Norm advocacy: a small state strategy to influence the EU
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Norm advocacy: a small state strategy to influence the EU
Annika Björkdahl

ABSTRACT In June 2001 the European Council adopted the EU Programme for the Prevention of Violent Conflict. The story of how conflict prevention became an integral and legitimate part of EU policy and practice illustrates the influence of powerful ideas and successful norm advocacy of a small state managing to punch above its weight in the EU. The aim of this article is to analyse norm advocacy as a potent addition to traditional strategies of gaining influence in the Union. By tracing the process of Swedish promotion of conflict prevention the article explores norm advocacy strategies, such as framing, agenda-setting, diplomatic tactics and the power of the Presidency. The EU institutional setting also provides ample opportunities for a small state to exert normative power, and in areas where great powers are generally regarded as dominant, such as the CFSP and the ESDP.

KEY WORDS Agenda-setting; CFSP; civilian ESDP; conflict prevention; norm advocacy; Sweden.

INTRODUCTION
In the early 1990s Sweden began to call international attention to the importance of preventing violent conflict. New to the European Union (EU), conflict prevention was perceived as a non-controversial issue to be promoted in the early development of the common foreign and security policy (CFSP). Despite the moral persuasiveness of conflict prevention, it needed to be promoted in order to take off within the EU. The institutional setting of the EU permitted frequent interactions for Sweden to advocate the emerging norm pertaining to conflict prevention. By intense norm advocacy through framing, agenda-setting, diplomatic tactics and by taking advantage of the opportunity of the Swedish Presidency, conflict prevention was institutionalized into EU’s discourse, policies and practices. Sweden’s well-known support for peaceful conflict resolution and international peacekeeping made her a credible advocate for the issue of conflict prevention. The shared core values of the EU member states facilitated the endorsement of conflict prevention. The ability of a small state to
influence the inception of the CFSP and the European security and defence policy (ESDP) challenges the conventional understanding that the great powers of Europe determined the pace, direction and end-goal of the processes of constructing a common foreign, security and defence policy and adds new insights to conventional understandings of power and influence in the EU. The influence of this small state has to a large extent been overlooked by previous studies concerned with the development of the EU as a security actor (apart from Strømvik 2006).

NORMATIVE POWER AND NORM ADVOCACY

How we conceptualize power is relevant to exploring small state influence or the lack thereof in international settings. This article utilizes a modified version of the popular concept normative power and regards this type of power as a complement, and as a valuable addition, to traditional conceptualizations of power (cf. Manners 2002, 2006). The concept normative power rests on the power of ideas and norms, and it is related to the concept of ‘civilian power’, ‘soft power’, as well as the notion of ‘ideational power’. It is often associated with actors with limited traditional power resources such as military capabilities (Sjursen 2006a, 2006b). Normative power is conceptualized here as a norm-generating and norm-spreading capability exercised in order to change normative convictions and to set normative standards through processes of norm advocacy. The hypothesis to be explored is that small states may gain a constructive and effective influence on issues relating to international peace and security by using normative power.

The literature on norm advocacy has generated a number of important insights, three of which are noteworthy here. First, norm advocacy is related to the power of values, norms and ideas, such as conflict prevention, and it has been particularly important in value-laden debates over human and minority rights, the environment and gender equality (Keck and Sikkink 1998; Risse et al. 1999; Prügel 1999). Emphasis is often put on the morally persuasive characteristics inherent in the norm, making it resonate with a particular audience (Acharya 2004). Less attention is paid to how advocates frame norms by defining ‘the right thing to do’ and how framing is used to construct a normative fit with the existing normative context. The aim here is to further explore framing as a mechanism in constructing a normative ‘fit’.

Second, it is debated in this literature whether norms established through coercive means, such as arm-twisting, shaming or moral sanctions which require constant monitoring to ensure compliance, can be considered as authentic norm adoption (Risse et al. 1999; Crawford 1993). This article perceives norm advocacy as a form of non-coercive, persuasive argumentation that may be used in order to raise moral consciousness about what constitutes ‘the right thing to do’ (Checkel 2005). It is an attempt to add complexity to existing accounts of norm advocacy by exploring in detail the mechanisms of persuasion, such as diplomatic tactics and institutional positions of authority.
Third, the general focus in this literature has been on non-state organizations, such as transnational advocacy networks, individuals, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and few studies have analysed states as norm advocates. The purpose here is to explore norm advocacy as a strategy for small states lacking traditional power resources to gain influence on issues that they normally fail to affect.

An arena for norm advocacy

Like other international organizations, the EU is a norm-generating arena and norm advocacy in such a context is facilitated if the norm is seen to correspond with the overall ambition of the institution (Finnemore and Sikkink 1998: 897, 915). Ideally, norms are exported from the domestic context to the European level, where they are successfully institutionalized, and adopted by other member states (Börzel 2002). The normative context of the EU is clearly conducive to the promotion of conflict prevention. In itself, the EU can be regarded as a peace project and its role in conflict prevention has grown persistently. Its international role has expanded as a result of its increasing foreign policy responsibilities and external demands. Through the process of enlargement, the development of the CFSP and the ESDP, as well as its development co-operation and external assistance programmes, the EU has attempted to contribute to international peace and stability (Björkdahl 2005). For instance, one of the vaguely defined aims of the CFSP, suggested by the European Community (EC) foreign ministers in June 1992, was ‘contributing to the prevention and settlement of conflicts’ (cited in Smith 1999: 137). According to Article J1 of the Amsterdam Treaty of 1999, one of the main objectives of the CFSP is ‘to preserve peace and strengthen international security in accordance with the principles of the United Nations’ Charter, as well as the principles of the Helsinki Final Act and the objectives of the Paris Charter of the [Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe] OSCE’. There was evidently a potential to construct a normative match between the norm pertaining to conflict prevention and the EU normative context, facilitating the institutionalization of conflict prevention.

A committed advocate

A norm advocate is an actor strongly committed to a particular norm, and ready to invest energy in promoting the norm in order to shape the behaviour of others. Norm advocates have ‘strong notions about appropriate or desirable behaviour in their community’ and may be considered as norm leaders constructing and promoting norms and shaping the EU normative context and future practices (Finnemore and Sikkink 1998: 897). If the advocate also acts as a forerunner and complies with the norms it propagates, i.e. ‘practising what you preach’, the advocacy becomes more convincing. A purposeful norm advocate selects a norm that is perceived as morally appealing, familiar and ‘good’, and that agrees with the values, beliefs, identities and practices of
the advocate (Sikkink 1991: 26). It is not only the intrinsic characteristics of the norm that will make the norm take off, but also how it is propagated. Norm advocates are identified as the primary impetus for spreading nascent norms. The norm advocate has at its disposal a number of resources, such as diplomatic, rhetorical and pedagogical skills, moral authority and legitimacy (derived from practising what the norm advocate preaches, and thereby setting an example for others to follow).

Swedish support for the notion of conflict prevention can to a great extent be found in the domestic normative framework and its norm advocacy is based on an ambition to export some of the values that are important in Swedish history and domestic relations, such as respect for the rule of law, arbitration of disputes, consensus settlements, social solidarity and a preference for dealing with the root causes of conflict rather than symptoms (Archer 1994: 377). When explaining Sweden’s commitment to conflict prevention, former Minister for Foreign Affairs, Lena Hjelm-Wallen (interview), accentuated these domestic values and experiences, in addition to the Swedish traditional foreign policy of internationalism and activism, and argued that conflict prevention resonated with these values. In some aspects Sweden has managed to practise what it preaches, as it has been a strong supporter of United Nations (UN) peacekeeping, and it is one of the few countries that has contributed to all the civilian and military peace operations undertaken by the EU (Strömvik 2006).

**Strategies of norm advocacy**

Norm advocacy is a strategy to gain influence often used by otherwise powerless actors. The bulk of what norm advocates do can be termed as persuasion to convince others to share their normative convictions (Keck and Sikkink 1998). My typology of norm advocacy tactics includes: framing, agenda-setting, diplomatic tactics and use of the opportunity of the chair. Framing refers to a process of defining reality. A frame can be constructed to connect a particular problem to a general line of appropriate action for ameliorating the problem (Snow and Benford 1992: 135–9). A norm can be framed in commonly held values, in terms of rational economics or in language that resonates with the audience (Hall 1989: 383). A norm advocate may contribute to shaping the agenda by introducing a new idea or by bringing a particular issue to the forefront. To provide credible, and for political purposes useful, information at the right time and to the right individuals is important for successful norm advocacy (Keck and Sikkink 1998). Through diplomatic tactics, such as bilateral consultations and coalition-building, it is possible to identify like-minded supporters as well as potential opposition and mobilize support for norm promotion. This is facilitated by the establishment of focal points within the EU Commission and the Council Secretariat, making use of officials who support the norm (Björkdahl 2002b). Frequently held meetings at various levels within the Council Secretariat, the Commission, the European Council, the
Normative fit and institutionalization

Norm advocacy is not an uncontested endeavour. The promotion of a new norm is a combative, competitive process, which posits emerging norms in adversarial positions vis-à-vis settled norms. Norm promoters must construct norms not in normative voids but in already monopolized normative space that is resistant to change. This conditions the types of norms promoted by norm advocates, and it means that advocates seeking to construct norms must remain cognizant of the manner in which existing norms will affect how the emergent norm may be interpreted and evaluated. Hence, to be able to sustain itself over time a ‘new norm must fit coherently with other existing norms’ and become embedded in the normative structure of the specific institution (Florini 1996: 376). Norms that ‘fit’ with extant norms gain persuasiveness; yet fitness is simply not just “there” in the norms themselves’, it is ‘actively constructed’ (Laffey and Weldes 1997: 203). Once institutionalized in discourse, policies and programmes, norms will become powerful, and introduce practices not previously considered relevant or efficient and induce new patterns of behaviour. Naturally, all norms advocated in a particular setting will not be institutionalized and gain a taken-for-granted status. A norm may still be contested as there may be pockets of resistance refusing to accept it or advocating a different idea (Legro 2000: 420). Conflict prevention was generally viewed as morally persuasive and fitted well with the soft power image of the EU. Yet, when the EU began its transformation into a security actor stressing military capabilities and crisis management, the risk of marginalization of conflict prevention loomed large if the norm was not institutionalized.

FRAMING CONFLICT PREVENTION

A carefully constructed frame may enable the norm advocate to promote a persuasive norm that resonates with the audience and fits with the existing normative framework. Frames provide an interpretation of a particular problem
(new wars), suggest a general line of appropriate action for ameliorating that problem (prevention), and assign responsibility for carrying out actions to address the problem at hand (to the CFSP, the ESDP and EC external relations).

Normative framing

Norms framed in a way that links them to an issue of great common concern are more likely to gain attention. Conflict prevention was therefore framed by the Swedish foreign and security elite as a humanitarian idea, and linked to sustainable development and eradication of poverty by stressing the need to address root causes of new conflicts (Hjelm-Wallen interview). By convincingly framing the Swedish perspective on conflict prevention in a familiar language and in the words of a number of agreed EU texts, policy documents and inventories related to EU conflict prevention, a persuasive frame was constructed. In addition, conflict prevention was framed in commonly held values, such as democracy, human rights and the rule of law shared by the EU member states (Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs 1999: 24). Yet, the framing also referred to conflict prevention as an integrated approach that included economic, political, legal and military instruments. The emphasis on diplomacy and military instruments for prevention was important in linking conflict prevention to the CFSP and the building of the ESDP (Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs 2000/01: 2: 21).

Prescriptive framing

Prescriptions for when and how to take preventive action were also included. The proactive quality of the conflict prevention idea was regarded as appealing to the EU member states, particularly in view of previous policy failures to prevent the outbreak of violent conflicts; for example, in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. In Preventing Violent Conflict – A Swedish Action Plan (henceforth the Action Plan), conflict prevention was framed with reference to its proactive qualities, i.e. as ‘measures that can be implemented before a difference or dispute escalates into violence, or to measures for preventing violence from flaring up again after the signing of a peace agreement, cease-fire or similar document. It also refers to measures designed to counteract the spreading of conflict to other geographical areas.’ Furthermore, ‘measures should concentrate on a specific situation which is liable to become violent within a foreseeable period’ (Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs 1997: 18: 35). The framing also included a solution to the problem by addressing how violent conflicts could be forestalled by calling for greater coherence between development co-operation policy and security policy, and by primarily using existing instruments at the disposal of the EU, but for partly new and preventive purposes, such as trade and development agreements, political statements, civilian observers and the emerging ESDP as well as development co-operation and the enlargement process (Swedish Ministry for Foreign
Affairs 2000/01: 2). Once a particular concept or buzzword, i.e. ‘conflict prevention’, is developed to describe the norm, a rhetorical momentum may be generated that will be used in communication and efforts to persuade others to adopt the norm and to influence the discourse.

SHAPING THE AGENDA
Norm advocacy is about gaining influence over the agenda and shaping the agenda through efforts to bring a particular issue to the forefront, push for a particular problem definition or introduce new ideas – so-called agenda-setting (Keck and Sikkink 1998). Although the notion of conflict prevention had been discussed in relation to EU development co-operation, it was uncommon to discuss it in terms of security policy and as an element in the building of the ESDP. The ongoing process of constructing EU’s foreign and security identity provided an opportunity for Sweden to reinvigorate the idea of conflict prevention and introduce it in the ESDP debate.

Setting conflict prevention on the agenda...

Working with Finland, Sweden took a first initiative to promote conflict prevention by proposing to introduce the Petersberg tasks into the Amsterdam Treaty. The Petersberg initiative was followed by a Swedish–Finnish suggestion to change the Maastricht Treaty’s Article J4 concerning the CFSP, so that all member states should be able to participate on equal terms in conflict prevention and crisis management activities (press release). According to a Swedish diplomat, the Petersberg initiative was ‘not intended as a means to militarize the Union’, but to ‘give it new goals and tools that reflect contemporary threats and challenges to the international system’ (Bringéus 2000: 66). The political ambition behind introducing conflict prevention into the EU crisis management debate was to provide an alternative interpretation of the EU defence dimension (interview: Former Minister for Foreign Affairs, Lena Hjelm-Wallen).

In the spring of 1999 the Swedish foreign policy élite began to bring the norm to general notice within the EU and the member states were provided with information about conflict prevention as the Swedish Action Plan was distributed. The Action Plan provided both morally persuasive and rational arguments in favour of conflict prevention, and it attracted attention in most of the influential capitals as well as in the EU Council Secretariat and the EU Commission. Also the EU’s electronic communication network – the Correspondence européenne (COREU) – was used, when Sweden sent a COREU to present additional persuasive arguments by recalling and developing some of the ideas presented in the Action Plan (COREU/STO/0240/00).

At the European Council summit in Cologne of 3–4 June 1999 conflict prevention was therefore already an issue on the expanding security agenda (European Council Conclusions, 4 June 1999). A clear link between the
norm-promoting activities of the Swedish foreign policy élite and the fact that conflict prevention was a prioritized issue on the agenda is difficult to establish, yet it should not be ruled out. Encouraged by the Council’s adoption of guiding principles concerning conflict prevention, the Swedish foreign policy élite decided to pursue their norm-promoting activities. Despite the Finns’ preoccupation with developing their pet project, the ‘Northern Dimension’, Swedish representatives vigorously persuaded the Finnish Presidency, during the pre-negotiations to the Helsinki Summit of 10–11 December 1999, to include conflict prevention in the conclusions from the Helsinki summit (interview: Swedish Ambassador; cf. Arter 2000: 677–97). As an indication of successful persuasion, the Council conclusions included a reference to conflict prevention as a separate but parallel track to civilian and military crisis management and stated that conflict prevention, together with crisis management, constituted the main goals of the ESDP (European Council Conclusions, 10 December 1999). This demonstrates that conflict prevention was a flexible and absorbent norm candidate able to work in parallel with crisis management. Apart from the Swedish initiative, no other member state proposals concerning the CFSP and the ESDP that emerged in the period 1998–99 involved ideas pertaining to conflict prevention (Karlas 2005). Yet, the Swedish norm advocacy was not uncontested. Several other issues competed and struggled to reach the top of the EU agenda. Diplomatic tactics and persuasion kept conflict prevention on the EU agenda in times when support for crisis management was strong.

...and keeping it on the agenda

Despite little genuine interest in conflict prevention, the Portuguese Presidency was commissioned by the European Council to carry work on conflict prevention forward, and was required to report on progress of the issue in Santa Maria da Feira, 19–20 June 2000. At the summit, the European Council underlined the Union’s determination in its approach to conflict prevention and crisis management and invited the incoming French Presidency, together with the Secretary General/High Representative and the Commission, to present a progress report on conflict prevention in Nice (European Council Conclusions, 19 June 2000). As Sweden would inherit the French agenda, it was important to retain conflict prevention on the EU agenda, despite conflicting French priorities and a narrow focus on crisis management. The European Council summit in Nice, 7–9 December 2000, concluded that if the EU was to fully play its role on the international stage, it must develop a coherent European approach to crisis management and conflict prevention, and it welcomed the commissioned report by the Secretary General/High Representative and the Commission, Improving the Coherence and Effectiveness of the European Union Action in the Field of Conflict Prevention (European Council Conclusions, 9 December 2000). The recommendations of the report, combined with the European Council’s Conclusions, formed the basis for the Swedish Presidency to carry work forward on conflict prevention. Thus, the incoming Swedish Presidency
was given a mandate to report to the European Council in Gothenburg with ‘a
definition of proposals for improving the cohesion and effectiveness of Union
action in the sphere of conflict prevention’ (European Council Conclusions,
9 December 2000). Swedish diplomats had been instrumental in commission-
ing and drafting the report to ensure it included the important mandate for the
Swedish Presidency. In the EU context, conflict prevention was increasingly
related to crisis management, which enabled it to gain from the momentum
of the crisis management process. On the other hand, the emergent norm was
partly reshaped to meet new expectations and match the evolving normative
context of the EU and its member states, and adapt to the development of
the ESDP.

DIPLOMATIC TACTICS

As a small state Sweden needed to establish informal contacts and gain support
from like-minded states before diffusing the norm broadly among all the EU
member states (cf. Elgström et al. 2001). In order to identify potential allies
and build coalitions, the Swedish foreign policy élite scheduled meetings with
diplomats from the individual member states as well as from the Commission
and Council Secretariat. The ambition was, according to an interview with a
Swedish Ambassador, to establish a consensus while at the same time promoting
Swedish priorities.

Mobilizing support in Helsinki, Berlin and Rome

Continuous discussions with the Finns, particularly during the pre-negotiations
of the Helsinki Summit Conclusions, as previously mentioned, shaped the
Swedes’ perception of conflict prevention. The common interest in civilian
crisis management and conflict prevention was illustrated in a joint article by
the Swedish and Finnish Ministers for Foreign Affairs, in which the need for
a new preventive approach to the new pattern of conflict was highlighted
(Lindh and Tuomioja 2000). Bilateral discussions in Lisbon revealed other pri-
orities, such as an interest in a Common Strategy for the Mediterranean Region.
Consequently, the Portuguese could not be considered as a coalition partner
assisting in advocating conflict prevention. Consultations in Berlin in the
spring of 2000 indicated a strong German interest in the Swedish ambition
to develop the EU capacity for conflict prevention, and the Germans invited
Sweden to close co-operation on the issue (interview: German diplomat). Con-
considering the German foreign policy élite’s efforts to promote conflict prevention
during their Presidency of the Group of Eight (G8) in 1999, the Franco-
German Final Declaration from Potsdam which mentioned conflict prevention,
and the personal engagement of the Minister for Foreign Affairs Joschka Fischer,
German support for conflict prevention was not unexpected. Strong support
was also found in Rome where Italian officials stressed the need to balance
the military measures of crisis management with civilian capabilities, and
regarded conflict prevention as co-ordinating and linking the activities which the EU already performed. Although the Italians acknowledged being inspired by Swedish ideas (Toscano 2000), they had in a joint declaration with the British in July 1999 mentioned that conflict prevention and crisis management should both be basic objectives of the EU (Karlas 2005). The Italians also offered to work jointly with the Swedish foreign policy elite, as the Italian Presidency of the G8 coincided with the Swedish EU Presidency, and the Italians were eager to make progress on the G8 Miyazaki Initiative for Conflict Prevention (Toscano 2000). Hence, there was no need for additional efforts to persuade the Finns, the Germans or the Italians as they had already been convinced and adopted conflict prevention at least at the rhetorical level.

**Scepticism in Brussels, Paris and London**

The bilateral talks during the spring of 2000 indicated that Belgian representatives had a weak interest and limited expertise in the issue of conflict prevention. Sceptically, they argued that political will could not be mobilized for preventive purposes, pointing to the EU’s inability to prevent the conflict in Kosovo (interview: Swedish Ambassador). In addition, conflict prevention would overlap and thereby not add value, as newly established institutional structures were already in place for crisis management. Few efforts were made at this stage to persuade the Belgians through argumentation and convincing evidence in favour of conflict prevention.

Consultations in Paris during the same spring indicated little French interest in conflict prevention. The French clearly favoured crisis management, which was perceived as a potential competitor to the Swedish enterprise of gaining support for conflict prevention. Without French support it could be difficult to reach an agreement in Santa Maria da Feira on how to pursue the work on conflict prevention (interview: desk officer). Efforts to persuade the French diplomats achieved success when the French Secretary General, Loïc Hennekinne (2000) stated, that, ‘France viewed Swedish proposals to focus particularly on questions of conflict prevention during its presidency with considerable interest and sympathy.’ This was an indication that the French would refrain from obstructing Swedish advocacy and ambitions concerning conflict prevention. Discussions with the British Foreign Office suggested that the Department of International Development in particular showed a strong interest in integrating conflict prevention into development co-operation, according to an interview with State Secretary Andersson.

This illustrates the general openness of the development co-operation units in various Ministries for Foreign Affairs, including the Swedish, towards incorporating a conflict prevention perspective into their activities. Overall, more reluctance and resistance were initially found among those concerned with traditional security policy. These bilateral consultations and the overall consensus-building approach that characterized the Swedish efforts are clearly beyond the continental norm but it was beneficial to the norm advocacy (Miles 2002: 190–8). In
general, the Swedish norm advocacy met little resistance as ‘essentially no member state had a strong “objective” reason to be against the EU’s taking on of substantial commitments to conflict prevention in the ESDP-building process’ (Karlas 2005: 179). Furthermore, none of the big powers were particularly concerned with taking a lead on conflict prevention, which left Sweden in a favourable position to continue its efforts.

**Internal turf battles between the Commission and Council Secretariat**

It was important to muster support not only from like-minded member states but also from representatives from the Commission and the Council Secretariat. According to a senior official at the Council Secretariat (interview), smaller member states, with limited resources of their own, tend to utilize the EU institutions to a larger extent. The Commission’s monopoly on policy initiatives within the first pillar, including development co-operation, entailed close cooperation to ensure support for the development co-operation aspect of the norm. In contrast, on second pillar issues, such as the CFSP, member states could initiate proposals, but support from the Council Secretariat was considered conducive to broad acceptance within the EU and necessary in drawing on its extensive expertise on the issue (cf. Karlas 2005: 177).

Although conflict prevention was a familiar notion in the Commission and the Council Secretariat, intense norm advocacy was needed to ensure that the leaders of the two institutions – the Commission and the Council Secretariat – would adopt the norm pertaining to conflict prevention, framed to incorporate both security and development aspects. As a cross-cutting issue, conflict prevention created an internal turf battle between the two institutions. The Commissioner for External Affairs, Chris Patten, for example, perceived conflict prevention simply as crisis management and therefore as a CFSP project not concerning the Commission, according to a senior official within the Commission (interview). The Commissioner eventually changed his mind, favouring early conflict prevention and linking it to development co-operation, partly in order to be able to influence the EU’s external relations (Patten 1999a, 1999b). To some degree, this can be interpreted as a result of Swedish advocacy within the Commission, both by representatives from the Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs, and more importantly by Swedish officials working within the Commission (interview: Swedish Ambassador). Efforts by the Swedish Minister for Foreign Affairs were of immense importance in swaying Patten to view the EU’s promotion of democracy, human rights and the rule of law as a part of long-term, structural prevention (Patten 2004).

A similar development took place within the Council Secretariat. Initially, the High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy, Javier Solana, was reluctant to accept conflict prevention, according to senior officials at the Council Secretariat (interviews). Over time, however, Solana began to interpret conflict prevention as a second pillar issue, as a CFSP matter, in order to use conflict prevention to change the balance of power between the
Commission and the Council Secretariat. One reason for the Commission’s and the Council Secretariat’s acceptance of conflict prevention could be that both perceived that they could strengthen their influence in the ongoing institutional turf battle within the EU (interview: Swedish diplomat). Yet, influenced by the Swedish norm advocacy, particularly by his close co-operation with the Swedish Minister for Foreign Affairs, Anna Lindh, Solana admittedly was persuaded of the imperative of conflict prevention. ‘Anna could be relentless and persuasive, particularly when an issue close to her heart was involved . . . I believe it was Anna Lindh that first coined the phrase “a culture of prevention”’ (Solana 2004).

At the working level, strong and early support for conflict prevention was found within the PPEWU of the Council Secretariat and among some representatives of the Conflict Prevention and Crisis Management Unit in the Commission. These groups proved to be valuable allies, and Swedish representatives worked closely with them, according to a representative of that Unit and the Policy Planning and Early Warning Unit (PPEWU) (interview: Commission official). The support from the Council Secretariat can be understood as part of the Council Secretariat’s tradition of working closely with the incoming and current Presidency. Support from the Commission, however, is less common, and can perhaps be interpreted as being derived from sharing a common understanding of the importance of an integrated approach to conflict prevention. In addition, good personal communications facilitated discussions, argumentation and close co-operation on the issue (interviews: Swedish desk officer; Council Secretariat official). Christoph Heusgen (2000), Director of the PPEWU, pointed out that ‘one of the first to visit me when I became Head of the Policy Unit was (then Deputy State-Secretary) Ambassador Bjermer, who brought with him the Swedish booklet on conflict prevention in four different formats’. Co-operation with the PPEWU intensified during the months leading up to the Swedish Presidency with frequent meetings and consultations (interviews: Swedish representative to PSC; senior official at the Council Secretariat). These experts from the PPEWU were of immense importance for changing normative convictions within the Council Secretariat and spearheaded the institutionalization of conflict prevention into the policies and procedures of the Council Secretariat.

**THE POWER OF THE CHAIR**

Owing to its formal position, the Presidency possesses not only informational and procedural resources, but also a normative influence that can be used to encourage norm adoption and a change in normative convictions (c.f. Tallberg 2006). After preparing the ground through informal meetings, bilateral consultations and establishing support from the EU institutions, conflict prevention was presented as an important commitment for Sweden during its Presidency of the EU in the first half of 2001. By occupying this formal position, Swedish norm advocacy was provided with improved opportunities, as the Presidency enjoys privileged control of procedures as well as a ‘problem
formulation prerogative’, allowing it to define concerns which deserve collective attention as well as develop concrete proposals for action (Svensson 2000: 24). In this position the country also has access to the full co-operation, expertise and support of the Council Secretariat and the Commission. Sweden played the small-state Presidency role and worked in close tandem with the EU institutions (Elgström 2002: 45). However, using the Presidency to pursue your own agenda is controversial as it contradicts strong informal norms where the nation holding the Presidency is expected to ‘pay the price of the Presidency’ and ‘make concessions in order to broker a compromise agreement’ (Bjurulf and Elgström 2004: 260).

**Presenting the priorities of the Swedish Presidency**

Conflict prevention was the thematic issue of the first and last open debate at the GAC during the Swedish Presidency. In a speech at the first GAC meeting on 22 January 2001, the Swedish Foreign Minister, Anna Lindh (2001), criticized the rapid development of the EU’s military crisis management capability and contrasted it with the need to develop civilian crisis management and conflict prevention in the same way, and pointed out that the necessary tools already existed within the EU. In this speech Lindh noted that ‘long-term conflict prevention is largely about standing up for fundamental values – respect for human rights, democracy and the rule of law.’ The Swedish advocacy was presumably persuasive, as a consensus on the principles underpinning conflict prevention, such as democracy, the rule of law, respect for human rights and human dignity, was reached in the debate that followed (Solana 2004). The consensus on conflict prevention also covered concrete measures, such as trade, development co-operation, humanitarian assistance, and, as a last resort, military action to prevent violent conflict (GAC Conclusions, 22 January 2001). At the GAC meeting, it was publicly announced that one aim of the Swedish Presidency was to develop an EU programme for conflict prevention. According to an interview with a Swedish Ambassador, it was considered important to develop some kind of political document establishing guiding principles for the EU in conflict prevention, and thereby also spearhead the mainstreaming of conflict prevention into the policies and procedures of the CFSP and the ESDP.

**Drafting the EU policy for conflict prevention**

There were a number of sources to tap into to develop such a programme and many of the previously presented proposals and recommendations were to be converted into political decisions at the European Council summit in Gothenburg. As part of that process the PSC developed some of the ideas from the Nice report in order to translate them into practice (interview: Swedish Ambassador). To follow up on the discussions in the PSC, a seminar devoted to generating new ideas and pre-negotiations for a first draft document on conflict prevention was held in Simrishamn on 4 April 2001 (interview: desk officer). Experts from the
capitals of the EU member states as well as representatives from Brussels and from the Commission and the Council Secretariat discussed a Swedish draft of an EU Programme for the Prevention of Violent Conflict. Although the draft was welcomed, according to Swedish participants at the seminar, new ideas were discussed and the text was negotiated resulting in a redraft of the programme where new elements were incorporated (interview: Swedish Ambassador). Clearly, it was important to relate to the existing EU discourse on conflict prevention in the drafting process, to draw on the support of like-minded member states as well as the influential institutional partners in the Commission and the Council Secretariat. Conflict prevention can be seen as providing a common thread, in terms of values, objectives and instruments, which held the CFSP and the ESDP together and gave it purpose. Accordingly, conflict prevention became the new operational code of Europe, increasingly referred to.

Problems

Difficulties emerged when deciding on within which EU structure the programme for conflict prevention was to be negotiated (interview: Swedish diplomat in Brussels). The process began with a presentation in the COREPER, which launched a discussion in PSC and in the EU Development Council (interview: Swedish Ambassador). The actual negotiations on the substance of the conflict prevention programme took place in RELEX, a cross-pillar working group (interview: Swedish diplomat). Although the negotiations were perceived as relatively frictionless, a senior Swedish diplomat in the Commission (interview) acknowledged that the negotiations on conflict prevention highlighted two related problems. The first problem was the EU–North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) relationship. Despite a high-level meeting between the EU and NATO, an agreement allowing EU access to NATO resources could not be achieved. The second, and related, dilemma was if and how conflict prevention should be linked to the ESDP. Conflict prevention was perceived as an element of the ESDP, yet it was broader and more comprehensive, including, for example, development assistance. The issue was sensitive because certain member states, such as France, perceived the growing co-operation on crisis management as threatened if conflict prevention were included. Sweden was reluctant to establish close links with NATO and to discuss the future of the ESDP, as domestically that could be interpreted as contributing to militarizing the EU, and inconsistent with traditional Swedish security policy doctrine. The dilemmas were, however, resolved in the PSC prior to the discussion in COREPER, according to a senior Swedish representative in the PSC (interview). In addition, less politicized disagreements were resolved in low-level bilateral meetings, where reference could be made to the GAC meeting which indicated political support for conflict prevention (interview: Swedish diplomat). Interviews also indicate that when problems emerged threatening to derail the negotiation process in the RELEX, the Swedish Minister for Foreign Affairs brought
them up informally, in connection with the GAC meetings to boost the negotiations in the RELEX.

INSTITUTIONALIZING CONFLICT PREVENTION

The process of institutionalization is characterized by how a norm becomes mainstreamed into an organization’s discourse, procedures and structures, and thereby may create changes in policies and programmes as well as in future practices (Björkdahl 2002a). Clearly, conflict prevention became a label used to describe a number of the EU’s external activities as it was the buzzword of the day. Obviously, the norm advocacy of Sweden cannot solely claim credit for this development. Exogenous factors, such as the historical experience of the failure to prevent the Yugoslav wars of secession, the Kosovo conflict, and perhaps most importantly the 9/11 attack on the US, contributed to change the normative convictions of the leaders of the EU and its member states.

In policies and programmes

The initial Swedish suggestion of formulating a common strategy for conflict prevention was not advocated, according to a senior official at the Council Secretariat (interview). Subsequently, the Swedish foreign policy elite settled for the EU Programme for the Prevention of Violent Conflict, which in a sense indicates a lesser degree of institutionalization, as EU programmes lack legal status and the Council adopts a number of programmes on various issues, these programmes generally having few institutional consequences. Conflict prevention was not simply a rhetorical commitment in an unimportant programme. According to Karlas (2005: 165), ‘the EU adopted more than 20 substantial commitments to conflict prevention and decided to carry out a reform of conflict prevention as one of the fields of its activities’ in the programme. The adoption of the EU programmes for conflict prevention was also a means of translating the nascent norm advocated by Sweden into a policy to guide EU practices. According to Solana (2004:11), ‘the Göteborg Programme for the Prevention of Violent Conflict ... sets out a number of practical steps towards making the European Union more active politically, more capable at both long and short term prevention.’ The important European Security Strategy, adopted in 2003, emphasizes conflict prevention, and this indicates that the norm pertaining to conflict prevention was becoming institutionalized and embedded in the efforts to create a European strategic culture.

In the organizational structure

The process had gained momentum and would, independently of Swedish involvement, persist as mechanisms for follow-up on the programme had been established. For example, global overview papers were to be discussed in the GAC, and a Swedish initiative to host a regional meeting with organizations involved in conflict prevention in Europe during 2002 was accepted (interview:
official at Council Secretariat). In addition, a quick budget process without cumbersome decision-making procedures was provided by the rapid reaction mechanism (RRM), intended for deploying fact-finding missions, and for initiating programmes where formal programmes would take over within six months. This mechanism was first operational in the Macedonian crisis of 2001. The Commission’s use of the RRM also allowed immediate funding for mine-clearance programmes, support to public service information broadcasting and detailed needs assessments in Afghanistan. Hence, these are signs that the norm pertaining to conflict prevention was now institutionalized and mainstreamed into the processes and procedures of the EU.

In practice

Once the conflict prevention norm was adopted and institutionalized in the development programmes of the Commission, in the ESDP and the CFSP, it began to guide EU practices. Launched in March 2003, Operation Concordia to Macedonia was the first preventive EU mission tasked with impeding the escalation of the inter-ethnic conflict that brought Macedonia to the brink of civil war in 2001. That first successful operation has been followed by further preventive efforts, such as the EU deployment of troops in operation Artemis to the Democratic Republic of the Congo, aimed at preventing a large-scale humanitarian and civil crisis, followed by a police mission – EUPOL Kinshasa – to prevent the degradation of security conditions. The EU has also undertaken a number of structural prevention activities in that region, such as support of the Inter-Congolese Dialogue, actions for the reintegration of child soldiers, confidence-building initiatives, rehabilitation programmes, humanitarian aid, and poverty alleviation. Under the European Initiatives for Human Rights and Democracy, the Commission has initiated a project to develop a peace-building strategy that addresses reconciliation needs and the root causes of conflict in the Kivu provinces.

CONCLUSION

The endorsement of the EU programme is an indication that the notion of conflict prevention has become widely accepted among the EU member states. The emphasis put on conflict prevention in the European Security Strategy further demonstrates that the norm has been institutionalized. Conflict prevention is not simply rhetoric. The EU has been able to undertake preventive actions in a number of places in its ‘near abroad’ as well as in Africa. This article demonstrates that norm advocacy can be a strategy for small states to gain influence. Sweden – a committed norm advocate – managed to propagate, consolidate and institutionalize conflict prevention in the EU’s policies and practices. The Swedish norm advocacy illustrates the need for bilateral consultations as well as coalition-building in order to consolidate the norm pertaining to conflict prevention before its formal presentation in the various settings and committees of the EU, a context where multilateralism flourishes. The Swedish Presidency was a
'golden opportunity' to promote conflict prevention, and the power of the Presidency should not be underestimated as it would have been unlikely that a programme for conflict prevention could have been adopted otherwise. Furthermore, the most powerful (largest) EU member states did not seem to play an important role in the process that led to the adoption of the EU programme for conflict prevention. The Swedish conflict prevention advocacy was clearly efficient: ‘one of the most significant results of the process of building the ESDP of the EU in the period 1999–2001 was a substantial reinforcement of conflict prevention as an objective of the CFSP’ (Karlas 2005: 164–75). Alternative explanations perhaps suggest that the adoption of the EU programme on conflict prevention and the institutionalization of the norm were due to the existence of a culture of reciprocity in EU negotiations, the advocacy of the Commission, the fact that the time was ripe for conflict prevention and a commitment without costs; to the fact that the institutionalization of conflict prevention did not demand a new institutional structure or the development of new instruments rather an authentic adoption of conflict prevention. This article, however, suggests that Swedish norm advocacy was instrumental in adopting conflict prevention in the EU, and that such advocacy can be an important way for a small state to create a niche for itself and punch above its weight. By selecting a particular issue – conflict prevention – rather than trying to act as a ‘great power writ small’, Sweden managed to influence the development of the CFSP, the crisis management capabilities and the civilian aspects of the ESDP, challenging the view that these areas are normally reserved for great power politics.

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