



International peacebuilding financing and changing politics in Europe

Pauline Veron and Andrew Sherriff

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Table of Contents

Introduction	1
Why Europe matters for peacebuilding financing	3
Changing European politics and factors influencing peacebuilding funding	6
Evolving foreign and development policy narratives	16
The importance of a domestic European political constituency	20
Responding to changing European politics: three priority areas for action	22
Conclusion	26
Endnotes	27

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Official Development Assistance (ODA) from European countries and the EU institutions has been a large and important source of grant funding for international peacebuilding over the last twenty years. It will continue to be an important source of funding for international peacebuilding in the likely absence of comparable other sources of financing for the next twenty years. Yet competition for allocation of public funds is fierce in the wake of the economic and social disruption caused by the pandemic, an ongoing global climate crisis, significant inflationary pressures, and an impending economic recession as well as fallout from the war in Ukraine.

While globalization has increasingly challenged the distinctions between internal and external policy, the political and bureaucratic momentum for significantly greater social and economic external spending, even in the wake of the pandemic and climate crisis, has proven very difficult to mobilize in Europe, the United States, and the Global North more generally. The most recent and keenly-felt exception in terms of increased external spending is on defense, which has recently been subject to dramatic pledges of increases in Europe in the wake of the Russian war in Ukraine. More broadly, in much of Europe, a more openly self-interest-driven narrative is affecting not only foreign policy, but also development cooperation and international spending including ODA. Also, there has been increasing criticism of existing approaches to ODA and international financial support for peacebuilding including from within the peacebuilding community.¹ It is against this background and these dynamics that a case for supporting international peacebuilding has to be made in Europe.

Supporting international peacebuilding is a domestic political and senior bureaucratic choice. International norms and globally agreed targets or the specific needs of conflict countries and communities seemingly have limited influence on European and US government financing decisions. Geopolitics and domestic politics have more significant impact. A few European countries and the US provide the bulk of ODA focused on peacebuilding (see Table 1).

More broadly, in much of Europe, a more openly self-interest-driven narrative is affecting not only foreign policy, but also development cooperation and international spending including ODA

In the current times of significant global, European, and domestic turmoil, support for peacebuilding is facing significant risks. The continued fallout from the COVID-19 pandemic's socioeconomic and humanitarian consequences has added new layers of risk to already vulnerable people in conflict-prone contexts;² hence the need to ensure that peacebuilding and conflict prevention is part of global governance more generally.

While global and national economies are still reeling from the impacts of the pandemic, the Russian war in Ukraine is an additional global economic and geopolitical shock with its game-changing impact on European defense, energy, sanctions policies, and international spending choices. It is also compounding the economic problems caused by the pandemic and creating pressures that may precipitate political instability and conflict.³ The political, diplomatic, and economic fallout from the war in Ukraine is having a significant impact on both the global environment for peacebuilding and available finances (most probably a greater impact than the COVID-19 pandemic ever had on European support for peacebuilding). While it is a truism that peacebuilding must be built bottom-up in conflict-affected countries, international public finance for peacebuilding from Western democracies is reliant on the existence of a public and elite, political and bureaucratic constituency for it—a constituency that is willing to prioritize and protect this financing in the wake of other priorities.

What is the current state of affairs, and can greater, smarter, more principled financing for peacebuilding be achieved in shifting global and national politics in Europe? This paper first provides insight into key issues based on the European Centre for Development Policy Management (ECDPM)'s past analysis related to peacebuilding support⁴ and the current (geo) political context in Europe. It provides some **recommendations for the peacebuilding community to consider when making the case to sustain and improve the quality of peacebuilding support, with a particular focus on ODA from Europe.**

In this regard, the paper does not replicate the Good Peacebuilding Financing recommendations, which provide a firm basis to guide support and judge quality.⁵ **We focus instead on short- and long-term actions needed to undertake the difficult task of strengthening and sustaining a political constituency for peacebuilding in the face of significant political headwinds.** This includes:

- building a broader and more influential constituency to support international peacebuilding within Europe;
- embedding peacebuilding advocacy within other important foreign policy agendas;
- finding the appropriate moments and fora to make the case and influence policy.

Why Europe matters for peacebuilding financing

To understand why Europe is important in this discussion, there are three trends to be aware of: first, international public funding for peacebuilding is overly reliant on a small group of Northern European countries and the EU; second, over the past decade, although the funding for peacebuilding has increased, it is still a small part of ODA overall, and a small part of ODA devoted to the humanitarian-development-peace nexus; and third, there are mixed dynamics in relation to ODA funding in peacebuilding related to political developments in European countries.

Table 1 demonstrates that peacebuilding financing is reliant on a small number of countries within Europe, the EU, as well as the US.⁶ This overreliance on a small number of European governments renders international peacebuilding vulnerable to potential changes or shifts in the politics, policies, priorities and modalities of these countries and the EU institutions.

Table 1: Top ten OECD donors to civilian peacebuilding, conflict prevention, and resolution, 2011-2020 (in USD)

	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	Average rank (rounded to top)
Germany	2 (\$256m)	2	3	2	4	2	1	1	1	1 (\$667m)	1
United States	1 (\$513m)	1	1	1	1	3	4	3	2	3 (\$334m)	2
EU Institutions	3 (\$152m)	3	2	3	3	4	3	2	3	2 (\$538im)	3
United Kingdom	4 (\$152m)	4	4	4	2	1	2	4	4	4 (\$214m)	4
Norway	5 (\$89m)	5	5	5	5	5	7	6	5	6 (\$123m)	5
Sweden	6 (\$67m)	6	7	6	6	6	6	7	7	5 (\$126m)	6
Netherlands	7 (\$52m)	7	6	7	7	7	8	8	9	8 (\$83m)	7
Denmark	10 (\$30m)	8	9	9	10	9	5	9	8	9 (\$80m)	8
United Nations (total, including Peacebuilding Fund)	11 (\$27m)	10	10	10	9	11	12	5	6	7 (\$118m)	9
Switzerland	9 (\$31m)	9	8	8	8	8	9	11	11	11 (\$59m)	10

Source: ECDPM analysis from OECD figures, CRS code 15220, in millions of US dollars. Gross disbursements in constant 2020 prices

The funding picture

Overall, according to the OECD, ODA increased to its highest level ever in 2021, reaching USD 178.9 billion and 4.4 percent increase on 2020.⁷ Much of this increase was driven by DAC donors' response to COVID-19, although this was equivalent to a tiny fraction of DAC countries' domestic fiscal measures in the wake of COVID-19 (USD 11.7 trillion). The small amounts for peacebuilding demonstrate that it remains a lower priority and could be pushed even further down the agenda due to other priorities in the post-COVID-19 world, including the fallout of the war in Ukraine, an increasing drive on climate change, or new priorities such as infrastructure and digitalization. Official aid for peacebuilding was equivalent to 1.1 percent of total ODA in 2020. Despite this limited amount, ODA for peacebuilding has increased by 67 percent over the ten-year period from 2011 to 2020, outstripping increases for total ODA (52 percent). Overall, there is somewhat of a mirroring of funding trends between peacebuilding and total overall ODA. However, from 2019 to 2020, peacebuilding ODA from DAC donors decreased by 9 percent while total ODA from DAC donors increased by 6.7 percent. Over the same period (2019 - 2020), **peacebuilding ODA from official donors decreased by only 2 percent while total ODA from official donors increased by 14.5 percent.** Nevertheless, the peacebuilding sector has come a long way in terms of the level of its funding over the last twenty years since it first became an area of significant ODA support.

Despite this growth in peacebuilding funding, figures from the OECD show that peace is the weakest element of the humanitarian-development-peace nexus: In 2020, 63 percent of DAC members' gross bilateral ODA to fragile contexts went to the development pillar of the humanitarian-development-peace (HDP) nexus, 25 percent to humanitarian objectives and 12 percent to peace objectives. DAC members' aid to peace in fragile contexts declined by 19 percent from 2010 to 2020. In the same period, humanitarian assistance increased by 57 percent, with extremely fragile contexts receiving the largest share. Of DAC members' country allocable aid, 4 percent went towards conflict prevention, a subset of peace ODA. This means that for every dollar invested in prevention, six dollars went to humanitarian assistance. **The speed of COVID-19 responses and the need to reallocate funds to meet the crisis have reinforced an existing trend towards the use of funds for humanitarian rather than development or peace responses, especially in extremely fragile contexts.**⁸ While the humanitarian-development-peace nexus is certainly part of the policy and operational discourse of European foreign ministries and their implementing agencies, the peace angle is still subject to significant underinvestment.

The full impact of choices and changing politics in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Ukraine crisis, and the UK ODA budget cuts (see Box 2) on both ODA as a whole and funding for peacebuilding remains to be seen, due to the OECD-DAC data lag. Maintaining or increasing peacebuilding ODA will require increased volume and sustained mobilization of political commitment and senior bureaucratic prioritization in Europe and the US. Even so, the quality of funding for peacebuilding might be at risk in ODA budgets that juggle many different priorities and link these more clearly to the framing of more narrowly defined national interests or geopolitical competition. This is particularly true in light of the ongoing war in Ukraine, which has raised concerns that rising defense and humanitarian budgets (including for refugees) will impact aid, particularly (and perhaps, ironically)

Box 1: Reality check on targets and increases in internationally focused public expenditure

It is also worth noting that even priorities at the very top of the global and domestic political agenda, such as climate or the pandemic response, are not necessarily mobilizing the resources. Targets—such as the commitment of developed countries to jointly provide USD 100 billion annually to developing countries by 2020 for climate mitigation and adaptation – have yet to be met.⁹ Also the World Health Organization's (WHO) ACT-Accelerator (ACT-A), established in 2020 to accelerate the development, production, and equitable access to COVID-19 tests, treatments, and vaccines, still has a funding gap for 2021-22 of USD 11 billion,¹⁰ despite the clear need for financing and equal access to end the pandemic and the impact that a prolonged pandemic has on global economies. This should provide a reality check, as well as a sense of the challenges facing the peacebuilding community as it attempts to increase and improve the effectiveness of peacebuilding financing in a changing global era.

allocations for conflict prevention.¹¹ There is also a concern that more ODA money will be spent on humanitarian aid as opposed to the longer-term development needs in response to the war, and significant amounts of bilateral ODA on in-donor costs for Ukrainian refugees housed in European countries—although the picture here is not uniform and varies greatly across European countries.

The question of not only how much or where, but also by whom peacebuilding ODA is implemented, is important. More than half of peacebuilding ODA goes through multilateral organizations and the public sector according to ECDPM calculations. In recent years, a rising share of ODA has been allocated through the multilateral system.¹² Whether the pandemic has reinforced the trend of “multilateralization of aid” remains to be seen. This is a crucial question, as concerns are growing that less and less funding is available to NGOs—especially local ones. For instance, in 2019, developing country-based civil society organizations (CSOs) received the lowest share of total bilateral ODA among all categories of CSOs.¹³ This trend has faced increasing criticism from those within the peacebuilding field calling for more funds and more flexibility for local organizations.

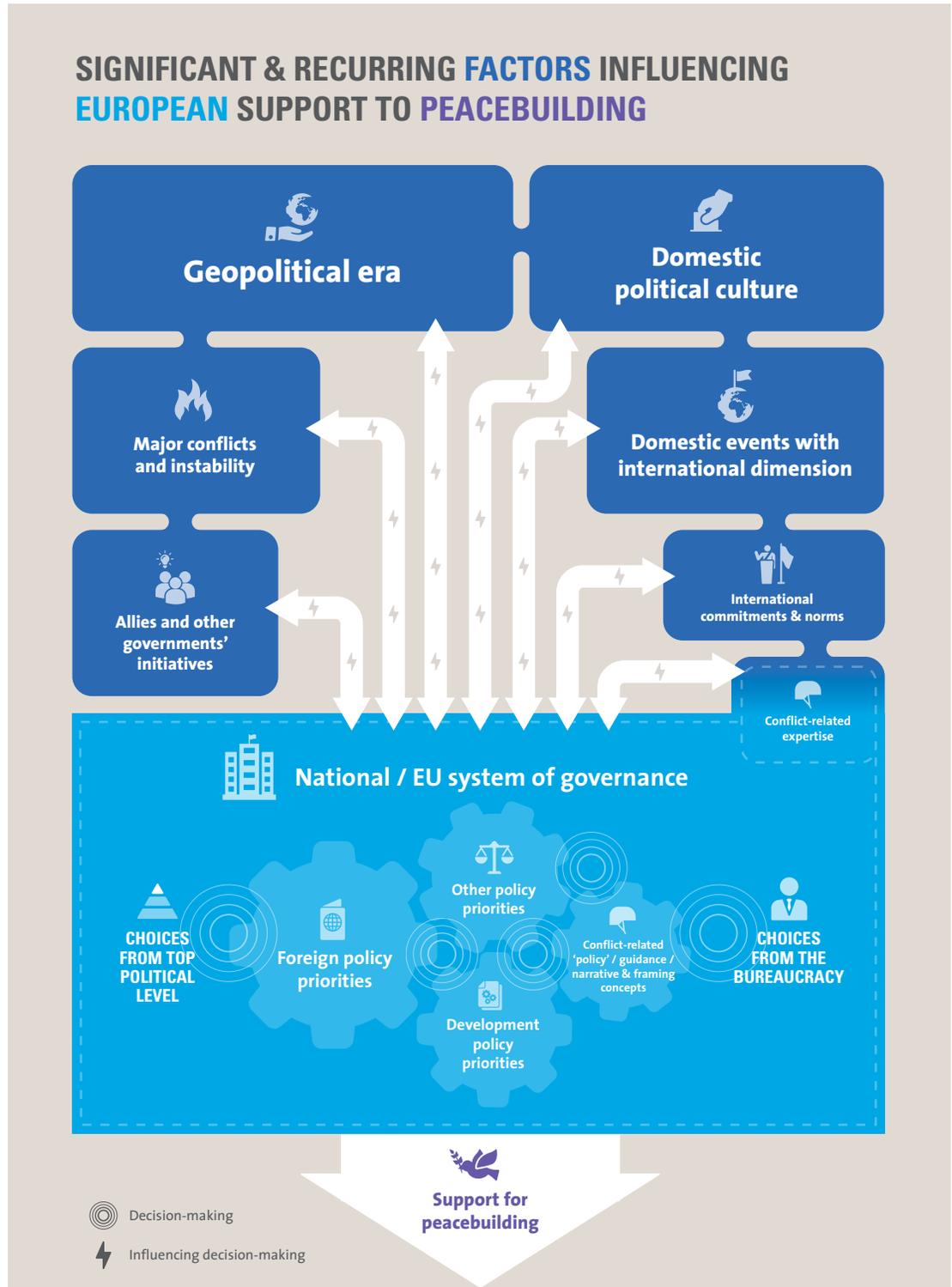
Changing European politics and factors influencing peacebuilding funding

In 2018, European Centre for Development Policy Management (ECDPM) analysis focusing on the previous twenty years identified eight factors influencing European support to peacebuilding, noting that the geopolitical era and domestic political culture were the most influential of these (see Figure 1 below). The world in 2022 is significantly different from 2018. In a way, both the COVID-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine have accelerated some of the trends we identified at the time and reinforced these factors, particularly the four most prominent: 1) the geopolitical era, 2) the domestic political culture, 3) domestic events with an internal dimension, and 4) major conflicts and instability. Changes in these dynamics will inevitably affect the amount and the quality of funding available for peacebuilding among many other pressing priorities, e.g., responding to the war in Ukraine (in terms of defense, economy, managing the refugee influx, or longer-term reconstruction), addressing the socio economic crisis and rising inflation in Europe, and increasing prioritization of the digital and green transitions at home and abroad.

A changing geopolitical era

While the geopolitical era has been shifting for several years, it now seems to be evolving at a faster pace, and in an increasingly multipolar and contested world—an idea supported by the recent Russian invasion of Ukraine and its related fallout. Geopolitical tensions are mounting as a narrative of competition between global powers becomes the new norm, leading some experts to conclude that a new Cold War has begun.¹⁴ The Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 in particular has catalyzed major geopolitical realignments: it is leading to confrontation between Russia and NATO, raising the specter of territory being stripped from a country by force, bringing Russia and China closer together, and renewing old questions about the role of nuclear weapons.¹⁵ It is also likely to reshape long-standing patterns of relations between the Global North and the Global South.¹⁶ In many countries of the Global South where Europe is supporting peacebuilding, there is much more open critique of the historical legacy and current policies of Europe and the West. The war in Europe has driven security and defense to the top table of politics, the agenda of European foreign ministries, and the EU institutions' foreign policy agencies. By reshaping the European security order, it has also led to what some have called Europe's "geopolitical awakening" by making full use of the EU's toolkit, from economic sanctions to the funding of lethal military equipment via the European Peace Facility—with more changes taking place in a matter of days than has been seen in the past decade. The political and strategic implications will be long-lasting, as the war is shedding light on interlinked security and economic challenges (including around energy and food supply).¹⁷ These issues will continue to evolve.

Figure 1: Significant and recurring factors influencing European support to peacebuilding



Graphic courtesy of ECDPM.

China's global influence is rising, even as it becomes more assertive and authoritarian,¹⁸ and the country was described by the European Commission as simultaneously “a cooperation partner with whom the EU has closely aligned objectives, a negotiating partner with whom the EU needs to find a balance of interests, an economic competitor in the pursuit of technological leadership, and a systemic rival promoting alternative models of governance.”¹⁹ The United States, in response, is placing increasing priority on the Indo-Pacific region and challenging China's ascendancy, while politics within the US is increasingly polarized, with growing inward focus even in the face of the war in Ukraine. China has its own particular approach to developmental peace and stabilization that differs significantly from the multi-stakeholder democratic liberal peace promoted by European countries.²⁰ Yet this approach also has its supporters in the Global South. The challenge to the dominance of liberal peacebuilding as championed selectively by the West is certainly changing peace and conflict dynamics in many parts of the world.

These developments are challenging the dominance of the Western-led liberal international order, along with approaches to peacebuilding and statebuilding framed and heavily financed by the West. As highlighted by ODI, “[u]nlike March 2020, where countries were facing a common enemy with a common set of policy instruments to tackle it, the Ukraine crisis is having global reverberations that are affecting different countries in very different ways.”²¹ This will likely place stresses on systems of economic and political cooperation that go beyond the conflict itself.²² At the same time, global challenges including but also going beyond violent conflict, such as the climate crisis and pandemics, require international and multilateral cooperation that is difficult to realize.²³ This new global era is also characterized by increased reliance on technology, cyber warfare, and hybrid threats calling for new multilateral approaches at a time when they seem to be ever more elusive to realize.

These changes are influencing responses to violent conflict, and hence European and US support for and financing of peacebuilding. With geopolitical fault lines becoming more apparent and polarized, conflict becomes more difficult to resolve diplomatically and multilateral agreements more challenging to realize. As ECDPM concluded in 2018, the changing geopolitical environment significantly impacts the margins of maneuver, levels of ambition, and framing of support for peacebuilding within European policy and spending. Outcomes would include changing geographic priorities for European spending on peacebuilding, attempts to co-opt peacebuilding approaches for more short-term security concerns, and recourse to “power politics” to resolve conflicts with little space for, or recognition of, local nongovernmental or multilateral actors—while conflicts deemed nonstrategic to Europe and the US may be increasingly ignored or at least downplayed as a destination for ODA or other financing.²⁴

It seems likely that all these outcomes will become more pronounced by the global and European response to the Russian war in Ukraine. It is also more likely that European governments supporting international peacebuilding may be characterized as partial, or having an agenda that is at odds with other geopolitical or regional players. Increasingly, the goal of different international community players is in some conflicts not peace but victory. A lack of agreement among powerful international and regional players will make achieving a sustainable peace more challenging, and getting resources to align behind a “shared” multilateral peacebuilding agenda will become more urgent yet more difficult to realize.

Current examples of this can be seen in conflicts in the Sahel, Syria, Libya, Yemen, and Ethiopia, where the international community is fragmented at best and in open competition at worst in its response—at times even favoring responses prioritizing the use of violence. Such polarization of the international community is likely to increase in the wake of the war in Ukraine. Competition and different views on conflicts subsequently have direct consequences on the nature and type of financing available. **The Good Peacebuilding Financing principles explicitly call for more open and inclusive dialogue to try and overcome this type of scenario, while ideas also exist on finding common ground on financing between North and South.**²⁵

Evolving domestic political cultures across Europe and their impact on peacebuilding

How the domestic political culture views a country’s “place in the world” is an important factor influencing funding for peacebuilding. Emerging priorities are another. The last few

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years have seen an increasing number of priorities at the European level crowding out the political and top-level bureaucratic space (and potential funding) available for peacebuilding. The COVID-19 pandemic already had put significant pressure on the budgets of all governments of the Global North, with national politics pushing them to focus on domestic challenges—namely the health and economic crises at home—to the detriment of global solidarity, as clearly illustrated by vaccine inequity and the failure of global leadership on that issue.

Green and digital transitions have recently become prominent priorities in the EU and its member states—both internally and externally—and are attracting an increasing amount of European external resources and ODA. Most recently, the war in Ukraine has resulted in a considerable shift in foreign policy and international spending priorities of key peacebuilding donors, with a clear focus on dealing with the energy crisis, increasing European defense capabilities, dealing with the humanitarian crisis and welcoming Ukrainian refugees in EU member states. Migration thus also remains very high on the agenda of the EU and its member states. Now a cost-of-living crisis and rapidly rising inflation are also influencing domestic politics in Europe.

These various non-peacebuilding priorities have increased competition over public funds in general, as well as ODA, potentially at the expense of quality funding for peacebuilding over the long term. The COVID-19 pandemic did not lead to significant cuts to ODA budgets (and resultant cuts to funding for international peacebuilding) in most Western European countries. The notable exception in terms of cuts is the UK (see Box 2). However, the war in Ukraine has already

led to considerable pressures on reallocating development aid budgets, due to increases in humanitarian aid, need for increasing food security spending, defense budgets, and in-donor refugee costs in some countries. In this context, **the level of prioritization of peacebuilding compared to these other urgent and new priorities** may have a long-term impact on peacebuilding funding. Increases in international spending are directly linked to issues at the top of the domestic agenda, as demonstrated by the war in Ukraine, and international peacebuilding is currently nowhere near the top of overall political or even foreign policy agendas.

European politics are undergoing significant changes. Major elections in **Germany** and **Norway**²⁶ in September 2021 led to the right of center parties losing ground and social democratic parties returning to power, albeit in coalition governments. Germany, as the largest European peacebuilding donor, is an interesting case: it is undergoing a rapid shift in its political culture,²⁷ particularly since the start of the war in Ukraine. The current government coalition, which includes the Social Democrats (SPD), the Greens, and the Free Democrats (FDP), was originally committed to an ecological transformation of the economy, digitalization, health, and social justice. In line with the SPD and Greens' manifestos, the coalition agreement backed civil crisis prevention and peacebuilding, including by defining and planning targeted personnel and financial resources for reliable and fast civilian crisis prevention.²⁸ The coalition also originally promised adequate finances, and proposed a long-term goal of spending 3 percent of gross national income (GNI) on diplomacy, development, and security—a compromise formula to circumvent the sensitive discussion on defense spending of 2 percent to honor commitments to NATO.²⁹ Since then, the country has made a dramatic turn in its foreign and defense policy by announcing a special fund of EUR 100 billion for investments in military capacity, and a permanent commitment to more than 2 percent of annual defense spending, although it already seems that the government will struggle to achieve this target.³⁰

Box 2: A special case: Political change behind ODA cuts and their impact on peacebuilding in the UK

The UK, which is the fourth biggest ODA donor to peacebuilding over the last ten years, is experiencing significant evolution in its foreign and development policies and spending priorities. This has been led by changing domestic political priorities as manifested by Brexit, significant domestic volatility in leadership, and much greater focus on its own political and economic interests. As a result, the UK's investment in peace has in recent years become dependent on "political winds and annual budgetary fluctuations."³¹

The UK was a leader in the West not only in funding but also in knowledge generation in responding to violent conflict. Changes in the UK will thus be more

keenly felt across the global peacebuilding sector. The country committed, in 2015, to allocate 50 percent of its then Department for International Development's (DFID) budget to fragile states and regions—based on the premise that prioritizing these countries was strategic. From 2020 to 2022, under a different political leadership, it has significantly cut its ODA aid budget, and seems to be withdrawing from a global leadership role in the peacebuilding area. In 2022, the UK launched a new international development strategy that—while mentioning the importance of conflict and linking this to other areas—seemed to be a downgrade from the prominence that addressing violent conflict and state fragility received in previous UK development commitments. In past strategies it was clearly and explicitly stated as one of a small number of priorities. There was no specific use of the term peacebuilding or commitment on spending amounts or percentages as in the past, although there was a commitment to target UK aid “in Fragile and Conflict Affected States (FCAS) to address the drivers and causes of crises.”³² Some informed observers noted that overall the new international development strategy seems like a “step back” not only from commitments made in the previous decade but also from more recent UK policy announcements relevant for peacebuilding.³³

This relative downgrading from the UK will have significant implications for peacebuilding efforts in many countries around the world. Such developments call into serious question the UK's future contribution to peacebuilding as the country becomes more self-interested and reduces its role as an influential norm-setter in both institutional innovations and expertise in responding to violent conflict.³⁴ The volatility in UK domestic politics is certainly impacting its international standing and its ability to focus on issues like peacebuilding.

Yet the evolutions relate more to the specific nature of the UK's electoral and parliamentary system, which makes possible significant changes in government political and spending priorities that are not as easy in other European countries or in the European Union institutions that also support peacebuilding. While the Conservative government originally kept its commitment to spend 0.7 percent of its GNI on ODA, the actual budget in 2020 decreased by USD 963 million (4.6 percent) due to the UK's shrinking economy as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, and decreased further by USD 5 billion in 2021.³⁵ In July 2021, members of the UK Parliament voted against restoring the country's commitment to spending 0.7 percent of gross national income on ODA until certain fiscal conditions are met. According to economists, those economic conditions are so tough that they effectively rule out a return to the 0.7 percent target until 2027-28 at the earliest.³⁶

These cuts caused a considerable public rift within the Conservative Party and seriously undermined the UK's self-declared “Global Britain” agenda, as well as its credibility both on the international stage and as a donor.³⁷ The cuts stand in contrast with the GBP 16.5 billion (USD 18.3 billion) increase in the defense budget over four

years which was announced in 2020 and further increases with the aim of defense spending to reach 3 percent of GDP by the end of the decade announced in the wake of the war in Ukraine.³⁸ The Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy, for instance, noted that the UK has made the biggest sustained increase in defense spending since the end of the Cold War³⁹—although it is not the only European country undertaking or considering increases in defense spending, particularly in the wake of the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Most recently, there have been calls even to increase UK Defence spending to 3 percent of GDP by 2030 by new Prime Minister Liz Truss, which would amount to an increase of 60 percent in real terms, the biggest increase since the 1950s.⁴⁰ If these were to occur, it may be that UK ODA is cut again to help contribute towards this. Yet pressure on UK public spending will also come from a wider need to ‘balance the books’ than just increases in defense spending.

A *Devex* analysis of UK government figures has shown that cuts to the UK’s aid budget will hit lower-income and fragile and conflict-affected countries harder than middle-income nations (some of which will actually enjoy aid budget increases). Conflict areas such as Syria, the Palestinian territories, Yemen, and the Joint Sahel Department saw cuts between 60 and 70 percent. Aid to Somalia is falling by 41 percent.⁴¹ As highlighted by the main UK peacebuilding organizations,⁴² the aid cuts were so abrupt and “seemingly arbitrary” that there was little to no scope for conflict sensitivity in their implementation.⁴³ According to Saferworld, the Conflict, Stability and Security Fund (CSSF) has been cut by GBP 492 million (USD 547 million) from 2020–21 to 2021–22, including at least GBP 348.9 million (USD 388 million) of the CSSF’s Official Development Assistance (ODA).⁴⁴ These cuts come despite the UK government’s Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy (published in March 2021), which sets out key objectives “to support open societies and defend human rights” and “tackle conflict and instability.”^{45,46}

Despite a good case for sustaining ODA spending in the wake of the pandemic, increasing funding for peacebuilding, and bolstering the UK government’s initiative for a Global Britain, domestic politics dictated other choices. The rhetoric around “promoting open societies and protecting public goods through conflict prevention, strong rule of law, respect for human rights and media freedoms”⁴⁷ runs the risk of sounding hollow if not matched with sufficient political, diplomatic, and financial resources deployed within the framework of a cross-governmental conflict prevention strategy.⁴⁸ As highlighted by peacebuilding experts, research shows there is strong cross-party and public support to strategic financial and political investments in conflict prevention.⁴⁹ As yet, though, this support has not been able to arrest cuts in budget and focus.

Despite cuts to ODA and its role in peacebuilding, the UK remains an important player and significant investor in this area (funding considerably more than for example France), necessitating continued engagement at the global level. Also, within the UK government and civil society, there remains significant depth in terms of expertise in peacebuilding, including on cutting edge issues. Yet a significant opportunity for change of political course with potential to reprioritize peacebuilding in foreign policy and spending probably will not present itself until the next UK general election scheduled for 2024.

Germany also is changing its long-standing policy of blocking weapons from being delivered to conflict zones.⁵⁰

This is a watershed move in a country where military spending has always been a contentious political issue.⁵¹ This could represent the largest absolute jump in German military expenditure since at least World War II.⁵² This leaves limited space for priorities like peacebuilding, and what this shift would mean for the 3 percent spending target for diplomacy, development, and security remains unclear.

Other major European countries are going through similarly complex political situations. The **Netherlands**, for instance, held an election in March 2021 and only managed to form a government in December 2021, although continuity prevails as it is the same coalition previously in government. The Netherlands' development policy was refreshed in June 2022 and largely builds on existing Dutch priorities, which included 'security and rule of law.' It maintains a commitment to work in fragile regions, particularly the Horn of Africa and the Sahel, and to work in an integrated fashion, yet some analysts think the focus on conflict and governance could be reduced in practice.⁵³ The focus is really on increasing the link between trade and development, including the Netherlands' own trading interests, although there is a modest commitment to increase ODA. It had relatively little in reference to peacebuilding per se and no indication that this area will receive increased funding.⁵⁴

Sweden is also going through major political shifts. Russia's invasion of Ukraine led Sweden to boost its defense spending by around USD 300 million in 2022 as well as to make the decision to join NATO together with Finland.⁵⁵ There is also broad support in the Swedish parliament to raise the defense budget to 2 percent of the country's GDP.⁵⁶

Following the September 2022 elections, which led to very tight results, the Moderate Party (center-right) claimed victory with a narrow three-seat advantage (including other right-wing parties supporting them). Outgoing Social Democrat Prime Minister Magdalena Andersson conceded defeat and resigned. While the far-right Sweden Democrats (whose aim is to 'Make Sweden great again') used to be shunned by Sweden's other parties because of their roots in the neo-Nazi movement and their racially polarizing anti-immigrant rhetoric and policies,

the party has increased its share of the vote and become sufficiently mainstream for the other conservative parties to be prepared to accept the party's support to form a right-leaning government.⁵⁷ They have emerged as Sweden's largest right-wing party, with 20.5 percent of the vote, and the second largest party overall behind the Social Democrats (30.3 percent). The Moderates gathered around 19.1 percent of the vote and now lead a formal three-party coalition with the Christian Democrats and Liberals, with support from the Sweden Democrats. While the latter will not be an official member of the government, the four parties will, together, pursue a unified government policy which means the Sweden Democrats will have strong influence and representation in the administration to monitor the government's daily work and the Moderates will have to rely on them to govern effectively.⁵⁸

The increasing influence of the far-right Sweden Democrats has already led the past few governments headed by the Social Democrats to adopt stricter immigration and asylum policies and combat gang crime—something voters associate with immigrants. As highlighted by the *Economist*, Magdalena Andersson, Sweden's first female prime minister, put tougher policing and efforts to combat de-facto segregation at the heart of her campaign, along with a hard line against Russia and measures to fight rising energy bills. Crime and immigration dominated this year's campaign.⁵⁹ The liberal-conservative Moderate Party has also moved closer to the Sweden Democrats in the past few years.⁶⁰

While aid was definitely not at the heart of the campaign ahead of the election, Sweden's foreign aid budget, consistently among the highest percentage of GNI in the world, is at risk, as the 1 percent of GNI target will be abolished and "aid will be reduced." The new government reportedly plans to cut the country's international aid budget from 1 percent of GDP to 0.85 percent⁶¹ and aid will become a tool to prevent "irregular migration," increase the number of returned refugees, and reduce the root causes of migration.⁶² This is a significant development, given Sweden's traditionally strong values-based support for development cooperation.

Sweden has also lost some credibility in the course of 2022 due to its diversion of SEK 9.1 billion (around EUR 834 million) from development spending to cover the cost of hosting Ukrainian refugees at home, then turning around to announce that it planned to restore SEK 4.2 billion (around EUR 385 million). This triggered questions over why the government froze so much foreign spending so soon before the full impact of the Russian invasion was clear.⁶³

These political changes raise questions as to the level of (values-based) support to peacebuilding that can be expected from the country in upcoming years. It is too soon to fully appreciate the consequences of these changes on support for peacebuilding, but the political landscape in Sweden is evolving, and therefore more of a case for continued engagement will have to be made.

2022 is also an election year for **France**. It is too early to tell whether the presidential and legislative elections of April and June 2022 will have a significant impact on funding for peacebuilding, but France has never been a significant contributor in this area as defined by OECD-DAC codes and is unlikely to become one in the near future. President Emmanuel Macron—who won with 58.6 percent of the votes against far-right candidate Marine Le Pen—has however presided over a historic increase in France's ODA.⁶⁴ Yet, domestic issues (particularly the energy and socio-economic crises) have dominated the electoral campaign

and will continue to dominate the French political landscape, and the fact that the election brought the far right closer to the French presidency than at any time since World War II limits Macron's room for maneuvering. Similarly, in the June 2022 legislative elections, the far-right scored a historic success increasing its number of lawmakers almost tenfold and cementing the party's rise from fringe status to the mainstream opposition.⁶⁵ President Macron on the other hand only won a relative majority in the Assemblée Nationale which finds itself in a political deadlock.⁶⁶ On a positive note, in September 2022, the French Minister for European and Foreign Affairs announced that France's ODA will increase by EUR 860 million (USD 840 million) in 2023, in line with ambitions to reach the 0.7 percent ODA/GNI target by 2025. The amount will be proposed to the French Parliament, which will debate the budget law until December.⁶⁷

Thus, while far-right parties have had a mixed fortunes across much of Europe in recent years, they are still very influential, as demonstrated by the Italian elections at the end of September 2022 as another illustration of the influence of the far-right.⁶⁸ This is also illustrated by the increasingly right-leaning discourse of other parties on security and migration issues.⁶⁹ They can also pressure for less resources to be spent on ODA or evolve the political discourse toward more military and defense-led engagements, "containment" narratives, or a mostly "humanitarian" approach to responding to violent conflict, rather than a peacebuilding approach. More generally, in Europe, the discussion on international political priorities—even among centrist parties—has also focused increasingly on defense, migration management, and countering geostrategic threats. This was the case before the Russian invasion of Ukraine, but is even more prominent now. Many traditional ODA providers (e.g., France, Germany, UK, and the EU) are showing greater inclination to link international cooperation and spending more to perceived key values and political and economic interests, rather than to the United Nations' 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals, or to poverty alleviation. Thus, while development aid is rarely the center of attention during national election campaigns in Europe,⁷⁰ election outcomes can still have a significant impact on aid priorities.

While dynamics are mixed across Europe, the overall political landscape is changing and becoming increasingly fragmented and volatile. In a context of increasingly polarized and volatile politics in European countries, elections and government formations are key, as is the state of public discourse: these determine where public spending priorities lie. New or evolving priorities for development cooperation and ODA in the wake of the above must also be analyzed. These political changes (particularly as a result of the war in Ukraine) have the power to swing the focus away from development and diplomacy prevention-driven policies to more defense-driven approaches depending on the winning parties and the governing coalitions they form. While this has always been the case, it is gaining renewed importance in the current political and geopolitical context.

In a context of increasingly polarized and volatile politics in European countries, elections and government formations are key, as is the state of public discourse: these determine where public spending priorities lie

Evolving foreign and development policy narratives

Even among the largest peacebuilding donors in Europe and the US, narratives around foreign and development policy have evolved considerably in recent years, with a much greater link between domestic interests and foreign engagement and an underpinning narrative that security at home depends on security abroad. As a result, responses to violent conflict impacting Europe are increasingly securitized and focused on containment, stabilization, and where Ukraine is concerned—solidarity and material support including military support for Ukraine’s defense. This has implications for peacebuilding support.

Domestic events with international dimension

Domestic security concerns—especially over terrorism and irregular migration, and most recently over the threat of (nuclear) war in Europe and the US—have not abated in recent years, and have indeed been reinforced following the Afghan crisis in 2021 and the fallout of the war in Ukraine since February 2022. Both events have been dealt with at the highest levels of EU politics. The Afghan crisis led to an immediate focus on preventing irregular migration flows in the EU,⁷¹ while the Ukraine war on the contrary has triggered the Temporary Protection Directive (drafted in 2001 but never used), an emergency mechanism which grants protection to a large number of Ukrainian refugees, including rights to residence as well as access to the labor market, medical assistance, and education.⁷² This shows that while international crises can have strong domestic ramifications, the outcome very much depends on both the strategic importance and proximity of the crisis to Europe. In any case, migration still largely influences political debates around elections in European countries. These domestic security and migration management concerns also increasingly shape EU assistance in regions such as the Sahel.⁷³ They thus have a considerable influence on foreign and development policy agendas, and hence on the amount and quality of support for peacebuilding.

This link between internal and external interests has been pushed by nationalist and populist parties and has increasingly influenced the EU’s foreign and development policy. While the 2016 Global Strategy (EEAS 2016) committed the EU to “engage in a practical and principled way in peacebuilding” and enshrined concepts such as human security and conflict sensitivity, it also further strengthened the link between internal and external security.⁷⁴ According to Saferworld, “While peace, democracy and human rights remain central to its external action, Europe is increasingly turning towards securitized responses to crises.”⁷⁵ Even before COVID-19 and the war in Ukraine, the European Commission has branded itself a “geopolitical Commission” and has called for the EU to be more forceful in defending its strategic interests abroad.⁷⁶ The EU and its member states increasingly address competing interests and priorities, such as investment in defense, counterterrorism, trade partnerships, and more value-based concerns related to governance and democracy.

Box 3: A new aid narrative in Denmark and impact of the Russian war in Ukraine

These dynamics are particularly clear in Denmark’s new aid strategy. Preventing migration and the arrival of refugees in Denmark has become an overarching goal of the government’s aid policy.⁷⁷ While Denmark’s new aid strategy commits to peacebuilding and preventing conflict and instability, it does so through the lens of irregular migration; i.e., creating sustainable alternatives to irregular migration and displacement.⁷⁸ While these concerns might lead to an increased focus on fragile contexts and conflict prevention, as is the case with Denmark,⁷⁹ they also mean that an increased share of development cooperation goes to priorities that have a direct link to core domestic interests—which might not necessarily be the case for peacebuilding, at least not in the public’s perception. There is some stability in the priorities of the strategy as it was negotiated and endorsed by Parliament. Yet the financing agreed in the 2022 budget came under pressure due to the fact that Denmark chose to reallocate ODA towards receiving Ukrainian refugees in Denmark.⁸⁰

The EU is also setting aside an increasing amount of money for collaborative military efforts.⁸¹ The European Defence Fund, established to boost the bloc’s defense capabilities, will receive close to EUR 8 billion (USD 7.8 billion) for 2021–2027.⁸² Further, in March 2021, EU member states set up the European Peace Facility (EPF), a EUR 5 billion (USD 4.9 billion) fund to provide training and equipment—including arms and ammunition—for foreign security forces and regional military operations.⁸³ In February 2022, the Council of the EU approved assistance measures of EUR 500 million (USD 490 million) to Ukraine for (lethal) military materiel which were then topped up and amounted to EUR 2.5 billion (USD 2.4 billion) in July 2022.⁸⁴ This is the first time that the EU is providing lethal equipment to a third country through the EPF and marks a real paradigm shift. In March 2022, the EU also adopted a “Strategic Compass,” which provides a shared assessment of the strategic environment in which the EU is operating, and of the threats and challenges the Union faces. It also gives the EU “an ambitious plan of action for strengthening the EU’s security and defense policy by 2030.”⁸⁵ It went through a significant rewrite following Russia’s invasion of Ukraine and mentions peacebuilding only once, in relation to an integrated approach potentially involving coercive and military engagement.

On the other hand, the EUR 871 million (USD 854 million) Neighborhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI)-Global Europe⁸⁶ thematic program on Peace, Stability and Conflict Prevention for 2021–2027 has 29 percent of funds devoted to “assistance for conflict prevention, peacebuilding and crisis preparedness,” while 69 percent is devoted to “addressing global, transregional and emerging threats.”⁸⁷ The EU also has EUR 3 billion (USD 2.9 billion) available for rapid response, a significant portion of

which can further support conflict prevention and peacebuilding for the period 2021–2027. Specific peacebuilding funds are thus quite limited in comparison to EU defense and wider international and traditional development cooperation-related funding. Also, these more flexible, ‘rapid response’ funds from the EU will increasingly have to deal with responding to the ‘crisis of the day’ rather than long-term conflict prevention and peacebuilding. While the EU budget for 2021–2027 was designed to have more flexibility to respond to crises, the magnitude of the crises, particularly responding to Ukraine and the food crisis, has taken a heavy toll on the EU’s external finances.

In the US, the narrative behind the State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs fiscal year 2022 appropriations bills is that “the funds in the bill are the soft power tools that are increasingly indispensable to carrying out an effective foreign policy that protects the American people, defends US interests, and projects US global leadership.”^{88,89} Some of this rhetoric is undoubtedly necessary to gather the necessary political support, yet it also carries risks that domestic security interests overshadow the values and rationale that are supposed to underpin international assistance, such as solidarity, or actual needs on the ground.

Major conflicts with a geostrategic relevance for Europe and the US do have the potential to continue to attract funding, particularly when they end up at the top of the news cycle and foreign policy agenda

Major conflicts and instability

Not all violent conflicts are equally influential on ODA spending patterns in terms of support for peacebuilding. Major conflicts with a geostrategic relevance for Europe and the US do have the potential to continue to attract funding, particularly when they end up at the top of the news cycle and foreign policy agenda. The war in **Ukraine** has also shown that the closer the conflict, the more political and media attention it gets within Europe, and the swifter

additional finances are made available. Yet such attention rarely leads to increased long-term and quality peacebuilding financing for these countries, despite the dire need for it. Rather than leading to a deeper reflection on how to better support international peacebuilding or conflict prevention, geostrategic conflicts increasingly tend to bolster discussions around strategic autonomy and military capacity in much of the foreign and defense establishment in Europe. With the war in Ukraine, it is also resulting in a different public discourse on security.

Such conflicts should lead to a reflection on the limitations of what international actors can support and fund, and their level of ambition (e.g., positive versus negative peace) in such high-stakes conflicts. Pouring in ODA without a proper political strategy or local ownership is unlikely to have any sustainable or positive impact, as has long been noted.⁹⁰ Yet one of the main issues remains that more effective approaches to conflict require long-term engagements which do not fit into a domestic political cycle and thus do not sell easily to European politicians who need short-term fixes or visibility to carry domestic political favor.

This is especially true in a crisis which is perceived to lead to “massive” migration flows and also poses domestic security risks.

Afghanistan is a good example. The cost of the post-9/11 wars in Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Syria, and elsewhere reportedly totals about USD 8 trillion. Pentagon spending has totaled over US 14 trillion since the start of the war in Afghanistan, with one-third to one-half of the total going to military contractors.⁹¹ A minuscule portion of aid to Afghanistan is devoted explicitly to peacebuilding—no more than 1 to 2 percent.⁹² Still, Afghanistan was the highest recipient of peacebuilding ODA until 2015. In 2016 it became the second highest after Syria, dropped to the tenth spot in 2017, and rose again to the second spot in 2020 after Iraq.

While the short-term priority for Europe in Ukraine is ending the war, boosting the country’s defense capabilities, and providing humanitarian aid, the long-term impact on approaches to conflict (and especially peacebuilding) is still very unclear. Peacebuilding remains highly necessary in countries like Afghanistan and Ukraine, especially at the local level—yet such conflicts generally do not lead to an uptick in financial support for local peacebuilding. Another crucial question concerns the extent to which the Afghan crisis and lessons learned from such precipitated withdrawal will impact other conflicts and foreign interventions in the world, for instance in the Sahel. French President Emmanuel Macron is ending the Barkhane military operation and pulling many of the more than 5,000 French troops from the Sahel, where they have been fighting a jihadi insurgency since 2014.⁹³ There are however no indications that this drawdown is to be complemented by a surge in diplomatic or financial support for international or local peacebuilding. Indeed, it seems that there will be less comprehensive political engagement, not more, in the Sahel for the coming years from Europe.

Current trends are challenging for peacebuilding

These developments demonstrate that when domestic concerns are linked to the international context, the foreign and development policies of the EU and other donors of peacebuilding ODA are affected. Narratives are evolving and “soft power” tools seem to be increasingly deprioritized, ignored, or in the case of the Russian war in Ukraine, overtaken by current events. Even European countries with a strong tradition of military nonalignment and support for peacebuilding are rushing to develop their own capacities and alliances. While peacebuilding priorities are unlikely to completely disappear in the near future, they are increasingly squeezed by domestic concerns and military defense-led narratives in Europe. This makes monitoring and advocacy for improvements in the quality of peacebuilding funding even more crucial. In polarized domestic environments, political attention tends to be won by those who connect with the public mood. This is something that the peacebuilding community has found challenging in the past, as it does now.

The importance of a domestic European political constituency

The previous sections have shown the importance of how perceived national interests are framing the current political and spending context in Europe, and to some extent in the US. The dominant “new” European priorities (both domestically and internationally) currently revolve around geopolitical competition, the energy crisis and rising prices, the green and digital transitions, getting domestic economies to recover and perform, bolstering defense, and responding to the Russian war in Ukraine.

Peacebuilding will have to find its place among these priorities while not compromising its own key principles. It will have to show a clearer link to these narratives at home and abroad, in the short and longer term. Furthermore, a shifting geopolitical era and major international events that bring instability are having an impact on how European countries see their role in the world, and hence the approaches they adopt and spending choices they make. This is an enormously difficult environment for more values-led long term multistakeholder peacebuilding support to gain traction.

ECDPM identified several factors in 2018 that had less influence on support for peacebuilding,⁹⁴ such as **allies and other governments’ (peacebuilding) initiatives** or **conflict-related expertise**. These factors are having even less impact in the current (geo)political context. Indeed, conflict-related expertise inside European governments is being increasingly repurposed and refocused away from peacebuilding, particularly in parts of the world deemed “nonstrategic” for Europe. Similarly, **international commitments and norms (e.g., principles)** are not the dominant driver of specific choices in European foreign and development policy or spending priorities. The UK case demonstrates that even previous domestic government and parliamentary commitments to the target of 0.7 percent of GNI as ODA are not invincible in the face of an evolution in domestic political culture backed by a parliamentary majority for change.

Furthermore, a shifting geopolitical era and major international events that bring instability are having an impact on how European countries see their role in the world, and hence the approaches they adopt and spending choices they make

Furthermore, in the wake of the war in Ukraine, existing funding—even when already earmarked for conflict countries or peacebuilding-related actions—can be repurposed, as in the example of Denmark, Sweden, and Norway. Failing a political or at least bureaucratic constituency within Foreign Ministries to make a strong case for protecting peacebuilding-related support, funding in this area will be increasingly vulnerable to change.

Making a compelling political and bureaucratic case for peacebuilding in this context is not straightforward, and expectations that significant increases could be possible should be tempered.

Box 4: European public support for peace and security in international cooperation

When asked in a comprehensive poll in February-March of 2022, respondents in all twenty-seven member states of the European Union overwhelmingly thought it was important to partner with countries outside the EU to reduce poverty around the world (89 percent). **In terms of “thematic” priorities, respondents indicated peace and security (40 percent) as the top challenge.** This is followed by health (39 percent), education (37 percent), water and sanitation (30 percent), economic growth and employment (25 percent), democracy and human rights (24 percent), and then food security and agriculture (23 percent). This would seem to indicate that peace-related activities are highly rated by European citizens as priority areas of European support, and that there is significant support for international cooperation. This is at least something positive to build on.

Source: Kantar, [Special Eurobarometer 521 Report: EU citizens and development cooperation](#), February-March 2022, Survey requested by the European Commission.

Responding to changing European politics: three priority areas for action

The risk that peacebuilding will slip down the international policy and funding agenda in Europe is very real, an ironic possibility at a time when violent conflict has returned to Europe and the world itself becomes more volatile. The magnitude of the political and economic crisis facing Europe is unparalleled in the post-World War II era with significant policy changes happening in the foreign, defense, and energy spheres on a daily basis, and changes in some bilateral ODA spending priorities coming overnight. However, the picture

is not a uniform one, leading to a requirement for more tailored responses for each country and at the overall EU level.

In the current immediate crisis response atmosphere in Europe, making a case for longer-term funding and principled support for peacebuilding is likely to be drowned out by the immediate repercussions of the Russian invasion of Ukraine

In the current immediate crisis response atmosphere in Europe, making a case for longer-term funding and principled support for peacebuilding is likely to be drowned out by the immediate repercussions of the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Nonetheless, as significant rethinking on political engagement and international spending is ongoing in European capitals, it is important to work at a high level, while also engaging the senior bureaucrats in charge of presenting spending options to political leaders for decision.

The following recommendations are aimed at the “peacebuilding community,” those inside and outside of government and EU institutions with a concern for more effective responses to violent conflict. These recommendations cannot be taken forward by governments or a specialist peacebuilding civil society alone. The “community” can be built up from academia, activists, political party members, parliamentarians, private philanthropy, business leaders, civil society, and all those

with a specific interest in peacebuilding. The sobering reality is that while the peacebuilding community is quite weak and fragmented, there is no-one else who is going to advocate for support for peacebuilding on their behalf.

1. Build a broader and more influential constituency to support international peacebuilding within Europe

Why: At present, European ODA financing for peacebuilding (both in quality and quantity) is at significant risk without a broad constituency advocating for its continued relevance and support.

How:

- Constituencies are most effective at the individual domestic/country and European Union level. They should include civil society, academia, political parties, parliamentarians, officials, and specific conflict-focused networks that have good knowledge of peacebuilding but need to connect more effectively to media and social media.
- Develop broad cross-party and cross-government coalitions—beyond the usual suspects in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs—in Prime Ministers’ offices, Ministries of Finance, Defense, and Interior Affairs that can advocate for retaining or expanding finance for peacebuilding. Such engagement should be aimed at showing these actors that investment in peacebuilding or conflict-sensitive approaches can deliver results for them, as well. The peacebuilding community can leverage current concerns over an increasingly volatile and dangerous world to the benefit of peacebuilding only so far as such concerns feed positively into peacebuilding principles. Adaptation of arguments and communication around peacebuilding to these wider concerns should be prioritized but undertaken in a way that does not in itself contribute to the “securitization” of peacebuilding. Any such adaptation should maintain underpinning values and principles, including those articulated in the Good Peacebuilding Financing Initiative. A deeper form of engagement that does not simply respond to the thematic “hot topic” or political narrative of the day, but rather connects (ideally across the mainstream political spectrum) to deeper societal arguments of how countries see their place in the world, will be key in the longer run to develop broad constituencies.
- Such a long-term constituency should also be promoted in potential “peacebuilding champions” outside of the current top ten donors, e.g., Ireland, Spain, or France. The focus should thus be on support for widening this constituency, rather than just deepening it domestically in the existing top European supporters.

2. Emphasize the peace(building) dimension in existing initiatives from Foreign Ministries

Why: Getting entirely new standalone peacebuilding commitments may be difficult to mobilize at this moment, but peace-related dimensions within existing initiatives should be emphasized and enhanced. Over the longer run there may be space to rethink peacebuilding-related foreign, development and aid policies, and the peacebuilding community must be ready to engage.

How:

- Support investment in the peace pillar within the **humanitarian-development-peace nexus**, which is largely underfunded and misunderstood. For instance, this

would require more flexible financing and permeability across budget lines, more horizontal reporting lines, and more decentralized management and decision-making.⁹⁵ Advocates for peacebuilding can make the consistent case why the peace dimension should be invested in (i.e., it can break the cycle and provide more long-term solutions to crises) and articulate how this can best be achieved in practice. While the humanitarian sector in particular is also facing an increasing funding gap, a case can be made that more investment in the peace dimension over the long term will lead to a reduction of humanitarian needs, and thus to a reduction of the humanitarian funding gap. This will however require more work on clarifying what the peace element of the nexus is and is not, which could be done by focusing on the objectives of peacebuilding, rather than on activities. Such an approach would help peacebuilders to identify points of convergence with different actors working across the nexus. Engagement between the three types of actors, e.g., in humanitarian forums involving development and peace actors, would allow these actors to better understand and learn from each other, and ultimately to advocate for more efficient and innovative financing to tackle funding gaps across the nexus.

- Make the link between financing peacebuilding priorities and other higher-profile thematic areas where there is growing or new ODA focus such as in infrastructure, green, digital transformation, or topical issues such as food security. Use global, regional, and national forums organized for these thematic discussions to bring in peacebuilding issues.
- Politically contested contexts (such as countries where there have been unconstitutional government takeovers) have continued to increase in recent years, posing challenges for donor engagement. The peacebuilding community needs to make a strong case for fit-for-purpose modalities that ensure donors stay engaged in these fragile and conflict-affected situations, to ensure the sustaining of lives and some form of basic government capacities. Within donor bureaucracies, peacebuilding experts need to put together compelling evidence that can be used for messaging to parliaments and other constituencies of interest.

3. Leverage practical entry points for policy influence at national and international levels

Why: Constituencies need to be smart and strategic in order to have an impact, moving beyond arguments to practical influence of policy and budgetary processes.

How:

- Pay close attention to **election cycles**: advocate for the inclusion of peace(building) when European foreign and development policy priorities are being revised (which may indeed happen post-elections, or in the face of the current major political upheavals in Europe).
- Constituencies need to inform themselves of the **national budgetary cycle**, collaborate, advocate, and engage at critical times when thematic and geographic

priorities and total amounts for ODA priorities are made or revised, connecting to potential champions. To further strengthen their voice, connections could be made with wider advocacy groups focused on increasing ODA or influential foreign policy players in think tanks, political parties, and parliamentarians, as well as Director-Generals and Director-level officials in Foreign Ministries.

- At the international level, look to put peace(building) (back) on the **agenda of international and regional norm-setting bodies where Europe has a leadership role**. Such as the presidency of the **Council of the European Union**, **G7**, but also **G20** meetings, as well as setting out a calendar of activities. The peacebuilding community should work with partners to put peacebuilding on the global agenda around relevant issues (e.g., **infrastructure, green transitions, or food security**).

Conclusion

Peacebuilding's main challenge in the context of the ongoing crisis in Europe is to remain relevant, supported, and principled. This paper has discussed policy shifts that will undermine financing for peacebuilding in the short term, with potential medium-term effects as well. For peacebuilding to stay on the agenda, multiple strategies are required including broadening the constituency of advocates; embedding peacebuilding advocacy within other important foreign policy agendas; and finding the appropriate moments and fora to make the case. Enablers such as media (social and traditional) and strong evidence told in a more compelling narrative can also support these processes.

Conflict prevention and peacebuilding are, at their core, local agendas. Finding ways to support local-level initiatives with unencumbered, sustainable funding is critical while also recognizing the implications and impact of geopolitical shifts. Advocates should support the evolution of innovative funding that reinforces local initiatives without bogging them down in donor bureaucracies, as well as try and isolate them from the volatility of European politics. Some examples include crowdsourcing and facilitating South-South and triangular cooperation, among others.

Looking to the future, however, sustainable solutions to violent conflict are not going to be found only through more and better financing from Europe or elsewhere. It is also not credible to advocate simply for "more" financial support to peacebuilding without also promoting multilateral, regional, and local solutions. As such, it will be important to continue to raise conflict prevention and peacebuilding concerns at the regional and global levels as a way of dealing with violent conflict and negative peace, while also ensuring that support for peacebuilding does not feed negatively into geopolitical competition dynamics. It is time for honest reflection and evaluations of successes and failures of various approaches to violent conflict that have been heavily invested in by Europe and the US (e.g., in Afghanistan). Such analysis can help build the case that alternative approaches are urgently needed.

Endnotes

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