

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report presents the results of an external evaluation of the mission, activities, structures and impact of the European Peacebuilding Liaison Office – EPLO – established in 2001. The evaluation is based on interviews and analysis carried out in March and April 2008 undertaken with EPLO member organisations (MOs) and a range of external EU actors. The evaluation centred on the question of the need for, and effectiveness of, a platform such as EPLO in the context of EPLO's overall mission and strategy. It focused in particular on the more recent years of EPLO's operations – principally 2005 to early 2008.

EPLO's key strategic goals are:

- To increase the capacity of the European Union to design and implement coherent measures that promote sustainable peace in conflict-prone and affected countries and hold it accountable to its own political commitments of helping secure peace within and outside its borders;
- To raise awareness within the EU of the links between peacebuilding, security, and sustainable development world-wide and the critical role of civil society in meeting these challenges
- To engage and support member organisations across the EU in lobbying and advocating with EU decision-makers and other NGO sectors.

EPLO has grown in the last three to four years both in membership and in its secretariat in Brussels, enabling EPLO to expand its activities substantially. Considerable work has been put into elucidating and clarifying EPLO's internal management, participatory and decision-making structures, with a clear set of internal statutes agreed in April 2005. By the end of 2005, a new strategic plan was in place. And from 2006-2007, EPLO's overall strategic plan was refined into the context of a log-frame and a four-year time horizon from 2006-2009.

It is clear that EPLO has developed into an effective and dynamic network in the seven years of its establishment. It is well-known and influential across various areas of EU policy-making and within various parts of the EU institutions. It has had demonstrable impact on EU policy-making. It is seen by many relevant EU policy actors as a credible, trustworthy and professional network and as a key representative of the EU peacebuilding sector. Overall, EPLO's MOs welcome its activities and achievements and the added-value the platform has provided for them as individual NGOs and CSOs.

Internal Structures and Activities

EPLO's range of work activities includes: coordinating and running a range of EPLO working groups and clusters to agree policy positions and other initiatives; advocacy and information-gathering; communications and policy analysis; occasional events; training; and fund-raising. EPLO's work is carried out by its Brussels-based secretariat and by its MOs. EPLO as a network can be described as a 'mixed strategy' model, being in part what could be labelled as a 'business-lobby office' model and part an 'active network' model. This allows flexibility but can and does inevitably create some tensions.

EPLO is a diverse network with MOs that vary in size, from large global NGOs, to smaller peace groups. Many of the MOs have field operations and expertise, some do not. Some of the MOs have Brussels offices, the rest do not. Some MOs have a hard security focus, while the majority focus on more soft security issues. Some MOs have a strong analysis and research component to their activities, others are characterised more as grassroots peace movement organisations. All these differences have the potential to cause disagreements and tensions, and were pointed to by some MOs in interviews. Overall, however, EPLO has mostly managed to utilise the diversity of its membership in a positive way – through a mixture of exploiting, adjusting to and overcoming differences.

Key elements of added-value for MOs' participation in EPLO are, firstly, the EU information and monitoring activities of the EPLO secretariat and, secondly, the advocacy activities and access points to the EU that EPLO creates. Other elements of added-value include: bringing field expertise to Brussels, profile; and inter-MO contact.

MOs views on EPLO's current strategy vary. Several support the current strategy but several others would like to see the strategy changed (though in different ways, from broadening to narrowing the range of activities) and a significant number of MOs are unclear on the top goals of EPLO's strategy. Some of the differences of views reflect a classic tension in EU lobbying where long-run plans need to be balanced against short-run opportunities and changes in the EU's agenda.

There is more agreement among MOs, however, on EPLO's overall mission of promoting the importance of EU peacebuilding to EU policy-makers and in EU policies. And MOs clearly support the aim of raising the profile and role of civil society in this process. MOs are interested in a range of policy issues many of which are already covered by

EPLO in its strategy and work programme from security and development to civilian crisis management, EU funding instruments and policy coherence.

EPLO's secretariat in Brussels is an efficient and hard-working team. The efficiency, quality and professionalism of the team is widely recognised among EPLO MOs. Most MOs are satisfied with information flows and transparency within the network, though some would welcome more information on the activities and contacts of the secretariat. And some MOs consider that there may be a Brussels 'inner-circle' of more favoured MOs. MOs broadly support EPLO's use of working groups as a central tool for interaction and policy discussion and decisions among MOs. But many see a need to streamline the way working groups operate to make them more efficient and effective.

External communications is an area of EPLO's work that is less well structured in a strategic sense and that would benefit from a considered overview. EPLO's external conflict prevention newsletter is, however, an important and widely welcomed and widely disseminated tool.

Issues to consider to improve EPLO's internal functioning include the following:

- Clarifying and raising awareness of EPLO's strategic goals across its MOs. Re-assessing the spread of EPLO's strategic goals, and the balance of activities across different areas;
- Considering ways of, and benefits from, developing more structured and strategic interaction with other Brussels/EU NGO platforms;
- Clarifying EPLO's external communication strategy, including whether EPLO wants to communicate more to a wider public;
- Ensuring EPLO knowledge capital is institutionalised as far as possible within the secretariat to underpin resilience and sustainability;
- Finding ways of streamlining the operation of working groups and clusters;
- Paying attention in the management and coordination of EPLO to the diversity of MOs, including the communication needs of, and information flows to, non-Brussels MOs.

External Actors

Indicators of EPLO's effectiveness in the EU environment include: access, acceptance (in terms of representativeness, quality and trust), and impact on policy outcomes.

EPLO's existence as a peacebuilding NGO platform is welcomed across the three main EU institutions. EPLO is seen as one of the key actors to consult and interact with and has a high profile. It is not necessarily seen as the sole representative of the sector, as officials are well aware of their obligations to consult widely with other NGOs. But EPLO has built up a very strong reputation for the quality of its work and advocacy in its interaction with the EU institutions. Its secretariat and its MOs are seen to be trustworthy and reliable, for example, in the context of informal briefings and discussions.

EPLO has had an impact in a variety of different ways: from securing greater access for, and respect of, civil society, to impacting on actual policy positions in the European Commission, Council of Ministers and European Parliament, to affecting the structure of funding instruments and funded projects. This represents a considerable achievement in the EU policy arena and indicates EPLO's success in achieving a number of its strategic goals. Some EPLO MOs and also external actors are concerned about whether policy, as impacted on by EPLO, is actually being implemented on the ground. This is an important issue and one EPLO may benefit from having a substantive discussion of among its MOs.

Many MOs welcomed the opportunities that EPLO has opened up for field input into EU policymaking. But both MOs and some external actors suggest EPLO is not fully exploiting its potential comparative advantage here. Some also question whether EPLO has over-concentrated its advocacy activities onto the Council and in particular onto civilian crisis management. There are a range of views on what is the best balance of EPLO's activities, something that needs regular review.

The following gives a set of examples of EPLO's wide-ranging impact (many of the activities listed here have required substantial time, and technical, policy and diplomatic expertise, in creating the entry points and impact listed):

- *Various European Commission Policy Documents and Positions:* informal/quiet input into the Fragile States Communication, and into a series of Country Strategy Papers; EPLO represented at various formal and informal consultations in DGRelex and DGDev;

- *Various European Commission Funding Instruments and Calls for Tender:* examples include work on the Instrument for Stability and within that the Peacebuilding Partnership, and the related call for tender in March 2008, work on the EIDHR, prior work on the Initiative for Peacebuilding (IFP), and the earlier Conflict Prevention Network/Conflict Prevention Partnership.
- *European Parliament:* work on the Instrument for Stability, on the EIDHR, funding for the IFP, various events including a recent seminar on gender and security, briefings and consultations.
- *Council of Ministers:* EPLO, including field personnel, represented at various formal and informal consultations including at CIVCOM, informal and formal input into various Council and presidency papers and processes including draft conclusions for European Council summits, and inputs into the Lisbon Treaty discussions; co-organisation of various presidency conferences and the two RoCS projects, impact on general procedures for consulting and dialogue with NGOs including the November 2006 Council position paper/PSC resolution on this, input into civilian headline goal 2008, input into the EU-Africa strategy.
- *Communications Impact:* more diffuse and wider impacts through EPLO's conflict prevention newsletter and its various policy papers, briefings and contribution to other reports, and similarly through seminars and conference organisation and attendance.
- *Establishment of EPLO as the key peacebuilding sector NGO platform in Brussels:* raising the profile of the peacebuilding sector, and creating links from grassroots organisations and the member states to the EU institutions. Also some training and capacity-building both within EPLO and of EU officials. Some joint activities and discussions with other NGOs and NGO networks.
- *Civil Society Consultation:* wide-ranging impact on the broader increase in the EU institutions' interaction with civil society in the last decade.

Issues to consider to improve even further EPLO's external activities and impact include:

- Taking a considered look at the balance of EPLO's advocacy activities both within and across the three main EU institutions;
- Assessing the best routes, and feasibility, of gaining more access to higher political levels of EU institutions for advocacy purposes;
- Having a strategic discussion within EPLO of the issues concerning policy implementation on the ground, and how and whether both to assess implementation issues and to have more impact on them;
- Discussing means of strengthening field-Brussels links and increasing the amount of field input into EU policy discussions, including at higher political levels.

EPLO's future development options

Key overarching policy areas looking forward as identified by external actors and by MOs included in particular: the Lisbon treaty and its provisions in the external action area including the new external action service; the 2008 redrafting of the European security strategy; and the opportunities for more policy development in the security-development policy nexus. The new EAS offers an opportunity to create substantially more coherent conflict prevention structures within the EU institutions but debates around implementation of the Lisbon treaty are highly political, currently confidential, and will need adroit advocacy skills to impact on.

MOs had a range of views on more organisational and operational issues looking forward. Many but not all favoured developing some more coordinated member state advocacy activities in support of EPLO's EU lobbying. Many but not all supported having at least a basic media strategy in place. On future growth, there was a consensus that EPLO membership growth should be selective and cautious and that there was no desirability of a 'growth for its own sake approach'. Nor did MOs support more than a limited growth in the size of the secretariat.

EPLO could benefit from further discussion of these future development issues including:

- Consideration of the range of issues brought up by the Lisbon treaty including the establishment of a permanent president and a double-hatted 'foreign minister', and the creation of an external action service;

- Consideration of the substantive elements EPLO wants to see in a new European security strategy and use of a range of advocacy points to input these messages;
- A wider EPLO brainstorming on the evolving characteristics of the EU as a global actor – incorporating into such a discussion the Lisbon treaty, European security strategy, and the security-development nexus;
- Discussion of a more active and considered member state advocacy programme of activities;
- Discussion of whether EPLO needs a more considered external communication strategy, including a media strategy;
- Discussion of EPLO's attitude to growth of its membership and its secretariat, in the context of a consideration of future strategy and funding.

Conclusion

EPLO has achieved a very considerable amount in the years since its establishment and has developed and expanded its impact and range substantially in the last three years. EPLO is well-known in many parts of the EU institutions and, where it is known, it is generally seen as a seriously professional, high quality and trustworthy player. EPLO has impacted on to a range of policy areas, documents and discussions through an increasing range of access points in ways and to an extent which represent a major achievement in advocacy terms. It has access and influence in the Council of Ministers secretariat, the Commission and the Parliament. Overall, these activities represent a highly successful implementation of its strategic goals.