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**EU Conflict Early Warning System: Objectives, Process and Guidance for
Implementation**

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Context

Article 21(2)(c) of the Treaty on European Union explicitly names conflict prevention as one of the EU's foreign policy goals. The 2011 Council conclusions on Conflict Prevention have elaborated this point and provide a strong mandate for the EU to engage in conflict prevention.¹ In order to identify structural risks of conflict and prevent the emergence, re-emergence or escalation of violent conflict, early warning capabilities are indispensable.

In its conclusions, the Council considers that conflict early warning needs to be further strengthened within the EU and that output from all sources, including from Member States, should be better integrated; conflict early warning should draw more extensively upon field-based information, including from EU Delegations and civil society actors, in order to provide a more solid foundation for conflict risk analysis. Enhancing conflict early warning will also enable the EU to work more effectively with partners on issues regarding the responsibility to protect and the protection of human rights. Finally, Council conclusions stress that more emphasis needs to be put on early action to mitigate the risks of outbreak and recurrence of conflicts.

In follow-up to these conclusions, the European External Action Service (EEAS) and Commission services have put in place the EU conflict Early Warning System (**EWS**) as part of their broader activities in the field of security policy. The procedures and methodology of the system were tested in two regional pilot studies in 2012 and 2013, before the system was rolled out in September 2014 for all non-EU countries.

The EWS is a key component of the EU's Comprehensive Approach to External Conflict and Crises (2013)² and applies to the complex context of EU external action implemented by the EU and Member States. This Joint Staff Working Document is a deliverable of the 2015 Action Plan for the Comprehensive Approach.³

The purpose of this Joint Staff Working Document is to serve as basis for the inter-service collaboration for the functioning of the EWS. To this end, this document describes EWS objectives and scope, components and stakeholders.

¹ Doc 11820/11.

² Doc 9644/14, JOIN (2013) 30, 11.12.2013.

³ SWD (2015) 85, 10.4.2015.

Objectives and Scope of the EU conflict Early Warning System (EWS)

The EWS is a robust, evidence-based risk management tool that identifies, assesses and helps prioritise situations at risk of violent conflict⁴ for non-EU countries, focusing on structural factors and with a time horizon of four years. It also identifies conflict prevention and peace building opportunities.

The EWS promotes a shared assessment of conflict risks and stimulates timely, relevant and coherent responses to prevent the emergence, re-emergence or escalation of violence by developing options for new responses or fine-tuning those that already exist.

The goal is not 'prediction'. It will always be difficult to pinpoint the exact trigger for the eruption of violence. There are, however, certain structural factors and indicators that frequently correlate with conflict risk that the EWS can help to mitigate.

Components of the EWS

The EWS process is conducted twice per year, which ensures a regular update of priorities and allows time for analysis and follow-up. The process must be able to evolve and respond to the requirements of different EU actors however the following components constitute essential elements.

Preparatory component: risk scanning

Main stakeholders: European Commission-Joint Research Centre ♦ EEAS: EU Intelligence and situation Centre, EU Military Staff Intelligence Directorate (Single Intelligence Analysis Capacity - SIAC) and Security policy and conflict prevention Directorate.

The preparatory component compiles available risk information, as the basis for subsequent prioritisation and conflict risk assessment by EU services. The main resource is a quantitative index of conflict risk⁵. The indicators that form the basis of the index (see Annex I) have been selected according to their strong correlation with highly violent conflict. They do not focus on risk for the EU but for the third country itself, with specific attention to human security.⁶

⁴ Violent conflict refers to those conflicts resulting in violence occurring within, between and across state boundaries and including violence targeting particular groups, such as mass atrocities. Situations 'at risk of conflict' are understood as situations where the actions of any of the conflict parties threaten or hold out the prospect of threatening: the security of a population or particular groups, and/or the fulfilment of core state functions, and/or the international order.

⁵ The Global Conflict Risk Index: <http://conflictrisk.jrc.ec.europa.eu/>. Developed by the European Commission's Joint Research Centre for the EWS, this is also used for the EU's Index for Risk Management (INFORM) as part of efforts to improve the evidence base for Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection financial decisions and policy making, measuring the risk of humanitarian crises and disasters, including human-induced hazard. The Global Conflict Risk Index is currently funded by the Instrument contributing to Stability and Peace (IcSP).

⁶ Different mechanisms with a conflict early warning or risk management component also exist within other services, such as tools related to crisis management (e.g. situation room) or EU threat assessment (intelligence

The findings of the index are complemented with intelligence-based analysis from the SIAC, which focuses on risks to the EU and its Member States. SIAC has adapted its methodology to include the structural conflict risk factors that are central to the EWS. The results are then brought together with the latest qualitative situation analysis available from open sources and compared with assessments from previous EWS cycles. Taken together, these different sources provide a first global overview of conflict risk. This overview is presented to EEAS and Commission services by the conflict prevention, peacebuilding and mediation division of the EEAS as the starting point for component 1. (Prioritisation)

1. Prioritisation

Main stakeholders: Management and staff of EEAS and Commission Services, including in Delegations ♦ Political and Security Committee (PSC)

The preparatory risk scanning is reviewed by relevant services, including input from EU Delegations, in order to identify early warning priorities. This takes into account specific EU interests and leverage as well as where there is value in reviewing, enhancing or expanding EU engagement to increase prevention / peacebuilding impact.

The result of this preparatory risk scanning is shared with Member States for discussion and input in PSC.

Following PSC discussions and, where appropriate, relevant guidance, senior management requests their staff to launch coordination work on further analysis and/or preventive action involving EU Delegations, field missions and EU staff in headquarters. This takes place through informal country team inter-service consultations, including EEAS and Commission services as described below in component 2. (Shared assessment and follow-up)

2. Shared assessment and follow-up

Main stakeholders: EU Delegations ♦ ECHO field offices ♦ EU Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) Missions in-country ♦ EU Special Representatives (EUSR) ♦ Member States' Embassies in third countries ♦ EEAS and Commission services' headquarters geographic and thematic staff ♦ Council Working Groups ♦ PSC

Preventive action must be based on expertise from the field and a thorough analysis of the specific conflict risks in the EWS priority countries. In-country, all EU actors are consulted, including field staff of ECHO, EUSR teams, CSDP missions and representatives of Member States as well as EU Delegations. In parallel with inter-service consultations, Member States are consulted and informed through the relevant Council structures.

In-country, the consultation is based on a structured discussion among EU actors, around a series of factors linked to human security that is provided by the conflict prevention, peacebuilding and

based). The EWS integrates findings from these sources where possible. The Risk Management Framework for Budget Support also assesses conflict risk for the purpose of decision making on EU financial assistance.

mediation division of the EEAS. The factors cover political, social cohesion and public security, conflict prevalence, geography and environment, and economic indicators - see Annex I.

During this process, EU actors take stock of existing interventions and their impact on conflict/risks. Such interventions include preventive / peacebuilding actions as well as actions with other goals (e.g. developmental, security, political) that affect the identified risk factors or causes of conflict and fragility. Where there is a need to complement ongoing activities, e.g. to address a rising risk level, EU actors develop proposals for additional action. Proposals are linked to the analysis of conflict and target those structural factors that have been identified as specific risks. These can consider the full range of the EU's engagement on external action as well as measures proposed by the Member States through their mission staff.

The results of the in-country consultation process are documented in Checklists for structural risks of conflict. They represent the collective assessment of EU actors at country level.

On the basis of these Checklists, the EEAS geographic services prepare conflict prevention reports that identify key risks as well as options and recommendations for political and programmatic preventive action, in consultation with the Delegation(s) concerned and Commission services. Wherever possible, timelines for action are identified alongside responsible services. The assessment and proposals contained in these reports are subsequently discussed and agreed during country team / region / theme-specific inter-service meetings in Headquarters as joint EEAS and Commission services' output. Staff from thematic and specialised departments are invited to contribute to the analysis.

Where necessary, more detailed information on individual countries can be gathered by commissioning conflict analyses from the EU institutions or from external organisations. Guidance for using the conflict analysis tool can be found in the joint EEAS – Commission guidance note on conflict analysis⁷ or the EU Staff Handbook: Operating in situations of conflict and fragility.⁸ A conflict analysis can also serve as an opportunity to reflect on the conflict sensitivity of previous EU policies.

Conflict prevention reports are shared and discussed with the relevant geographic Council Working Groups and are the basis for follow-up work by the various services, EU Delegations and Member States.

3. Monitoring

Main stakeholders: Management and staff of EEAS and Commission services ♦ Member States' representatives

The EWS has a built-in 'review moment' designed to provide EU institutions' senior management and Member States with an overview of work on prevention and peacebuilding. At the end of each six-month EWS cycle, services report on progress with regard to options and recommendations identified

⁷ <http://intragate.ec.europa.eu/eeas/eeaszone/?q=node/52532#Guidancereferences> (intranet)

⁸ <http://capacity4dev.ec.europa.eu/public-fragility/document/guidance-note-conflict-analysis-support-eu-external-action>

in conflict prevention reports (to EEAS and Commission senior management and to the PSC) on cases prioritised up to one year before. The reporting indicates those proposals for (early) action that have been identified, initiated or implemented, and their impact. Where proposals have not been followed up, reasoning is provided. The identified options for action may be updated / revised. This monitoring phase triggers new guidance on forward action and a reflection on impact as well as lessons learned during the process and potential improvements.

Impact/Added Value

The EWS facilitates EU-wide discussion on where risks for violent conflict exist, and on what comprehensive action can be identified to mitigate those risks. The focus is on multiplying the preventive and peacebuilding impact of EU engagement.

Each component is designed to add value for EU actors working in and on countries affected by, or at risk of violent conflict.

Information gathering and risk scanning provides a valuable additional resource for EU staff and management by integrating in a single product a wide variety of different conflict risk assessments: quantitative and qualitative, external and internal, open source and intelligence-based.

Prioritisation allows the EU and Member States to focus resources where there is most leverage, capacity and interest to have a real impact on the prevention of violence or on enhancing peacebuilding.

Bringing together the wider country teams, in-country and at headquarters, for shared assessment and analysis promotes increased impact by stimulating greater coherence in developing options for preventive action based on a 'joined-up' assessment of risks and dynamics.

The monitoring and review moment fosters the translation of options into action, feeding into diplomatic activity and the identification of conflict prevention / peacebuilding actions to be developed through the relevant instruments. It also allows for a comprehensive overview of EU contribution to reducing conflict risks and preventing violent conflict.

Annex I Indicators for the Global Conflict Risk Index (2015)⁹

Risk Area	Concept	Indicator
Political	Regime type	Regime Type
		Lack of Democracy
	Regime performance	Government Effectiveness
		Level of Repression
		Empowerment Rights
Social cohesion & Public security	Ethnic compilation	Ethnic Power Status (National Power)
		Ethnic Diversity (Subnational)
		Transnational Ethnic Bonds
	Public security & health	Corruption
		Homicide Rate
		Infant Mortality
Conflict prevalence	Current conflict situation	Recent Internal Conflict
		Neighbours with highly violent conflicts
	History of conflict	Years since highly violent conflict
		Trends from last year
Geography and Environment	Geographic challenge	Water Stress
		Oil Producer
		Structural Constraints
	Demographics	Population Size
		Youth Bulge
Economy	Development and distribution	GDP per capita
		Openness
		Income inequality
	Provisions and Employment	Food Insecurity
		Unemployment Rate

Source: <http://conflictrisk.jrc.ec.europa.eu/Methodology>

⁹ The choice of indicators reflects academic research on their correlation with conflict risk and the availability of datasets that cover all non-EU countries, are updated at least annually and include historical data to allow for testing for relevance. The choice may be updated.

Annex II: Who does what?

The preparatory risk-scanning step of the EWS compiles risk information from open sources and intelligence as a basis for subsequent prioritisation, shared assessment & follow-up and monitoring components.

	Prioritisation	Shared Assessment & Follow up	Monitoring
EU Delegations; other field presence	Provide input to geographic desks' review of risk information in preparation for the inter-service meeting at senior-management level	Complete checklist for structural risks of conflict based on structured discussions with EU actors in the field Comment on and discuss conflict prevention reports	Contribute to reporting on progress and implemented adjustments to increase prevention / peacebuilding impact
Geographic Desks; EEAS and Commission Services	Review risk information in preparation for the inter-service meeting at senior-management level	Draft and discuss conflict prevention reports based on checklist for structural risks of conflict (including existing preventive interventions and recommendations and timelines for further preventive action) Present and discuss conflict prevention reports in Council Working Groups	Report on progress and propose possible adjustments to increase prevention / peacebuilding impact
Management: EEAS and Commission Services	Inter-service meeting at senior-management level to identify early warning priorities for conflict prevention / peacebuilding	Provide input and guidance for preventive action (informed by checklist for structural risks of conflict and conflict prevention reports)	Review progress, reporting and guidance on action
Council / Member States	PSC discussion provides input and guidance to risk identification	Member States' Embassies in-country contribute to structured discussions around conflict risks as input to checklists for structural risks of conflict Council WG discussions Member States identify bilateral preventive action	Council WG discussions on progress and action
EEAS Conflict Prevention, Peacebuilding and Mediation Division	Compile and present preparatory risk information Coordinate the overall EWS process	Facilitate structured discussions on conflict risks Support development of conflict prevention reports and facilitate discussion and agreement thereon	Support discussion of progress reporting and the identification of adjustments to preventive action