FROM EARLY WARNING TO EARLY ACTION: 
DEVELOPING THE EU’S RESPONSE TO CRISIS AND LONGER-TERM THREATS

Introduction

Today’s world is characterised by more conflict than ever before; last year 118 violent conflicts wreaked destruction around the globe. Not all raged with the same ferocity; but they were nevertheless united by one fundamental issue: their capacity to destroy human life.

As the Talmud puts it, “Whoever saves one life, saves the world entire”.

It is this simple truth which should guide us as we enter these discussions, together with our recognition of the fundamental responsibility we share to protect human life and to promote human security.

Another characteristic of today’s world is the vast array of information sources and tools at our disposal. But, does that capacity for early warning translate into early action?

Too often it does not. And that is simply unacceptable in this ever more globalised and sophisticated world.

EU, early warning and early action

The conference on early warning and early action is part of the European Commission’s response. We want to use this occasion to look at how the EU can better react to crises and conflicts. And we want your active guidance as to the future focus of our activities.

The European Union has a comprehensive range of tools at its disposal for crisis management. To maximise their impact we must ensure that at every stage, from planning to the final stages of implementation, Member States, Council Secretariat and Commission work closely together. We have to focus on ensuring all instruments, not only our rapid reaction programmes but also our long term development assistance, humanitarian assistance and ESDP rule of law, police and military missions, are carefully coordinated and complementary.

This conference builds on one held here two years ago, which President Ahtisaari co-hosted with us. Since then we have launched a number of initiatives to further develop our crisis response.

Certainly one of the most innovative developments over the last two years has been our new financing mechanism for crisis management and conflict prevention, the Instrument for Stability.

Here I should pay tribute to the European Parliament for its invaluable support in enabling this instrument to see the light of day. It gives the EU’s crisis response capacities an important boost. On the financial side it more than quadruples our assistance, from €30 to €140 million this year alone. We have established efficient methods for exchanging information with Member States about our activities via the Council’s Political and Security Committee.

The Stability Instrument enables us to fund a wider range of activities than ever before: on the one hand in a range of areas under the broad heading of crisis response and preparedness; and on the other under the heading of long-term trans-regional threats to stability, including non-proliferation, protecting critical infrastructure and tackling major public health threats.

As a result we can now respond more flexibly and rapidly to a major new political crisis or natural disaster; to shore up peace-building processes; and to ensure development needs are addressed from the start by getting children back to school and re-opening health and other local public services.

Dr. Benita Ferrero-Waldner has been the European Commissioner for External Relations since 2004. She was born in 1948 in Salzburg, Austria. Dr. Ferrero-Waldner received her doctorate in law from the University of Salzburg. She has served as Austria’s federal Minister for Foreign Affairs and State Secretary of Foreign Affairs. Between 1993 and 1995, she served as Deputy Chief of Protocol at the Federal Ministry of Foreign Affairs, then Chef of Protocol at the Executive Office of the Secretary General, United Nations Secretariat, New York. Before entering the diplomatic service, Dr. Ferrero-Waldner worked in the private sector and held a number of management positions in Europe and the United States.

1 Introduction speech held by Dr. Ferrero-Waldner at the conference “From early warning to early action: Developing EU’s response to crisis and longer-term threats”, 12-13 November 2007, European Commission, Brussels, Belgium
EU’s crisis response mechanism

To illustrate the complementarity of the EU’s crisis response mechanisms, let me mention the forthcoming (ESDP) mission to Chad. The Commission and Council Secretariat cooperated from the beginning of the planning process, and undertook a joint information gathering mission together with civilian and military staff and the Presidency. The result is a package of EU and EC activities bringing to bear a wide range of EU instruments. The ESDP mission will be complemented by money from the Stability Instrument for training and equipping 850 Chadian Police Officers. They will then be deployed in refugee and IDP camps in Eastern Chad. We hope this will play an important role in securing and stabilising the neighbourhood of Sudan/Darfur. We are also considering additional support, for example funding a population census in Chad to lay the groundwork for future elections.

In Afghanistan the EU is intensifying its efforts to develop a democratic, secure and sustainable Afghan state. Central to that objective is promoting the rule of law, and the Commission has therefore been supporting the payment of police salaries while developing a strategic reform programme for the justice sector and a system of legal aid. All this has been carefully coordinated through joint exploratory missions of the Commission, Council Secretariat and Member States.

We have also been fully involved in the EU’s evolving response to the deteriorating security situation in Lebanon. Again, joint planning missions have led to a number of common projects designed to strengthen the country’s security sector. We are working closely with the German government on a project for integrated border management, enabling the Lebanese authorities to better control and secure their border with Syria. And we are providing senior police experts to the Lebanese police service, building their capacity for maintaining law and order.

All over the world, from Georgia to Burma/Myanmar, from the DRC to Peru, we are working to tackle ongoing crises and prevent future conflict. An important focus of our work in the coming period will be Kosovo/a. We are engaged in intense planning activities for what we hope will be a smooth transition to its future status.

Another innovative element of the Stability Instrument is the Peacebuilding Partnership. We are convinced that the most sustainable approach to resolving conflict is to ensure all partners are involved. We also recognise the deep reserve of technical expertise held by organisations such as those represented here today.

We will set up a broad-based network of specialised European NGOs with expertise in early warning, conflict prevention, peacebuilding, post-conflict and post-disaster recovery. But it also means strengthening our cooperation with Member States’ aid agencies, the UN and other relevant organisations. Some financial support will be available for capacity building and the roster of NGOs we establish will give us a readily accessible pool of experts to rapidly mobilise support for any given situation.

We are very excited by the possibility for more collaborative working practises. We hope to build upon the existing capacity amongst our implementing partners, as well as provide innovative mechanisms to deploy these skills in crisis situations.

But the Stability Instrument is not the only way we have been consolidating the EU’s crisis response. You may be familiar with the Barnier Report which took a thorough and critical look at the EU’s crisis response mechanisms and offered a number of recommendations, several of which we have already begun to implement. Of particular importance to me are consular protection, about which the Commission will publish a Communication later this year, and enhanced coordination of humanitarian aid and civil protection. I want the Commission delegations to play a constructive role in these areas.

In addition, we have released a Communication on the EU’s response to situations of fragility, looking at the specific requirements of contexts where institutional capacity is very limited. In such circumstances there is a particular onus on donors to take a whole-of-government approach and
ensure development assistance is conflict sensitive. This Communication is complemented by a joint Commission-Council Secretariat paper on security and development to be endorsed by the External Relations Council in November 2007.

I hope in years to come we will no longer speak of forgotten emergencies because they won’t exist. And we will play our part in banishing them. We are determined to shoulder our responsibility and ensure that the EU lives up to its ambitious goals for global security.

We have ambitious ideas for the future and I am convinced that the EU will become an ever more powerful force for the good in tackling the world’s trouble spots. But we are also conscious that will only be possible through widespread cooperation with others.