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FACTSHEET

EU conflict Early Warning System

INTRODUCTION

The **EU conflict Early Warning System (EWS)** is a robust, evidence-based risk management tool that identifies, prioritises and assesses non-EU countries at risks of violent conflict. With a time horizon of up to four years, the EWS identifies **structural risk factors that frequently correlate with the outburst of violence**. It enables policy makers to develop **strategic responses to mitigate those risks** and provide opportunities for conflict prevention.

WHY AN EU CONFLICT EARLY WARNING SYSTEM?

The increase of violent conflict in recent years, especially of non-state violence, has raised the question of how the emergence, re-emergence or escalation of violent conflict can be prevented.

As a global actor, the EU has developed a conflict EWS as part of its toolbox. By systematically collecting and analysing information to identify and understand the risks for violent conflict in a country, the EU conflict EWS provides for a shared analysis and coherent European response, linking early warning to early action

WHAT DOES THE EU CONFLICT EWS DO?

The goal of EU conflict early warning is not 'prediction'. It is always difficult to pinpoint or forecast what precisely will trigger the eruption of violence. The EU conflict EWS looks at underlying factors which correlate to the risk of a violent conflict in a country. Risks are identified and assessed so that early preventive action can be pursued before situations escalate into crises.

HOW DOES IT WORK?

The EWS process starts with the compilation of quantitative and qualitative data which indicates the risk of conflict for non-EU countries. Out of these, a handful are selected to become the focus of further analysis under the EU conflict Early Warning System.

The assessment provides the basis for the formulation of **timely, relevant and coherent EU responses for conflict prevention by staff from across EU services**. The response reflects the Integrated Approach and brings together diplomacy and political actions, development cooperation, and crisis preparedness and crisis response actions. Responses may take the shape of a new action or lead to fine-tuning of existing ones, ranging from short/medium-term actions to contributing to setting the long-term priorities for EU

development cooperation in the country. EU preventive action involves EU Member States, who closely follow all the stages of the EWS.

The early warning cycle builds on four components: Risk Scanning, Prioritisation, Shared Assessment, and Follow-up and Monitoring. This ensures a regular update of priorities and allows time for analysis and follow-up.

THE EU CONFLICT EWS PROCESS

Preparatory Component: Risk Scanning

Risk information from the Global Conflict Risk Index¹ provides **the basis for subsequent prioritisation** by EU services. Quantitative data on the probability and intensity of a violent conflict is complemented with open source and intelligence-based qualitative analysis. An overview of countries in regional risk tables is presented to the EEAS and Commission Services for their thematic and geographic expert input.

1: Prioritisation

Senior management from the European External Action Service and the European Commission decide on up to **five priority countries**. The decision takes into account where there is heightened risk of emergence, re-emergence or escalation of violence, as well as EU interest and leverage. Results of risk scanning and conflict prevention priorities are shared with EU Member States for input and discussion at the **Political and Security Committee (PSC)**.

2: Shared Assessment and Follow-up

The **Assessment of Structural Risks of Conflict part is based on a field mission in prioritised countries**. It focuses on a series of factors including legitimacy and rule of law, security and regional stability, inter-group relations and society, human rights and civil society/media, climate change/disasters, and economic performance. EU actors identify gaps **in relation to these risk factors, seeking opportunities to support, complement, and expand ongoing activities**. In-country assessment of structural risks of conflict lay the foundation for **Conflict Prevention Reports, which are shared with** geographic Council Working Groups and form the basis for follow-up work by the various services, EU Delegations, and Member States.

Starting from the ninth iteration of the EU conflict EWS, a **follow-up exercise** will be undertaken approximately one-and-a-half years after the first in-country assessment. The goal is to update the assessment if there have been significant changes in the risk environment of the country, providing an opportunity to delve deeper into some priority risk domains, to assess the implementation of previously identified options for action, and to develop adjustments and potentially pinpoint new opportunities for engagement.

3: Monitoring

Monitoring involves assessing the evolution of the risk environment and how EU action has contributed to mitigated risk. EU Delegation and Member States present in the country will help initiate new guidance on forward actions, enable reflections on impact, and identify lessons learned and potential improvements. Their reports on how identified actions have contributed to addressing underlying risks are discussed with Member States in the relevant Council Working Groups and PSC.

EU CONFLICT EWS COORDINATION

The EU conflict Early Warning System exercise is **led by the ISP.2 Division within the Integrated Approach for Security and Peace Directorate** of the EEAS.

¹ The Global Conflict Risk Index is produced by the Joint Research Center of the European Commission and is financed by the Instrument contributing to Stability and Peace.

Find out more:

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