



“Conflict Prevention” (12th – 14th October 2008)

RACVIAC – Centre for Security Cooperation organized in Rakitje, Vitez Damir Martić barracks, a two-day seminar with an aim to provide an overview of some theoretical concepts, which were/are used to describe, analyze and assess conflict prevention and to discuss the role of International Organizations, NGOs and civil society in conflict prevention. During a two-day seminar international experts shared their experience, knowledge and expertise, evoking lively interest among participants.

Conflict exists in all countries and in every level of society. Conflict *per se* is by no means a negative force rather it is a natural expression of social difference and of humanity’s perpetual struggle for justice and self-determination. If managed non-violently, it can be positive, a source of immense creativity and progress.

The challenge, however, is to avoid the violent expression of conflict without suppressing the root causes completely. No matter how poor or oppressed a society is, or how provocative and manipulative political leaders may be, communal violence does not erupt suddenly. Inevitably, it is the manifestation of accumulated aggression and hostility. In order to prevent violence, it is necessary to address the hostile mistrust and belligerence before it reaches

a point where each side believes that violence is their only recourse. The goal of prevention is to create a situation in which differences and conflicts can be addressed in a non-violent and constructive manner.

“The aim [of conflict prevention] must be to create a synergy with those civil society groups that are bridge-builders, truth finders, watchdogs, human rights defenders, and agents of social protection and economic revitalization.”

UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan, quoted in *The Washington Times*, 23 June 2004.

Discussion Results

Conflict prevention has risen to prominence on the agendas of governments and international organizations in the post-Cold War period. This can be primarily attributed to the opportunities for international cooperation brought about by the end of the Cold War, the potential instability inherent in the forging of new states, and the continuing prevalence of inter and intra-state conflict.

In this respect professor Wolff illustrated the relationship between the aims (why) and timing (when) of any intervention, the

options available to the intervening party, and its likelihood of success.



In general terms, conflict prevention in the international arena refers to any attempt by the third parties to prevent the outbreak of violent conflict.

Conflict prevention (CP) is a multifaceted, complex process ranging from long-term or structural policy to promote stability, to short-term intensive diplomacy to resolve disputes (“preventive diplomacy”), and civilian or military intervention to monitor and/or control the early stages of conflict (“crisis management”). It also refers to attempts to stop the recurrence of violence in conflict zones (“peace-building” or “post-conflict reconstruction/rehabilitation”). It is therefore an activity primarily, although not exclusively, concerned with the period before the outbreak of war.

It covers a range of activities also associated with gathering information on impending conflict (“early warning”), aid to relieve the effects of conflict, sanctions, and humanitarian intervention. Preventing the recurrence of violence also includes issues of peace-building and post-conflict rehabilitation.

The concept of Early Warning is important in CP since early and accurate warning allows for effective responses in order to stop further conflict escalation. This thesis tries to solve the problems associated with three major elements of early warning systems: a) the collection of trustworthy

and accurate information b) the selection of a precise prediction model and c) the prediction of negative developments itself.

Mr. Gerd Hagemeyer-Gaverus illustrated SIPRI project “An Internet-Based Early Warning Indicators System for Preventive Policy” and the ideas to build an Internet based Early Warning System in order to achieve accurate short-term early warning on conflicts and humanitarian crises, including ethno-political conflicts, genocides, inter- and intrastate conflicts.

CP rose to a position of importance on the 1990s political agenda due to a number of factors, as just previously mentioned. International organizations and non-governmental organizations were the key actors in promoting conflict prevention as a significant policy objective in the post-Cold War years.

There was a pressing need to find new ways of mediating and resolving the growing number of internal conflicts emerging during the process of state formation and disintegration in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union.



Professor Stefan WOLFF mentioned how security threats presented by conflict within (and between) states, as well as widespread public demand to 'do something' about this, poses a continuing challenge for regional and international organisations and their member states.

International organizations and NGOs rose to the challenge. The Organization for

Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE – formerly CSCE) was institutionalized and expanded, and was to play an important role in election and human rights monitoring.

Mr. Loda explained about OSCE conflict prevention tools, which include regular political dialogue and exchange of views among OSCE participating States in the Permanent Council, the network of OSCE field missions and other field activities (currently 20 different operations) and permanent Institutions such as the High Commissioner on National Minorities, Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights/ODIHR, Representative on Freedom of the Media and the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly.

The United Nations (UN) was able to take its key objective forward and took the lead in early warning and the development of preventive diplomacy techniques.

Mr. Zachary Taylor displayed the role of UNDP in promoting prevention and peace building and reducing and averting conflict. He stressed that building skills among key stakeholders enabled them to convene problem-solving discussions as an alternative to violence. Raising awareness of contentious issues for development planners and policymakers allowed them to integrate prevention measures into the long-term development agenda.

Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have played active roles in non-official (“track-two”) diplomacy and continue to lobby for effective and coordinated international conflict prevention policy.

The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) made a successful transition from Cold War defence alliance to post-Cold War crisis management outfit and occasional military partner of the UN.

Prof. Kriendler described the mechanisms of NATO crisis management and conflict management, highlighting in his conclusion some of the key challenges. Among others he mentioned that NATO would continue to improve its capabilities and continue military transformation to assure that it retained its credibility, it would reinforce the link between political commitments, operational roles and responsibilities and it would increase the resources which allies have available for defence.

Conflict prevention is a multifaceted, complex process ranging from long-term or structural policy to promote stability, to short-term intensive diplomacy to resolve disputes and civilian or military intervention to monitor and/or control the early stages of conflict.

The European Union (EU) emerged as a new actor in conflict prevention as it acquired a more visible foreign policy with the inception of the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) in 1991.

Regional cooperation is at the core of the European

Union. As such, it features also in the EU approach to its neighbours, including the European Neighbourhood Policy.

As Ms Woollard explained the European Union remained a leading contributor to peace and stability across the globe. Its wide array of instruments allowed it to effectively map the risks, the rising tensions and fragile situations, thus ensuring the application of adequate tools to respond to them. EU can be considered as a perfect example of Conflict prevention system.

Moreover, as Gen Lato pointed out in his presentation and with reference to the

provisions of the Geneva Conventions and the Additional Protocols related to International Humanitarian Law, domestic legislation should be considered a preventive tool, which countries had at their disposal.



In adjusting domestic legislation to take on board, the preventive obligations ensured that there is a much greater likelihood that humanitarian law will be honoured in the event of a conflict breaking out. Such measures must be implemented immediately, and without delay in peacetime.

The Media is also playing an important role in the prevention phase. *The media can be an agent for peace as well as an agent of war.* Their impact on peace and conflict dynamics should not be underestimated. Prof. Grbesa illustrated how media messages are not simply 'report facts', but they also had a direct bearing and influence on the way that people think and act.

The lecturers

The following lectures were given during the seminar:

Conflict Prevention: Why, When, and How to Intervene by Prof. Stefan Wolff (Director of Centre for International Crisis Management & Conflict Resolution - ICMCR); The Conflict Prevention and Crisis Management Practice of the OSCE by Mr. Christian Loda (OSCE, Conflict

Prevention Centre); The EU and its Conflict Prevention Potential by Ms. Chaterine Woollard (Director of European Peacebuilding Liaison Office - EPLO); Conflict Prevention. NATO Perspective by Prof. John Kriendler (George C. Marshall European Centre for Security Studies); Crisis Prevention and Recovery in Southeast Europe – UNDP Perspective by Mr. Zachary Taylor (Conflict Prevention Specialist, UNDP); Ways towards mainstreaming Conflict Prevention and its Institutionalization by Ambassador Ortwin Hennig (Vice President & Head of the Conflict Prevention Program, EastWest institute - EWI); Impact and role of media in conflict prevention by Prof. Marijana Grbesa (Faculty of Political Science, Zagreb University); The Rule of Law: Instruments for guaranteeing Compliance with International Humanitarian Law and Human Right by Maj. Gen. (rtd) Salvatore Lato (member of International Institute of Humanitarian Law - IIHL); Conflict Early Warning. How to be on time? by Mr. Gerd Hagemeyer-Gaverus (Stockholm International Peace Research Institute – SIPRI); People building Peace. The Role of the Civil Society in preventing Conflicts by Mr. Peter van Tuijl (Executive Director of European Centre for Conflict Prevention – ECCP); Preventing Conflicts in the Balkan. Lessons Learned and Way ahead by Dr. James Lyon (Senior Associate of Democratization Policy Council).



Conclusions.

Conflict prevention has to be considered a shared priority.



Mainstreaming is without doubt the best approach to tackle conflict and it means considering conflict prevention as a clear cross cutting argument and unequivocal target. Only in this way it can rightly be considered, reflected and captured in all existing policies, programmes and evaluations.

Cooperation with the international community was further strengthened. Desk-to-desk meetings, staff-to-staff consultations between different partners, and cooperation in the field with regional organizations were evoked, stressed and requested by all participants during the final discussion.

If significant progress was achieved in developing partnerships and cooperation with regional organizations,

likewise, further efforts to enhance dialogue and to share information and cooperation with non-state actors should be fostered in the region.

“In the beginning war was only a word. It did not have substance for me. Journalists and political leaders used the word occasionally at first, then more frequently. But people did not utter the word because no one believed it could really happened. In the long phase of preparation and denial the substance began to slowly fill that ugly it became fat and real, like an insatiable animal.”

Slavenka Drakulic,
from *Letter from Zagreb on the Nature of the War*