

Stocktaking and scoping of the Peacebuilding Partnership

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Executive Summary

This study provides a stocktaking and scoping on the future strategic direction of the Peacebuilding Partnership (PBP). Established in the context of the European Commission's Instrument for Stability (IfS), the PBP has the broad objective of strengthening international and regional capacity to analyse, prevent and respond to violent conflict and disasters, as well as to improve post-conflict and post-disaster recovery.

The three main PBP priorities are:

- Peace-building partnership support – funding to support capacity building of civil society actors and enhanced dialogue between civil society actors and policy makers at the European-level and in the field.
- Cooperation with international and/or regional organisations.
- Strengthening the European Union's (EU) contribution to international civilian stabilisation missions through training of EU experts.

Through consultation with stakeholders and experts, and a review of relevant documentation, the study draws lessons from the implementation of the PBP to date and provides recommendations on its future direction, *focusing primarily on the elements of the partnership relating to support and dialogue with non-state actors (NSAs)*. Some attention is, however, also given to the other elements of the partnership within the main body of the report.

The background and context of EC peacebuilding policies and engagement with NSAs

The PBP is just one of the EC's tools in relation to an overall strategic approach to peacebuilding that encompasses both 'long-term' approaches – supporting the adaptation and targeting EU instruments to address the causes of conflict – and 'short-

term' approaches - improving the EU's capacity to react quickly to conflict risks - as well as cooperation with international partners.

Engagement between NSAs and EC on peacebuilding issues is not new and has taken place within a number of settings and in relation to a spectrum of issues over the past fifteen years. Initiatives include the first Conflict Prevention Network established in 1997 and the ensuing Conflict Prevention Partnership and Initiative for Peacebuilding. The establishment of PBP has sought to enhance and formalise the relationship through the provision of capacity building support (funding) and a more structured dialogue process.

Results of the partnership to date

In 2008 the PBP launched two calls for proposals (CfPs). One to support to capacity building of civil society organisations in relation to operational and institutional capacity and their contribution to early warning systems and field-based political analysis; and one specifically for the organisation of round tables. In addition the EC initiated a dialogue process through a series of consultation meetings with NSAs and established a web portal as a channel of communication.

Since none of the projects identified for support under the CfPs have been fully implemented it is impossible to draw any well informed conclusions on their likely impact and contribution to the strategic objectives of the PBP. However a number of observations can be made (specifically in relation to the outcome of the CfP for capacity building support).

The projects selected (12 of 126 submitted) appear broadly consistent with the strategic objectives and priority areas of the PBP and a couple may prove particularly valuable due to their efforts to 'move the field forward' and be of benefit to the peacebuilding sector as a whole (e.g. through the field testing of new approaches). However, a number of issues have emerged with regard to the management of the call:

First, the majority of the projects are country specific (as opposed to enhancing the understanding of thematic and transversal issues) with activities aimed predominantly at building the capacities of local actors. Although not undeserving in themselves, their potential to build international and regional capacity and be of value to the peacebuilding sector as a whole is open to question. Related concerns were also raised during consultations regarding the diffuse and piecemeal nature of the projects, the absence of critical mass and concomitant potential for demonstrable impact beyond the scope of the project itself.

Second, it is unclear how far these locally focused projects are consistent and complimentary to other country-based EC funded activities and strategic approaches. Interviews with EC Delegations suggest that whilst they might fit with the EC's overall approach in a country, in some cases they failed to 'add another dimension' whilst in others they were surplus to requirement. This was probably inevitable since there were

only limited possibilities for involving EC Delegations during the selection of projects, not least due to the current human resource constraints within the Commission unit managing the call (RELEX A/2). It does suggest however that in future such activities should be supported from the level of the Delegation. Similarly, in future more could be done at an HQ level ensure closer coordination and synergies between the PBP and the global calls of EIDHR in relation to supporting the peaceful conciliation of group interests.

Third, a number of the smaller EU based peacebuilding organisations, many in need of support themselves, were disappointed not to receive funding and this placed a strain on their relations with the EC. The grant beneficiaries were on the whole large well resourced NGOs based in EU capitals with some specialism in peacebuilding.

These issues are attributable to a number of factors. Research to date suggests that as a tool for funding capacity building, the EC CfP mechanism is a rather blunt and rigid instrument that is neither particularly conducive to supporting strong policy steer in the selection of projects and beneficiaries, nor to supporting smaller, less well resourced organisations for their own capacity building needs. Furthermore, more could be done in future to calibrate the CfP application form and evaluation grid to the identification of high quality peacebuilding projects.

Against this background, it is evident that the CfP guidelines were too broadly conceived. They were insufficiently targeted in terms of the level and scope of activities and set the floor and ceiling for the grants very wide, opening the door a large volume and broad range of proposals. The lack of human resource to manage the CfPs process within RELEX A/2 certainly did not help in this respect.

At the same time, many of the proposals lacked quality and some contained administrative errors. In some cases this was no doubt due to of a lack of experience in writing EC proposals. However in others, it was a result of a certain level of complacency that the funds were loosely 'earmarked' for certain actors and an expectation that the CfP would support core funding. It seems that the Commission did attempt to provide clarification on this issue, however confusion persisted.

The research process also revealed wider issues surrounding the PBP. These include an evident lack of clarity and common understanding around the strategic focus and concepts underpinning the PBP. On the part of NGOs and the European Parliament this stems from different perspectives regarding the genesis of the NSA elements of the partnership and what it is expected to deliver, and to organisations' differing interpretations of peacebuilding as a concept. On the side of the Commission, an analysis of key documentation suggests a level of inconsistency and lack of coherence in relation to the strategic aims and overall approach – notably in relation to the balance of focus between support for short term crisis response capacities and the longer-term peacebuilding and conflict prevention perspective.

On the other hand, the dialogue element of the PBP has proved less challenging than the CfPs and is viewed by most stakeholders as both relevant and useful. Indeed, efforts have been made during consultations to define a more systematic and strategic approach to dialogue and stakeholders agree that more needs to be done in this direction as the partnership evolves. Staffing constraints in the Commission will however continue to make managing a sustained and meaningful dialogue challenging.

The future strategic direction of support to NSAs via the PBP

The majority of stakeholders consulted stated a preference for the PBP to adopt a broad conceptual understanding of peacebuilding to allow for capacity building support in relation to a wide range of thematic areas, covering both short-term crisis management as well as longer-term peacebuilding and conflict prevention. This is also in line with the approach inherent within the IfS Strategy paper and the PBP Annual Action Programme for 2009.

Although there is a reluctance in some quarters to limit or list priority areas of focus under PBP CfPs - since this may risk excluding certain interventions or actor – due to the pitfalls associated with insufficient targeting in the previous CfP, it would seem to make sense in practical terms to narrow down the thematic areas, type of activities and level of support.

In this respect the EC could give preference to thematic or transversal areas of focus that demonstrate a clear complementarity and synergy with other EC supported activities and policy priorities (e.g. other areas of support under IfS Article 3 and 4 as well as broader policy priorities, such as engagement in fragile states), with due attention also given to the priorities of other relevant actors (e.g. the EU Member States and United Nations). Moreover, thematic or transversal focus is also of particular relevance given the comparatively limited budget for NSA support under the PBP as opposed to under other funding mechanisms, for example the EIDHR. PBP funding could thus more effectively be concentrated on adding value to existing in-country support under other instruments by targeting for example regional, multi-country and cross-sector activities, than diluting impact by distributing a small amount of disparate country-specific grants.

In terms of the type of activity, the study points to providing support to organisations (or consortia of organisations) working with local partners and networks across a range of geographical contexts in relation to thematic or transversal issues, who not only support their partners but also generate learning from practice and support the development of an evidence base of what works and what doesn't. This would in some cases involve supporting organisations to develop and deepen their *existing* areas of work and institutional capacities, pilot new projects and extract learning that can be fed back to the Commission (and beyond).

Regarding the level of support, a consensus of opinion suggests geographically focused support aimed exclusively at building capacities of local organisations at a country or

sub-regional level should be decentralised to the level of the EC Delegation. However, although valuable, these activities should not, as things stand, be a priority of the PBP as they are unlikely to have the most strategic impact. Furthermore, decentralisation of a CfP process would be difficult to achieve in practice given the capacity constraints faced by EC Delegations. Nonetheless, it should not be ruled out for the future, since the appointment of Regional Crisis Response Planning Officers, may present an additional capacity to take on this type of task. Support via global CfPs should focus on projects in relation to thematic/ transversal issues that could span a range of geographical locations.

In relation to dialogue, suggestions revolve around instituting a three pronged approach, involving consultations in relation to strategic documents (such as Annual Action Plans); consultations around priorities and policy issues in relation to thematic peacebuilding issues; and geographically focused consultations in relation to specific crises and responses. Furthermore, dialogue should take place both at the EU level and at the level of Delegations (where possible), should engage the broadest range of actors, become more structured in terms of institutional mechanisms, and involve expert facilitation and appropriate venues. However, this is an ambitious undertaking and, given the current staffing constraints in relation to the PBP, it may be recommended to outsource the strategic management of the dialogue to another party (e.g. a network).

Operational and financial implementation of the Partnership

From consultations with relevant Commission services and a review of the main financing tools available to the EC, it appears that the most appropriate tool for the implementation of the NSA elements of the PBP are grants awarded through Calls for Proposals via Centralised Management. (Direct granting procedures are not possible in the case of support to NSAs under the PBP, but can be used to support international organisations having reached the requested audit level).

Centralised management can be either by *direct centralised management*, directly operated by EC Services (at Headquarters or delegated to an EC Delegation), or by *indirect centralised management* whereby the management is entrusted to a public or private body that has reached the so-called '6 pillars', chosen in an objective and transparent manner, and involving a 'Delegation Agreement' outlining the scope of the delegated tasks (i.e. the scope of Commission involvement). Indirect Centralised Management can result in a 'Call for Expression of Interests' among the EU Member States or their agencies and the Delegation Agreement signed with MS or MS Agency or with a consortium of various MS or MS Agencies.

Framework contracts, used mainly for the provision of services e.g. the organisation of conferences or workshops and studies etc., may be relevant to the PBP in general, but are not used to support NGOs. On the other hand, framework partnership agreements, established as a long-term cooperation mechanism between the EC and grant beneficiaries (operating on a similar principle to framework contracts), can be used to

support NGOs but are burdensome to establish and most appropriate for missions involving rapidly mobilised short-term interventions (e.g. humanitarian response).

Following a thorough examination of their potential use, it is clear that neither operating grants, nor core funding are appropriate for the NSA elements of the PBP. Both are administratively burdensome and come with their own clear disadvantages for the beneficiary organisation.

The study suggests an approach for the financial and administrative implementation of the PBP contained within the recommendations is modular in approach in the sense that the suggested elements can be implemented separately or in an integrated way, and can be implemented at once or gradually.

Key recommendations

- The definition (or understanding) of peacebuilding adopted by the PBP should be as wide as possible in order to allow for inclusion of capacity building support in relation to both short-term (crisis management) and long-term (structural) approaches to peacebuilding and conflict prevention.
- In order to ensure sufficient targeting of future CfPs, preference could be given to capacity building support in relation to thematic or transversal issue areas that demonstrate a clear complementarity or synergy with other EC supported activities and policy priorities (as identified by the EC). With due attention also given to the priorities of other relevant actors, including EU member states and the UN.
- Support should be given to projects undertaken by organisations that work across a range of geographical contexts (in relation to thematic or transversal issues) that not only support the capacity building of local partners but also generate learning of benefit to the peacebuilding sector as a whole and can be fed back to the Commission.
- The PBP should provide opportunities to support individual organisations as well as to consortia.
- Predominantly country-focused local-level capacity building activities should not currently be a priority of the PBP.
- A three pronged approach to dialogue should be taken with consultations: in relation to strategic documents and programming (including future CfPs); around priorities and policy issues in relation to thematic issues; and on Geographic or crisis specific issues.
- Dialogue and consultations should ideally take place in Brussels, in Member States and where possible at the Delegation level and engage the broadest range of actors.

- RELEX A/2 should consider funding a network to undertake the strategic management of the dialogue and to provide a repository of best practice and evidence base for peacebuilding policy and practice.
- As a first step, the EC should launch an open call for proposals through a Direct Centralised Management procedure for the funding of a network to manage the dialogue.
- A global call for proposals should then be launched, preferably by a third party, for funding further capacity building support preferably through Indirect Centralised Management. The proposed and recommended alternative would be to transfer the management to a Member State Agency, or (better) to a Consortium of Member State Agencies, such as EUNIDA.
- The potential for launching future local and regional calls for proposals should be explored with the Delegations. This is subject to sufficient resources and budget, so not for immediate implementation, but to be thought of in the future.
- While various EC framework contracts exist, it is not certain that they respond to the exact needs of the PBP. To create a specific one will probably be difficult and take a quite long time. It seems to be preferable to create a framework partnership agreement.
- The creation of a framework partnership agreement is not an option for the time being due to human resources and budgetary constraints. However, it could be envisaged once the CfPs' management has been transferred to a third body (which means year 2 or 3, if we consider the current year as year 1), and could probably be envisaged through this third body.
- Adapt the evaluation grids to the exact needs and specificity of the PBP outlined in this report should be done.
- The rationale for the operational modalities of the PBP should be more clearly communicated with partners, particularly around the use of CfP and the limitations around operating grants and core funding, in order to assuage any misunderstanding and confusion with respect to the nature of support available.
- As a priority, and in order to implement the recommendations above, more human resource should be dedicated to the strategic and administrative management of the PBP within RELEX A/2.