issues central to stability in the region. Research by the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung⁴⁶ on the implementation of the Belgrade-Pristina Dialogue identified 21 core agreements and concluded that 80% of these have been implemented (10 agreements implemented, 6 agreements largely implemented, 4 agreements partly implemented, and 1 agreement not implemented). The report concluded at the time that 'the Kosovo-Serbia dialogue is a relatively success story' as it 'helped transform the Kosovo-Serbia conflict from a frozen conflict into a melting one'.⁴⁷

The EU's failure to make more sustained progress on Kosovo and an ever-present risk of escalation points to gaps and limitations in the EU preventive diplomacy, even in its neighbourhood. Several reports have identified challenges faced by the Belgrade-Pristina Dialogue, including the complex relationships among EU institutions, the interaction between these and MS and the complex dynamics among Member States, with five (Spain, Slovakia, Cyprus, Greece, and Romania) not recognising Kosovo. These internal divisions in the EU have limited Kosovo's participation in some EU programmes and initiatives, eroded the EU's credibility in the region, and to a certain extent 'undermine[d] its commitment to promoting democratic values and the rule of law in the Western Balkans'.⁴⁸ Furthermore, the EU's preventive engagement is

⁴² Plänitz, E., 'Towards a Comprehensive Framework of Mediation Success: EU Mediation in the Belgrade-Pristina Dialogue', *Journal of Regional Security*, Vol. 13, No 1 (1 November 2018).

⁴³ Zweers, W., De Boon, M., 'Overcoming EU internal Dividing Lines in the Belgrade-Pristina dialogue', Clingendael Institute (April 2022).

⁴⁴ Council of the European Union, 'Belgrade-Pristina Dialogue: Statement by the High Representative on Behalf of the European Union on Expectations from Serbia and Kosovo' (19 September 2023): <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2023/09/19/belgrade-pristina-dialogue-statement-by-the-high-representative-on-behalf-of-the-european-union-on-expectations-from-serbia-and-kosovo/>.

⁴⁵ Interview 2.

⁴⁶ Gashi, S., Novakovic, I., 'Brussels Agreements Between Kosovo and Serbia: A Quantitative Implementation Assessment', Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (December 2020): <https://library.fes.de/pdf-files/bueros/belgrad/17009.pdf>.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Mexhuani, B., 'The Role of the EU in Shaping Kosovo's Political Future: A Critical Analysis', *Cogent Social Sciences*, Vol. 9 No. 1 (2023).

constrained by sub-national fragmentation (at the municipality level) and factors of instability at a regional Western Balkan level. Russia, too, has endeavored to spoil progress by providing political and economic support to Serbia's position and using its veto within the UNSC to complicate efforts to find agreement on a UNSC Resolution regarding Kosovar statehood.⁴⁹

There has also been criticism of the Brussels Agreement on Belgrade-Pristina normalisation due to the ambiguity of certain provisions, described as 'vague and unclear in terms of wording and implementation'. This provides challenges around implementation and scope for the parties to 'communicate the Agreement [...] to their respective publics'.⁵⁰ Weak ownership of the Agreements has persisted, thereby weakening implementation. As a result of these concurrent factors, progress on normalisation has been slow, with more concrete and sustainable results thus far wanting.

The EU's engagement in Colombia demonstrates that, with sufficient alignment of Member State views, the EU has both the political will and capacity to take a leading role in conflict prevention beyond its neighbourhood. It has actively supported peace efforts in Colombia between the state and Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia for more than 20 years during different phases of the peace process: proposing a negotiated solution to the conflict, acting as an observer of the negotiations in Havana, and then supporting the implementation of the resulting agreement, with a focus on strengthening civil society, human rights, and rural development. Support has been provided at political level through monitoring by the European Parliament, the appointment of a Special Envoy for the Peace Process in 2015, as well as through development cooperation (especially in rural areas), a free trade agreement, and support to multi-level dialogue processes. A study on EU support to Colombia's peace process also identified several elements of EU diplomatic engagement, such as 'political support in the form of public statements (by the Delegation and ambassadors in Bogotá, the European Parliament, and other EU institutions), as well as regional dialogue, high-level bilateral dialogue with the Colombian government, and discussions with civil society and other actors'.⁵¹

While the general assessment of the EU's engagement is positive, the EU had limited impact in formulating the peace agreement itself, which was due to an alignment of internal political factors. The EU did, however, successfully provide political support to ongoing dialogue and encouraged the parties to take an inclusive view of the conflict that addresses rural reform, demobilisation, disarmament, and reintegration, political participation, transitional justice, and the trafficking of illicit goods. Yet, seven years later, challenges remain regarding reconciliation with the National Liberation Army, not a party to the original Colombia-FARC agreement, human rights violations in the country, and the sustainability of the government's development policies.⁵²

4.2 The EU in the mix: Georgia

The EU has been an active player in efforts to prevent and resolve conflict in the South Caucasus and has taken a more central role in recent years. Through its European Neighbourhood Policy and the Eastern Partnership, the EU aims to promote good governance and democracy as key drivers for security and stability.

⁴⁹ Bargués, P., Dandashly, A., Dijkstra, H., Noutcheva, G., 'Time to Re-engage with Kosovo and Serbia: Strengthening EU Foreign and Security Policy amidst Internal Contestation', *JOINT Research Papers*, No. 12 (December 2022).

⁵⁰ Gashi, K., Musliu, V., & Orbie, J., 'Mediation through recontextualization: The European Union and the dialogue between Kosovo and Serbia', *European Foreign Affairs Review*, Vol. 22 No. 4 (2017), pp. 33–50.

⁵¹ Ioannides, I., 'Peace and Security in 2019: Evaluating EU Efforts to Support Peace in Colombia', European Parliament Research Services (3 June 2019).

⁵² Ioannides, I., *Ibid.*

For example, the EU mediated the Six Point Agreement between Russia and Georgia to end the war in South Ossetia and Abkhazia in August 2008 and, over the last 15 years, has maintained a strong commitment to stability and peace through the establishment of a civilian CSDP Monitoring Mission (EUMM) and the appointment of a Special Representative for the South Caucasus and the crisis in Georgia. The EUMM's priorities are 'to ensure that there is no return to hostilities, to facilitate the resumption of a safe and normal life for the local communities living on both sides of the Administrative Boundary Line with Abkhazia and South Ossetia, to build confidence among the conflict parties, [and] to inform EU policy in Georgia and the wider region'.⁵³ In accordance with existing mechanisms, such as the OSCE, the EUSR's role is to:

'[...] prevent conflicts in the region, to contribute to a peaceful settlement of conflicts in the region, including the crisis in Georgia and the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, by promoting the return of refugees and internally displaced persons and through other appropriate means, and to support the implementation of such a settlement in accordance with the principles of international law; to engage constructively with the main interested actors regarding the region; to encourage and support further cooperation between Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia, and, as appropriate, their neighbouring countries; and to enhance the Union's effectiveness and visibility in the region'.⁵⁴

There has been effective collaboration between the EU and OSCE at different levels⁵⁵ through the high-level Geneva International discussions, co-chaired by the OSCE, the EU and the UN, and involving the main parties in the conflict (Georgia, Russia and the two breakaway territories, Abkhazia and South Ossetia), as well as through regular discussions between the EUSR and the OSCE Head of Delegation. At operational level, the Incident Prevention Response Mechanism (IPRM) was established in 2009, with meetings co-chaired by the EUMM and the OSCE. The aim is to provide an opportunity for all parties to come together to address and resolve security and humanitarian challenges faced by local populations living along the Administrative Boundary Line.⁵⁶ As part of this mechanism, a hotline was established to facilitate communications between the parties. The IPRM is regarded as an effective mechanism in maintaining stability along the Administrative Boundary Line and preventing any escalation⁵⁷.

The relationship with Georgia was strengthened significantly with the signing of the of the Association Agreement (AA) in 2014, an agreement on visa free travel for Georgian citizens to the EU in 2017, and regular European Parliament support to parliamentary capacity building since 2017. The AA provided for far-reaching cooperation and an institutionalised relationship that also required Georgia to undertake a significant reform programme. Georgia's ambitions to become an EU Member State and related the conditionality mechanisms have given the EU considerable influence and enabled it to engage constructively with Georgia on peace and security matters and prevent any further escalation in the region. On the other hand, however, the EU has unfortunately been unsuccessful in mediating an end to the conflict in its role as co-chair of the Geneva International Discussions, the formal negotiation format for the resolution of the frozen conflict in South Ossetia and Abkhazia, due to Russia's unwillingness to negotiate with Georgia on the basis of Georgia's internationally recognised borders.

⁵³ EU Monitoring Mission, 'Our Mandate' (n.d.): https://eumm.eu/en/about_eumm/mandate.

⁵⁴ European Union External Action Service, 'EU Special Representatives' (15 May 2023): https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/eu-special-representatives_en#10852.

⁵⁵ Interview 12.

⁵⁶ European Union External Action Service, 'Trust Building Measures by the EU Monitoring Mission Georgia: a Success Story' (7 October 2019): https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/trust-building-measures-eu-monitoring-mission-georgia-success-story_en.

⁵⁷ Interview 12.

4.3 The EU as an alternative: Nagorno-Karabakh

The EU has also increased its engagement in the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict since the war of 2020, facilitating direct talks between the two sides and providing an alternative channel for dialogue than that provided by Russia. In fact, Russia's renewed invasion of Ukraine has had an impact on regional dynamics in the South Caucasus and further eroded Russia's influence as a regional power. One of the early successes of the negotiation process led by European Council President Charles Michel was an agreement to establish a hotline to facilitate direct military communications between the two countries to reduce the risk of escalation. In January 2023, the EU established the EU Mission in Armenia, deploying 100 monitors with a mandate to observe and report on the situation on the ground, contributing to human security in conflict-affected areas, and building confidence between the populations of both Armenia and Azerbaijan and, when possible, their authorities.

The EU mediation efforts appeared to be effective when, in May 2023, the leaders of Armenia and Azerbaijan agreed to a long-term negotiation plan for a comprehensive peace agreement and committed to the 1991 Almaty Declaration and their 'respective territorial integrity'. However, the takeover of Nagorno-Karabakh by Azeri forces in September 2023 demonstrates the dynamic nature of this conflict and the challenges faced by the EU in attempting to use its preventive diplomacy tools. In a statement issued on 21 September 2023, the EU condemned the military operation by Azerbaijan against the Armenian population of Nagorno-Karabakh and called for the resumption of negotiations between Armenia and Azerbaijan on all pending issues, which it remains fully committed to supporting.

The escalation of the conflict in September 2023 and the failure to prevent the humanitarian crisis arising from the exodus of ethnic Armenians from Nagorno-Karabakh highlighted some weaknesses in the EU's approach and that of the wider international community in the region. Indeed, the EU's engagement is recent, since the 2020 war (which occurred due to Russian non-use of its peacemakers stationed in Armenia resulting from the Kremlin's assessment that Armenia had gone too far in adopting a pro-Western foreign policy), and does not have the same historical track record on engagement with the parties to the conflict (as it might in Colombia, Belgrade-Pristina, or Georgia). Regional issues have become increasingly complex and intertwined with wider geopolitical agendas and the influence of external actors, including Turkey, Iran, Russia, and, to a lesser extent, China. Russia's failures in its war against Ukraine have shifted its priorities away from the South Caucasus and opened the door for increased EU engagement; however, the EU's need to diversify its energy supply due to sanctions on Russian oil and gas has led to increased EU reliance on Azeri energy exports, thereby affecting its role as an impartial, values-based facilitator regarding Nagorno-Karabakh.

Clingendael Institute researchers have noted difficulties in identifying a consistent overall strategy due to what appear to be conflicting policy goals and concluded that the EU 'appears to be caught up in a reactive, short-term and ad-hoc modus operandi'. This was compounded by the roles played by different EU institutions and a certain lack of clarity as to who was leading the EU in the process.⁵⁸ Intra-EU unity on the peace process has also been lacking, with notable differences between the approach adopted by the President of the European Council Charles Michel, both trying to toe an impartial line and centralising the EU's role in the conflict within his cabinet, and the stronger position of some EU Member States and the European Parliament in defence of Armenia's territorial integrity.

⁵⁸ Deen, B., Zweers, W., 'Navigating a geopolitical labyrinth in turmoil', *The EU in the South Caucasus*, Clingendael Institute (30 March 2023).

4.4 The EU in partnership: The Horn of Africa and Southeast Asia

Beyond its immediate neighbourhood, the EU has also been active in preventive diplomacy in Africa, the Middle East, Asia, and South America, mostly through its support to and facilitation of peace processes. A key thread running through these engagements is the EU's strong focus on multilateralism and supporting the UN and regional organisations in their efforts to prevent and resolve conflict.⁵⁹ For example, the UN Liaison Office for Peace and Security in Brussels facilitates close cooperation between the two institutions. There has also been increased trilateral partnership where the EU works in partnership with the UN and the AU, collaborating on the Central African Republic peace process⁶⁰, supporting the establishment of continental and regional early warning systems, and scaling up capacity building on transitional justice and election support.

The work of the EU in the Horn of Africa demonstrates both the scale of the support provided to prevent and mitigate conflict, and the challenges faced by the EU, its international partners, and countries in the region. The geopolitical context has also become more complex in recent years, with competition for power and influence in the region and the increased influence of Turkey, China, and the Gulf states. The region has experienced multiple political and security crises in recent years (Somalia, Ethiopia, Sudan, and South Sudan). Considering this, it is challenging to identify successes in conflict prevention and preventive diplomacy. Nevertheless, it is important to highlight the work of the EU in the region and to identify where it has been effective, and where lessons have been learned. The EU has identified the region as a geostrategic priority⁶¹ and has invested heavily in a range of peace and security initiatives at both regional and national levels. It has supported the work of the UN, the AU and IGAD in the region, in the spirit of facilitating 'African solutions to African problems'. It has provided significant support to the African Transition Mission in Somalia to the tune of 2.7 billion Euro since 2007.⁶² The EU Trust Fund project 'IGAD Promoting Peace and Stability in the Horn of Africa Region' also aims to contribute to sustainable peace, security, and stability by focusing on 'enhancing capabilities on early warning and response, preventive diplomacy and mediation in the region'.⁶³

The EU's work on preventive diplomacy in the Horn of Africa is supported by the EU Special Representative for the Horn of Africa, whose mandate is 'to actively contribute to regional and international efforts to achieve lasting peace, security and development in the region'.⁶⁴ This work is carried out in cooperation with seven EU Delegations across the region (Ethiopia, Somalia, Kenya, South Sudan, Eritrea and Sudan) and the EU Delegation to the AU based in Addis Ababa. In Ethiopia, the EU took a strong stance against human rights abuses in the Tigray conflict by suspending support for Ethiopia. Regardless, the EUSR continued to play an active role in diplomatic efforts to resolve the Tigray conflict and took part in shuttle diplomacy efforts to liaise between the Ethiopian Government and the Tigray People's Liberation Front. In August 2022, the EUSR and the US Envoy travelled on a joint mission to Tigray to encourage the launch of

⁵⁹ Interviews 1 and 10.

⁶⁰ Interviews 1 and 8.

⁶¹ Council of the European Union, 'The Horn of Africa: A Geo-strategic Priority for the EU - Council Conclusions', 8135/21, Brussels (10 May 2021): <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-8135-2021-INIT/en/pdf>.

⁶² Press and Information Team of the Delegation to the African Union, 'Actions say more than words - Illustrations of the EU-AU partnership', Delegation of the European Union to the African Union, Addis Ababa (27 July 2023): https://www.eeas.europa.eu/delegations/african-union-au/actions-say-more-words-illustrations-eu-au-partnership_en.

⁶³ Press and Information Team of the Delegation to the African Union, 'The European Union and the African Union - Peace & Security', Delegation of the European Union to the African Union (17 November 2021): https://www.eeas.europa.eu/african-union/european-union-and-african-union-peace-security_en?s=43.

⁶⁴ European Union External Action Service, 'EU Special Representatives' (15 May 2023): https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/eu-special-representatives_en#10852.

talks between the two sides in support of the AU-led process that led to the signing of a peace agreement on 2 November 2022 in Pretoria, South Africa.

The EU has also been a key actor in efforts to stabilise Somalia and support a political solution to the various ongoing conflicts in the country. In June 2023, the Council of the EU adopted Conclusions on the EU's support to Somalia which complement two earlier initiatives, the Somalia-EU Joint Operational Roadmap published in May 2023 and the Somalia-EU Political Dialogue held on March 2023 to frame the EU's support for democratisation, peace, and security in Somalia. In Sudan, too, the EU has supported the transition process after the overthrow of President Omar al-Bashir in 2019. Its focus has been on bridging the divide between Khartoum and the regions, including facilitating the participation of representatives from conflict-affected areas at peace talks in Juba. Yet, beginning in 2023, the country has once again descended into civil war due to the Transitional Sovereignty Council's failure to peacefully resolve disputes over the integration of rival security forces and the Sudanese National Army (which, respectively, control key sectors of the national economy), with the EU's preventive efforts derailed by long-standing grievances.

The long running dispute over the Grand Renaissance Dam is another example of how the EU has supported preventive work in Africa. The construction of the dam by Ethiopia and disputes around the timeframe for filling it has become a major issue between Ethiopia and both Sudan and Egypt, which rely on a steady water supply from the Blue Nile. Ethiopia sees the hydroelectric project as a critical element in its efforts to modernise the economy and improve the living standards of the Ethiopian population. On the other hand, Egypt sees the dam as a major threat to its water security. With the EU's support in providing technical and legal expertise, the AU has been facilitating negotiations between the three countries since 2020 and has managed to keep the three parties at the table. However, the parties have yet to agree on the core issue – the timeframe for filling the dam.⁶⁵

While the EU has invested considerable resources in the Horn of Africa since the 1990s, the overall situation has deteriorated in recent years with major conflicts in Ethiopia and Sudan and limited progress in the transition processes in both South Sudan and Somalia. The EU's support for peace and security has faced two main criticisms. First, is the perception that EU engagement is largely driven by the EU's interests (curbing migration to Europe and combatting violent extremism) and that EU funding has emphasised security, with the bulk of the funding going towards peace support operations at the expense of good governance and sustainable development. Indeed, approximately 7% of the African Peace Facility's (the European Peace Facility's predecessor) was dedicated to prevention-related capacity-building or early response. This emphasis on security is also evident in the Sahel, where the primary focus of support for the G5 Sahel and CSDP missions in Mali and Niger was security-related.

In Asia, the EU is perceived mostly as an economic power and 'norm-setter'. It was one of the founding members of the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), a key platform for regional cooperation on peace and security, and has supported and facilitated peace processes in the region by 'knowing the context, consistently upholding international norms and principles, and supporting and strengthening the right civil society partners [...] through everyday action – local development, civil society empowerment, the promotion of education and religious, ethnic and gender dialogue – that contributes to building a more stable and resilient security environment in the region in the long run'.⁶⁶

⁶⁵ Interview 10.

⁶⁶ Banim, G., Pejsova, E. (eds.), 'Prevention Better Than Cure: the EU's Quiet Diplomacy in Asia', *ISSUE*, No. 33, European Union Institute for Security Studies (May 2017).

This has been the case in Timor-Leste (funding fact-finding and humanitarian assistance), the Philippines (support to the Mindanao peace process, with funding for training and community mediation), and Indonesia (with the establishment of the EU's Aceh Monitoring Mission following Finland's mediation). In Myanmar, the EU sought to play a role by funding the peace process in 2012. However, the resulting transition towards democracy has not been successful, with significant violence and human rights violations against the Rohingya population beginning in 2016 and further tensions since a military-led coup in 2021.

5 Analysis of critical success factors, lessons learned and areas for improvement

From the description above, the EU emerges as an international frontrunner in terms of preventive diplomacy. Its legitimacy and credibility, based on its perceived impartiality and commitment to upholding certain principles (inclusivity, consultation, deliberation), attention to 'forgotten' crises, and evidence-based approach to the early identification of opportunities to engage in preventive diplomacy, is leveraged to identify specific preventive actions, as well as to formulate and frame its ongoing programming and political engagement in a conflict-sensitive manner.

The EU aims to provide an integrated response to crises and conflict and sustain it over time. On paper, most of the elements are in place to act through the framework of the integrated approach at the EU level: regardless of where the procedures for prioritisation begin, opportunities for preventive action are taken in an inter-service manner across the EEAS and European Commission, analysis is conducted together with EU Member State representatives and relevant external stakeholders (such as international/regional organisations and international financial institutions), and the options for action are formulated in the political and programming dimensions (both DG NEAR/INTPA funding, as well as FPI actions). This can be seen clearly in the case examples, where several tools and instruments are used to promote and enable preventive work. Indeed, it is rare for the EU to intervene with a single tool: one of the key strengths of the EU is its ability to mobilise several tools, attempting to dovetail its efforts with those of EU Member States. In addition, the EU favours and promotes multilateral approaches to prevention, often working in partnership with or in support of actors such as the UN and regional organisations like the AU.

The harsh reality is that, despite the best efforts of the EU and other international actors, the security context has deteriorated in several of the case examples, particularly in the South Caucasus and the Horn of Africa, as well as in other contexts, such as the Sahel and Middle East. This is notwithstanding the EU's stated strategic interests and ongoing investments in both preventive action and long-term stabilisation. Wider geopolitical factors have contributed to this volatile context and undermined the work of the EU, EU Member States, and the international community.⁶⁷ This level of volatility and the scale and cost of these conflicts highlights the need for the EU to maintain its focus on peace, enhance its efforts in prevention, and continue to support the multilateral system. The policy documents and practical case examples outlined above highlight the fact that prevention is often a long-term process that requires sustained commitment by different EU institutions and EU Member States. The fact that the EU sustainably commits over time (including through long-term cooperation initiatives), mobilises international partners, and invests in conflict prevention is reflected in its engagement in the Horn of Africa, Kosovo and Georgia (see Section 4), as well as other challenging contexts, such as Colombia and Yemen. The application of an integrated approach and the importance of local ownership is also evident in the partnership between the EU and the AU. This support is provided at several levels: through structural support to address

⁶⁷ Crosson D.M., et al. 2021; Ibid.

vulnerabilities and strengthen local dispute resolution mechanisms; through operational support, such as the Early Response Mechanism (ERM); through systemic cooperation frameworks, such as EU and African Union Commission (AUC) engagement on the AU’s Continental Early Warning System; and on thematic issues, such as cyber security and climate change.

The findings above highlight the complexity of these contexts and the range of challenges faced by the EU and other international actors as they attempt to intervene to prevent the occurrence, re-emergence, escalation, and/or spread of violence around the world. The effectiveness of the EU’s efforts is shaped by a complex mix of factors: institutional coherence within the EU, the EU’s focus (or lack thereof) on prevention *vis-à-vis* the perennial state of crisis management it finds itself in, the extent to which there is EU Member State alignment and consistency with the approaches of third countries and multilateral organisations, geopolitical factors and competition, the influence and leverage of the EU, as well as (historical) perceptions of the EU, among others. It is therefore difficult to attribute success or failure to any factor and difficult to define success in such volatile and dynamic contexts. Notably, as the EU takes on a greater role as an international actor, specifically in security and defence matters, there are emerging tensions between its desire to project influence by taking on greater strategic responsibility and the EU’s longstanding nature as a values-oriented, diplomatically focused actor grounding its external action in multilateral cooperation (lending to its reputation as legitimate and impartial).

In an attempt to synthesise findings emerging from key stakeholder interviews, case studies, and desk research, the table below sets out some critical success factors contributing to more effective EU preventive engagements as well as those elements limiting the effectiveness of the EU’s engagement.

Table 3. Critical success factors and obstacles to effective EU preventive diplomacy efforts

Critical success factors	Limiting factors
Incentives for greater integration with the EU among parties to conflict/violence – e.g., EU accession, Free Trade Agreements, etc.	Delays in progress on key files – e.g., linked to EU accession – that undermine the EU’s credibility
EU and EU Member State buy-in to necessity of engaging preventively	Misaligned foreign policy positions among EU Member States
Enhanced political focus, diplomatic capacity, and networking of engagement – e.g., through the appointment of EU Special Representatives, joined-up engagement (EEAS, European Commission, European Council, European Parliament, EU Member States)	Inconsistent approaches by EU institutions and institutional competition to lead engagement (among institutions or with partners)
Partnership with international organisations such as the UN, OSCE, and AU – e.g., on project implementation, information-sharing, political dialogue	Fragmentation of regional governance structures
Alignment of internal politics to favour mediation support by the EU and local ownership of responsibility to resolve differences/address grievances	EU attention skewed towards crisis management and difficult to ‘make the case’ for preventive engagement
Long-term, values-based commitment by the EU, enhancing its credibility as a partner	Multipolar competition with third countries with unaligned geo-strategic objectives – e.g., Russia, Turkey, Iran

Efforts to build community dialogue and resilience, including through engagement of civil society organisations	Substantial internal polarisation regarding differences/grievances or the acceptability of EU engagement therein
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Indeed, as emerges from interviews and case examples, a critical factor for the success of preventive diplomacy (such as the integrated EU response to prevent the national and regional spillover of an insurgency in Cabo Delgado) is the buy-in of EU Member States. This is key to be able to mobilise EU tools, such as CSDP missions, humanitarian assistance, and development cooperation. Projects to promote civil-military cooperation in Mozambique, for example, were all undertaken in partnership with local authorities, third country actors (such as the US, UK, and Rwanda), and international partners, like the Southern African Development Community. However, several interviewees pointed out that there was a level of fragmentation of efforts, and a need for increased sharing between the EU and Member States, and also the EU and other international organisations, on prevention.⁶⁸ Others noted that EU capacity in the areas of political analysis diplomacy and peacebuilding was not as strong as it should be, and that the EU should draw upon its connections with the UN and OSCE, both of which had more local analysis capacity through the UN Peace and Development Advisors and the OSCE network of field offices.⁶⁹

The EU's diplomatic capacity is a critical success factor enabling the EU to engage at the highest level and take the lead in diplomatic efforts, where appropriate. The role of the HR/VP and the appointment of EUSRs has brought significant added value⁷⁰, playing a direct role in facilitating communication and understanding, building confidence, and establishing mechanisms to facilitate dialogue and address contentious issues. Beyond the examples cited above, HRVP Javier Solana facilitated the Ohrid Framework Agreement between Macedonia and the Albanian opposition in August 2001, and the Belgrade Agreement between Serbia and Montenegro in March 2002. HRVP Federica Mogherini played a key role in the Joint Commission set up under the Nuclear Agreement with Iran (otherwise known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action), co-ordinating the work of the Commission and overseeing implementation of the agreement.

EUSRs also bring added value to complex crisis situations, providing flexibility in that they are not subject to the 'European External Action Service's bureaucratic constraints', 'are a fast tool to deploy and can be quickly activated if a certain concern arises in a country, region, or regarding a certain issue-area', and 'demonstrate [the EU's] political commitment to the issues at hand'.⁷¹ The regional approach of the EUSR is also seen as critical, as it 'transcends the focus of existing EUDs and is able to create a regional process which benefits the Union and the countries themselves' and provides the EU with 'a more wide-reaching overview of conflicts and issues that would otherwise possibly not exist'. The convening power and capacity to reach out to different actors and their co-ordinating role among EU actors, third countries and multilateral organisations are also both considered to be key strengths.⁷² Furthermore, the support

⁶⁸ Interviews 3 and 5. This view is supported by findings of Crosson D.M., et al. (2021). *Ibid.*

⁶⁹ Interviews 1, 6, 10 and 12.

⁷⁰ Costa Reis, F., Lecocq, S., Van Der Loo, G., Raube, K., Wouters, J., 'The Scope and Mandate of EU Special Representatives (EUSRs)', European Parliament Directorate-General for External Policies (24 January 2019).

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

⁷² *Ibid* and interview 10.

provided by the Mediation Support team of the EEAS has been noted as crucial,⁷³ particularly in cases where heightened mediatic and political visibility are viewed as counter-productive.⁷⁴

While the flexibility of the EUSRs is considered an asset, there are also some concerns about their role and how they relate to and interact with other EU instruments and national actors, and also concerns regarding their appointment, the importance of impartiality, and the need to pay more attention to the principle of consent in these complex conflict environments.⁷⁵ Others noted that the EU was most effective when using quiet diplomacy and working out of the limelight, and called for 'more humbleness'.⁷⁶

Building a cohesive and coordinated approach and developing timely, proactive, and appropriate prevention strategies (rather than risk-averse ones) also presents a challenge to the EU, given the range of institutions and services playing a role in a process that is largely dependent on the sustained will of EU Member States above and beyond constant crisis management du jour. Where there is a good degree of coherence and alignment among EU Member States, the work of the EU is effective (Colombia, Mozambique).⁷⁷ Challenges related to coordination have emerged where there is a lack of alignment among Member States and, at times, a lack of coordination across the EU institutions. Despite the fact that the EU generated a relatively consistent policy in the area⁷⁸ and 'managed to put aside their concerns over Kosovo's independence and sought a common European position for stabilising the region'⁷⁹, the Belgrade-Pristina Dialogue has faced some challenges, including the complex relationships among EU institutions, the interaction between these institutions and EU Member States, and the complex dynamics among EU Member States which are exacerbated by the fact that five EU Member States do not recognise Kosovo's statehood. Clingendael also notes issues related to 'inter-institutional difficulties' among EU institutions, and the fact that 'ownership over the dialogue is not fully clear'⁸⁰, thereby weakening the EU's position. Clingendael identified similar weaknesses in developing a coherent EU strategy for the South Caucasus,⁸¹ in which several policy objectives compete with, rather than complement, each other. They found that it was problematic to 'find an overall strategy in the EU's application of these sometimes conflicting policy goals' and recommended that the 'EU should develop and implement a more holistic and strategic vision, both for the region and for its relations with the individual countries'.

Conversations with external stakeholders and practitioners alike also point to a recurring need to better connect the dots between the identification of various preventive diplomacy opportunities (and needs) and the concrete implementation of action points via the various channels at the EU's disposal.⁸² For example, the prioritisation of conflict prevention opportunities, potential EOMs, and selection of mediation support priorities are occasionally linked via electoral violence risk assessments and/or the option for action under a Structural Country Assessment. However, the procedures for selecting countries for

⁷³ Interviews 8 and 9.

⁷⁴ Interviews 1, 4, 7, 10, 12.

⁷⁵ Interviews 6 and 12.

⁷⁶ Interviews 1, 6, 7 and 10.

⁷⁷ Interviews 5 and 7.

⁷⁸ Bargués, P., Dandashly, A., Dijkstra, H., Noutcheva, G., 'Time to Re-engage with Kosovo and Serbia: Strengthening EU Foreign and Security Policy amidst Internal Contestation', *JOINT Research Paper*, No. 12 (December 2022): https://jointproject.eu/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/joint_rp_12.pdf.

⁷⁹ Viceré, A., Giulia, M., 'The roles of the President of the European Council and the High Representative in leading EU foreign policy on Kosovo.' *Journal of European Integration*, Vol. 38, No. 5, 2016, pp. 557–570.

⁸⁰ Zweers, W., De Boon, M., *Ibid.*

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

⁸² Interviews 6, 7, and 8.

preventive engagement – whether it be through establishing an EOM or providing insider mediation support for localised tensions – are not structurally aligned or sequenced (depending on the need).

Furthermore, while there is a high degree of information sharing and reciprocal participation in ongoing work among various institutions and services, there is scope to further reinforce Early Warning and Early Action, focusing on the link between the identification of options for preventive action and their actual implementation. In other words, action plans are evidence-based, consulted, and elaborate – yet, once agreed upon, there are challenges in translating it into changes in political engagement and adjustments in programming. Significant efforts have been made to improve upon knowledge management, including with annual lessons learned exercises within the Directorate for Peace, Partnerships and Crisis Management, and the establishment of an internal repository dedicated to collecting analytical documents and action plans. Nonetheless, challenges raised in this respect were a lack of capacity and bandwidth, the consistent pressures of crisis management overtaking long-term preventive engagement, and a gap between identified needs in the analysis and EU programming, especially long-term.⁸³

The enlargement process has been one of the EU's most effective tools, and has contributed to social, economic, and democratic reform in the region. The EU is embarking on a new phase of enlargement, with the potential for nine additional countries to join by 2030: six Western Balkans states (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia, and Serbia) and Ukraine and Moldova (and possibly Georgia). To date, the prospect of EU accession has been a significant factor in mitigating tensions and preventing conflict in these countries. However, the next phase of enlargement will present major challenges that will require novel approaches and significant investment in peacebuilding and preventive action, with a particular focus on preventive diplomacy. Membership of the EU does not guarantee the immediate and peaceful resolution of conflict (e.g., Northern Ireland and Cyprus), and the EU will need to develop appropriate strategies to ensure that the new members can make the necessary transitions. The OSCE has credibility, a good track record, and a footprint in these countries, and there is scope for the EU to strengthen its partnership with the OSCE, generate synergies, and enhance regional peace and stability.⁸⁴

Conversations with EU Member State representatives also highlighted space to improve communication channels and the opportunity to share knowledge, best practices, and coordinate responses.⁸⁵ As emerges in the EU's joint staff working documents themselves, EU Member States are not meaningfully consulted in the identification of prevention priorities and opportunities, nor in the identification of potential options for action, where they are at best involved in a geographical Council Working Party discussion on the action plans. Because of the key role played by EU Member States in the formulation of EU Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP), nurturing a culture of preventive diplomacy would require that EU Member States provide more input throughout the process, from the identification of needs to the monitoring of follow-up. Due to limited capacity in Member States' permanent representations in Brussels, this would also require more significant efforts to share knowledge and best practices to avoid that the exercise of seeking input and consultation leads the EU's engagement to simply become another channel for the priorities of the EU Member States with sufficient resources to cover all files.

⁸³ Interviews 3, 4, 5 and 7.

⁸⁴ Interview 12.

⁸⁵ Interviews 3 and 5.

6 Recommendations (with specifics, timelines, and trade-offs)

Based on this review of key (policy) documents, conversations with stakeholders, and case examples, several areas in which to further reinforce the EU's approach to preventive diplomacy emerge. From the strategic level to the operational level, while also addressing issues of methodology (how preventive diplomacy is framed and undertaken), some adjustments can be brought forward by key EU institutions and services focusing on preventive diplomacy.

At the strategic level – at a time when the EU is in a state of permacrisis management mode dealing with the multi-faceted fallout of US-China competition, Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, and issues related to migration – renewed political impetus for preventive approaches is of utmost importance. In view of the September 2024 UN Summit for the Future, which will discuss critical challenges to and address gaps in global governance, the UN has enhanced its focus on preventive diplomacy in July 2023 with its New Agenda for Peace meant to inform leaders' discussions.⁸⁶ The Agenda proposes 12 concrete actions to address strategic risks and geopolitical divides, prevent violence and conflict and sustain peace, strengthen peace operations and enforcement, adopt new approaches to peace and potential conflict domains, and strengthen international governance.

The European Parliament AFET Committee's draft report on its Recommendation to the Council, Commission, and HRVP on the role of preventive diplomacy (10 October 2023 – currently in the amendment phase) already puts forth several welcome proposals to best adapt the EU's approach to preventive diplomacy, including: continuously adapting the EU's preventive engagement to emerging challenges such as rapid technological development, ensuring complementarity with the European Parliament's preventive diplomatic engagements and duly informing the European Parliament of the EU's preventive diplomacy activities, ensuring the implementation of evidence-based preventive actions, and forming a solid and continual knowledge base of preventive diplomacy good practices and lessons learned.

Building on this momentum, both within the UN and European Parliament, **the European Council must task the incoming HRVP to develop an EU Agenda/Compact/Guidelines for Peace and Diplomacy** building upon the 2018 Council Conclusions on the Integrated Approach to External Conflicts and Crises that makes an effective case for joined-up preventive diplomacy, and lays out how this can be implemented. This new strategic direction can bring true added value only if certain strategic trade-offs are duly considered and a consensus is found, including on the benefits of:

- Dialling down the political and mediatic visibility of EU preventive diplomacy engagements to allow those processes to run their course, combat a culture of risk aversion, and preserve external reputational integrity;
- Elaborating how the EU will support the implementation of the UN's call to reinforce networked multilateralism (including in triangulating relations with the AU) and understanding how the EU chooses its partners;
- Identifying opportunities for preventive diplomacy while duly considering the rising influence of international actors promoting alternative, transactional, and authoritarian governance models;

⁸⁶ United Nations, 'Our Common Agenda Policy Brief 9: A New Agenda for Peace' (20 July 2023): <https://www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/our-common-agenda-policy-brief-new-agenda-for-peace-en.pdf>.

- Realising that the case-specific effects of preventive engagement are hard to measure, but nonetheless significant at the systemic level.

In doing so, the EU should clearly define the scope and purpose of its preventive diplomacy efforts, with a view towards operationalising it transversally across its institutions and EU Member States and facilitating monitoring and assessment of its effectiveness (as done by the UN).

To formulate and implement this strategic vision, the EU's focus on preventive diplomacy requires an institutional upgrading. As stated by UN Guidance on Assessing preventive diplomacy⁸⁷, how preventive diplomacy is designed and implemented is key to enhancing its effectiveness. Firstly, the identification of opportunities for conflict analysis and options for preventive action must be institutionally upgraded in an **EU Peace and Prevention Hub, directly linked to the EEAS Secretary General**. This is not without precedent: In the aftermath of the West's botched evacuation of Afghanistan with the Taliban approaching Kabul, several EEAS divisions were brought together and institutionally upgraded to form a novel Crisis Response Centre. Prevention requires the same level of importance. EEAS divisions working on preventive activities, such as intelligence, multilateral relations, security partnerships, preventing violent extremism, elections, human rights, conflict analysis, mediation, and other related thematic issues, should be brought together in this Hub.

It would be the Hub's core business to collect analysis, formulate options for action, and to make recommendations on how to recalibrate regional and country approaches, including those programmes implemented by the European Commission, based on these Early Action Plans. This would remedy the identified lack of consistency and coherence by addressing the misalignment in the processes leading to preventive engagement, from intelligence and data, to the identification of options for engagement, ensuring that preventive engagement is duly considered upstream at the policy coordination level rather than remaining compartmentalised under certain thematic areas, and **making the hierarchical distinction between approach (prevention) and means (political engagement through geographical desks, CSDP-related engagements, etc.)**. If duly coordinated with the work of the EEAS on Strategic Communications and Foresight (including, for example, by mapping the role played by other important and possibly competing international actors in each specific context), the targeting of interventions and communication of success stories would be enhanced.

This Peace and Prevention Hub should also become **the single-entry point for matters of prevention (rather than crisis management) for the EU system**: EU Delegations, EUSR offices, the European Commission, the European Council, the European Parliament and other EU bodies, to improve coordination and coherence of action. The underlying motivation is to bring various actors working on preventive engagement together in a *bona fide* Team Europe approach in which opportunities for preventive engagement are synergistically crafted by design rather than be subjected to institutional (and, at times, personal) whims and intra-EU competition for political attention. To better inform this work, the EU Peace and Prevention Hub must formulate and implement regional and country Early Action Plans with the input of geographical desks and endorsement of Council Working Parties. To make this possible, **geographical departments in EEAS Headquarters should benefit from the additional presence of conflict experts that liaise on related matters between EU Delegations and the Peace and Prevention Hub and contribute to monthly Horizon Scanning notes** that identify conflict trends and triggers of violence in the short- to medium-term in prioritised countries/regions. Furthermore, **European Commission programming must become more flexible and responsive to the policy prescriptions**

⁸⁷ United Nations University Centre for Policy Research, *Ibid.*

emerging from Early Action Plans. The drafting of Multi-Annual Indicative Programmes must be aligned with the legislative cycle and chronologically sequenced to incorporate the options for action outlined in Early Action Plans.

This requires further changes throughout the political decision-making cycle. First, the European External Action Service's emphasis on prevention should be mirrored by the **creation of a Council Working Party/Committee on prevention and mediation** to discuss the prioritisation of opportunities for preventive engagement, as well as resulting analysis, follow-up, and monitoring. While the capacity of EU Member States' permanent representations (especially the smaller ones) may be alluded to as a potential constraint, this would in fact provide under-resourced permanent representations with an opportunity to collect information to share with national capitals and remedy the current oversaturation of the Committee for Civilian Aspects of Crisis Management (CIVCOM) agenda.

A culture of prevention would be nourished if **duly complemented with an EU Integrated Political Preventive Action arrangement** (along the lines of the Integrated Political Crisis Response arrangements and building on the semi-regular Early Warning/Early Action Forum) within the Council of the EU that produces a **Coordinated Annual Review on Prevention (CARP)** to gather EU Member States' foreign ministries to share best practices and lessons learned, and align EU Member States' prevention activities and provide further political backing to the EEAS' prevention work. Introducing these structures could be facilitated by **providing EU Member States with access to the EU Knowledge4Peace repository of relevant analyses**, and expanding the repository to include some concrete, easily digestible good preventive practices and lessons learned. This would be a significant upgrade of the Council's attention to the topics of preventive diplomacy considering the absence of personnel dedicated to the topic at present. In addition, establishing mechanisms to raise awareness and duly consider initiatives by the European Parliament (e.g. parliamentary diplomacy, mediation, and capacity building) seems opportune.

Operationally speaking, these changes would give renewed legitimacy to the work of EUSRs, who would find natural counterparts within the EEAS Secretariat General with high-level coordination responsibilities to discuss ongoing developments and continuously review options for preventive engagement. If duly accompanied by **greater clarity on EUSRs' specific mandates and tasks**, these changes would provide greater political steer and enhance the impact of their work in those areas which the HRVP, by designating an EUSR to begin with, has identified as key to EU interests. Greater coordination at the EEAS Secretariat General level might also lead to the identification of a need to **review current EUSR portfolios and/or add new mandates**, particularly on thematic areas such as women and youth, peace, and security or climate change-related threats to peace and security.

Greater emphasis must be placed on matters of peace in EU Delegations on the ground too. This requires a tri-fold tweaking of the current set-up. Firstly, the political sections of EU Delegations must be bolstered in terms of personnel. Secondly, **EU Delegations in conflict-affected countries would benefit from the designation of Peace and Conflict Advisors** (building on the experience of the UN in this field) sitting below the Head of Delegation and co-ordinating the work of the political, press, and information and cooperation sections of the Delegation (as well as others if applicable: trade and migration attachés, FPI regional offices, DG ECHO field offices, etc.) on matters of peace and security. Thirdly, a **(significant) pool of FPI 'rapid action' funding for peace and security activities must be made available** to provide quick, clear, and objective analysis, identify opportunities for engagement, and implement context-sensitive activities. In terms of operationalising partnerships, this Peace and Prevention Hub should **systematically engage the UN Liaison Office for Peace and Security in Brussels** as the single-entry point to the UN system to involve the UN and relevant regional organisations in analysis and the identification of

opportunities for preventive engagement. A common culture of prevention can be built at the global level by, for example, **conducting joint training modules on conflict prevention, and sharing knowledge to facilitate (and perhaps coordinate) preventive action** at the country level. Furthermore, the EU should explore ways of **making systematic use of partners' in-depth knowledge of developments in the field – for example, by seeking to outline a methodology for information-sharing with the UN and OSCE**, and leveraging working level exchanges to deliver a joint, written EU-OSCE Roadmap on conflict prevention and crisis management (a Strategic Compass deliverable). A summary of recommendations can be found in Table 3 below, along with a visual representation of how the EU can re-structure its institutional focus on peace and prevention in Figure 3.

Table 4. List of recommendations to enhance the EU's approach to preventive diplomacy

<p><u>EU should politically renew its emphasis on prevention and preventive diplomacy.</u></p> <p><i>How?</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The EEAS should formulate an EU Compact for Peace and Diplomacy that makes an effective case for joined-up preventive diplomacy, outlines strategic trade-offs, defines the scope and purpose of the EU's engagement, and lays out how this can be implemented.
<p><u>The EU must improve the coordination, consistency, coherence, and sensitivity of its preventive engagements.</u></p> <p><i>How?</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The identification of opportunities for conflict analysis and options for preventive action must be institutionally upgraded and be directly linked to the EEAS Secretary General in a new Peace and Prevention Hub that acts as a single-entry point for matters of prevention within the EEAS. • European Commission programming must become more flexible and responsive to the policy prescriptions emerging from Early Action Plans. The drafting of Multi-Annual Indicative Programmes must be aligned with the legislative cycle and chronologically sequenced to incorporate the options for action outlined in Early Action Plans. • Geographical departments within the EEAS should benefit from the additional presence of conflict experts at the Division level that liaise on related matters between EU Delegations and the Peace and Prevention Hub and contribute to monthly Horizon Scanning notes identifying conflict trends and triggers of violence in the short- to medium-term in prioritised countries/regions. • Considering the relevant role played by the European Parliament in preventive diplomacy, the Council and European Commission should establish mechanisms to raise awareness and duly consider initiatives undertaken by the European Parliament (e.g., parliamentary diplomacy, mediation, and capacity building). • The work carried forward by EUSRs must be reflected in the Peace and Prevention Hub's responsibility for high-level coordination to discuss ongoing developments and continuously review options for preventive engagement.
<p><u>The EU must enhance political buy-in to the logic of prevention and reinforce the culture of prevention amongst EU Member States according to a Team Europe approach.</u></p> <p><i>How?</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The European External Action Service's emphasis on prevention should be mirrored by the creation of a Council Working Party/Committee on prevention and mediation to discuss the prioritisation of opportunities for preventive engagement, as well as resulting analysis, follow-up, and monitoring. • The Council of the EU should establish an Integrated Political Preventive Action arrangement (along the lines of the Integrated Political Crisis Response arrangements and building on the semi-regular Early Warning/Early Action Forum) that produces an annual CARP gathering EU

Member States' foreign ministries to share best practices, lessons learned and find synergies with EU Member States' prevention activities.

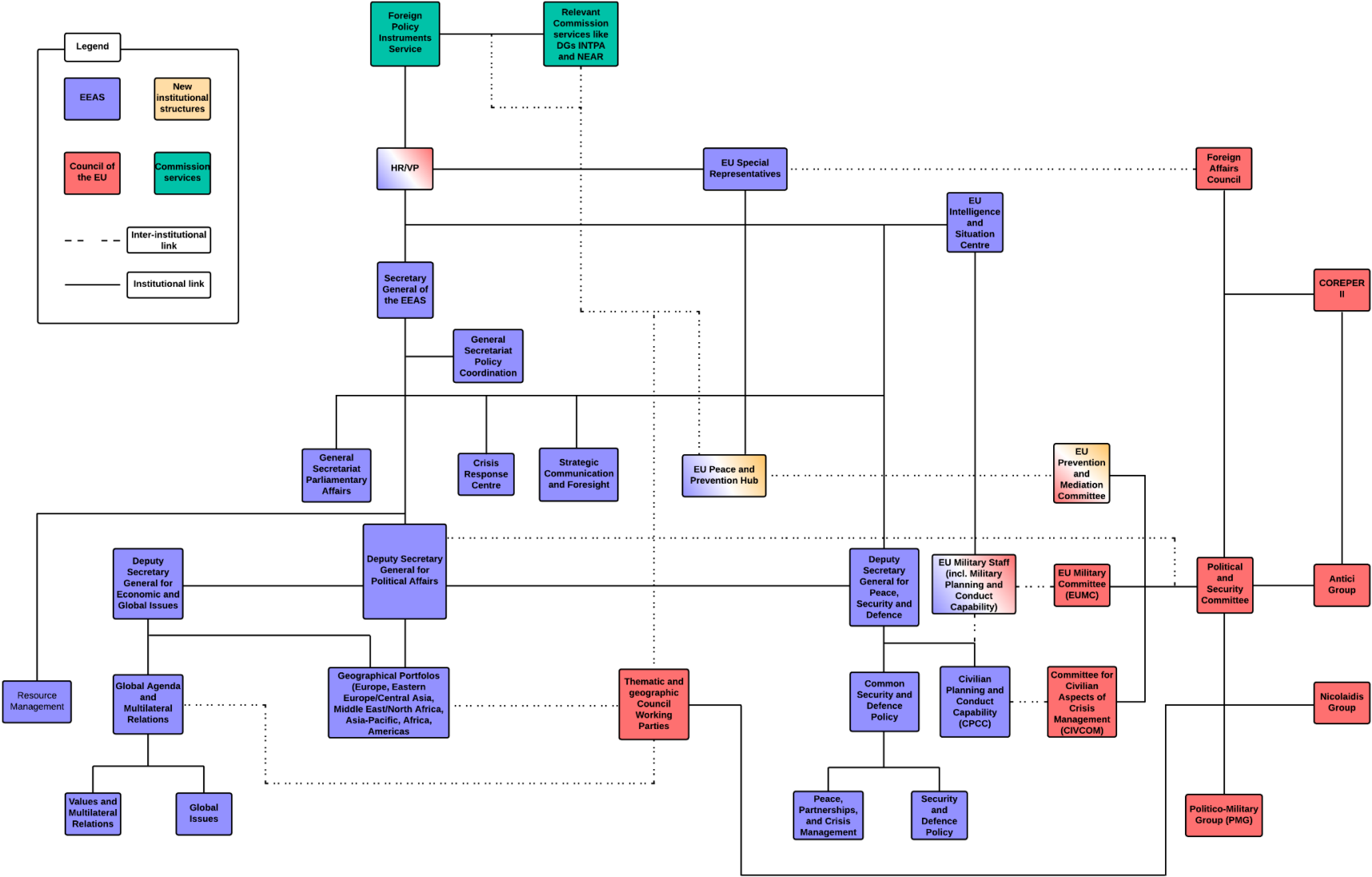
- The EEAS should provide EU Member States with access to the EU Knowledge4Peace repository of relevant analyses, and expand the repository to include some concrete, easily digestible, good preventive practices and lessons learned.

The EU must build its internal capacity and enhance its partnerships on matters of peace and prevention.

How?

- Greater emphasis must be placed on matters of peace in EU Delegations on the ground by bolstering the political sections of EU Delegations in terms of personnel, designating Peace and Conflict Advisors co-ordinating the work of the political, press, and information and cooperation sections of the Delegation (as well as others, if applicable: trade and migration attachés, FPI regional offices, DG ECHO field offices, etc.), and increasing the pool of rapid response funding for peace and security to provide quick, clear and objective analysis, identify opportunities for engagement, and implement context-sensitive activities.
- The EEAS should systematically engage the UN Liaison Office for Peace and Security in Brussels as the single-entry point to the UN system to involve the UN and relevant regional organisations in analysis and the identification of opportunities for preventive engagement, building a common culture of prevention at the global level by, for example, conducting joint training modules on conflict prevention, and sharing knowledge to facilitate preventive action at the country level.
- The EU should explore ways of making systematic use of partners' in-depth knowledge of developments in the field, for example by seeking to outline a methodology for information sharing with the UN and OSCE and working towards the Strategic Compass deliverable on a joint EU-OSCE Roadmap on conflict prevention and crisis management.

Figure 3. Visual representation of how to upgrade the EU's focus on preventive diplomacy with relevant actors displayed



7 Conclusions

The ongoing war in Ukraine, Azerbaijan's September 2023 offensive in Nagorno-Karabakh, Hamas' attacks on Israel (and Israel's retaliatory strike), as well as the intensifying resurgence of tensions in the Western Balkans, demonstrate that, despite success stories and continued engagement, preventive diplomacy remains an area that merits the EU's special attention. Engaging to prevent the occurrence, re-emergence, escalation, and spread of violence and conflict is a worthy investment in avoiding the loss of life and spurring socio-economic development worldwide.

Considering the EU's keen interest in preventive diplomacy since the 1990s, the urgency of geopolitical circumstances, and the clear, quantifiable benefits of preventive action, this IDA outlined the EU's preventive diplomacy toolbox in a structured way, including identifying all relevant actors (European Commission, the EEAS, Council of the EU, European Parliament, relevant EU Member States, and international partners) in achieving an integrated approach together with partner international organisations.

Basing itself off a review of the literature and key informant interviews, this analysis investigated how these key building blocks (e.g. conflict analysis, early warning, partnerships, mediation, etc.) contribute to the EU's preventive diplomacy efforts. This analysis sought to draw out the strengths and weaknesses of the EU's integrative preventive diplomacy approach with illustrative case examples, inevitably leading in the analytical section to identifying gaps in the EU's foreign policy where its preventive diplomacy efforts can be reinforced. While the EU is certainly an international frontrunner in terms of its evidence-based focus on preventing conflict, and the way in which it does so relatively effectively in an integrated manner, margin for improvement persists in joining the dots between early warning and effective implementation of identified options for preventive action. In an increasingly competitive international environment, the EU must also better navigate quickly changing conditions on the ground, garner the buy-in of EU Member States earlier and more frequently, and maintain an adequate balance between responding to ongoing crises and seeking to prevent future ones.

Lastly, based on identified gaps and lessons learned, the analysis provided recommendations on how to improve the effectiveness of the EU's preventive diplomacy toolbox. The four main recommendations stemming from this analysis are that:

1. The EU should politically renew its emphasis on prevention and preventive diplomacy;
2. The EU must improve the coordination, consistency, coherence, and sensitivity of its preventive engagements;
3. The EU must enhance political buy-in to the logic of prevention and reinforce the culture of prevention amongst EU Member States;
4. The EU must build its internal capacity and enhance its partnerships on matters of peace and prevention.

With sufficient institutional upgrading of the EU's preventive focus and the in-depth reflections resulting from the European Council's political appeal that the incoming HRVP develop an EU Compact for Peace and Diplomacy, the EU can further reinforce its global leadership on preventing violence and conflict through diplomacy.

8 List of interviewees

We acknowledge with gratitude interviewees for sharing their insights. For the record, we note the date of each online conversation. None of the below are responsible for the analysis presented in this study.

- Interview 1: UN official (18 September 2023).
- Interview 2: European Commission officials (18 September 2023).
- Interview 3: Netherlands Foreign Ministry official (19 September 2023).
- Interview 4: EEAS official (21 September 2023).
- Interview 5: Germany Foreign Ministry official (21 September 2023).
- Interview 6: EPLO officers (22 September 2023).
- Interview 7: EU Special Representative (25 September 2023).
- Interview 8: European Commission officials, (25 September 2023).
- Interview 9: EEAS official (29 September 2023).
- Interview 10: African Union official (29 September 2023).
- Interview 11: EU Delegation officials (2 October 2023).
- Interview 12: OSCE official (4 October 2023).

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