



European Economic and Social Committee

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The WhiteDoveWay - Proposal for an EU-led global peace-building strategy

OPINION

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(Own-initiative opinion)

Rapporteur: **Jane MORRICE**

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1. **Conclusions and recommendations**

- 1.1 The European Union was built on a mission of peace. It won the Nobel Peace Prize but cannot afford to rest on its laurels. Instead, the greatest peace project in modern time should take its rightful place as global leader and role model building peace in Europe and the world. With serious existential challenges facing Europe today, comprehensive renewal in the EU institutions and 100 years since the end of World War 1, there is no better moment in the history of European integration for the EU to lead the way by charting a new direction for peace-building worldwide.
- 1.2 The WhiteDoveWay is a metaphorical and physical route map pointing the way forward. It proposes a dynamic new EU-led Global Peace-building Strategy focusing on conflict prevention, civil society involvement, and effective communication using education and information, and a European Path of Peace, stretching from Northern Ireland to Nicosia, to physically engage citizens so they are included in the EU peace process and empowered to achieve its goal.
- 1.3 To achieve this, the EESC is calling for the new EU budget to devote greatly increased funds to conflict prevention in all EU external relations peace programmes and for greater coherence and cohesion between internal and external trade, aid, development and security policies.
- 1.4 The EESC strongly recommends greater involvement of civil society in the decision-making process, similar to EU peace-building initiatives around the world, such as the EU PEACE Programme in Northern Ireland, which benefit from active input from business, trade unions and the voluntary sector.
- 1.5 Reflecting the success of ERASMUS, the EESC calls for a serious communication effort to promote the role of education and information to deliver the EU peace-building story, to facilitate learning between internal and external NGOs, and to create a "WHITE DOVE" branding of EU peace projects to increase visibility at home and abroad.
- 1.6 To actively engage citizens, the EESC proposes a path of peace from Northern Ireland to Nicosia linking two divided islands on either side of Europe. As evidenced by the success of Cultural Routes, such as Compostela, travellers make such journeys as a pilgrimage or to discover more about different cultures through human interaction. On the WhiteDoveWay, they will also learn the legacy of peace which created the European Union.
- 1.7 "White dove" is the English translation of the name "Columbanus", the Irish pilgrim described as the patron saint of European unity. He is also the patron saint of motorcyclists. Following his original path from Ireland to France, Switzerland, Austria and Italy, the WhiteDoveWay will go through places of former war and conflict, such as the Western Front, South Tyrol and the Balkans. It will also be a "virtual" trail offering a high-tech history book of the EU journey from war to peace and encouraging a way of living and learning represented by the EU values of respect, tolerance and mutual understanding.

1.8 The EESC urges the EU to create a new Global Peace-building Strategy with three strands:

Strand 1 – conflict prevention, civil society, coherence

- doubling of peace building funding in all related EU policies with a focus on conflict prevention, reconciliation and intercultural dialogue promoting tolerance and respect at home and abroad;
- structured involvement of civil society at all levels of decision-making in EU external relations policies and programmes relating to peace-building;
- greater cohesion and coherence between the EU defence, aid, trade and conflict resolution strategies in all those countries where the EU operates worldwide;
- youth programmes, such as ERASMUS and Solidarity Corps, to include components relating to peace-building, European citizenship, mutual respect and tolerance;
- greater coordination at inter-agency and inter-state level and exchange of experience with grassroots local, national and international state and non-state peace-building organisations.

Strand 2 – Information, Communication, Education (ICE)

- the training of mediation, negotiation and dialogue between local, national and international peace-building NGOs;
- incentives to encourage the learning and teaching of European integration, peace-building and civic engagement at tertiary, secondary and primary level EU-wide;
- the creation of European centres for peace-building in Belfast and Nicosia and learning "hubs" connecting strategic sites along the WhiteDoveWay;
- official EU recognition of the White Dove symbol as the "trade mark" for all EU peace projects and increased obligation on projects to publicise EU support;
- greater effort at EC level to publicise EU peace projects using the White Dove "brand".

Strand 3 – European path of peace

- the creation of an EU White Dove Task Force to initiate and support:
- consultation with local councils, regional bodies, other established routes, such as the WesternFrontWay, museums and cultural sites connected by the WhiteDoveWay;
- closer collaboration with international organisations such as UN, UNESCO, OSCE and Council of Europe;

- networking with marathon, walking, cycling, motorcycling and other citizen initiatives;
- Supporting the Friends of Columbanus' application to the Council of Europe for official recognition as a European Cultural Route which would be one of the links within the WhiteDoveWay;
- preparing logistics to build a path linking Ireland to Cyprus through former conflict zones with "branches" to places which have made significant contributions to peace such as Scandinavian countries, Central and Eastern Europe;
- financial and technical support for a "virtual reality" WhiteDoveWay for use in schools and colleges throughout Europe as a high-tech history textbook of the future;
- support for an interactive online version of the WhiteDoveWay linking sites and hubs of peace-building, including storytelling, for those unable to make the journey on foot.

2. Background

- 2.1 The serious challenges facing the EU of today are threatening the very core of the European ideal. The refugee and immigration surge, the financial fallout, austerity, extremism, security threats, the rise of political polarisation and the impact of Brexit have shaken the EU's very foundations. The EU's lack of appropriate response cannot continue if the longest reign of peace in Europe is to be preserved. Given this highly volatile situation, the EU must respond with positive, ambitious, creative, constructive action and a vision reflecting the core mission of the European project – the promotion and maintaining of peace.
- 2.2 The success of the EU peace project means that new generations of Europeans are far removed from the reality of war. By reminding citizens of its origins, the EU recreates a binding ideal which will enhance the credibility of the EU and its mission. To accomplish this, the EU must step up its peace-building effort not only across the world but within Europe itself. By exchanging stories of grassroots conflict resolution, compromise and consensus across different cultures, communities and countries, the EU can reinforce and promote its core values of freedom, justice, equality, tolerance, solidarity and democracy at home and abroad.
- 2.3 Those outside the EU should see it as a global champion of peace, democracy and human rights. However, conflicts in Syria, Afghanistan, Yemen and beyond force us to look critically at the EU response to the humanitarian crises which follow in the wake of military action. To accomplish its stated aims and principles, the EU has a moral obligation, above and beyond geopolitical or economic interests, to protect the lives of innocent victims caught up in conflict, particularly children. EU funds can make a significant contribution to improving lives in these zones but the results are limited. By focusing on conflict prevention in areas where peace and security are threatened, and working closely with civil society, the EU can ensure greater grassroots engagement and increase the likelihood of lasting peace.

2.4 Based on the premise that every euro invested in peace saves EUR 7 in defence, the EESC urges the EU to prioritise peace-building in its proposals for the new EU budget (MFF 2021-27). The new EUR 10 billion "European Peace Facility" proposed by the EC should have a genuine peace-building strand actively involving local and international civil society stakeholders, two-way practitioner exchange, hubs for knowledge transfer and a strategy to communicate its message worldwide. The EESC also calls for full implementation of the 2016 Global Strategy for Foreign and Security Policy – preventing conflict, promoting human security, addressing the root causes of instability and working towards a safer world.

3. **The context – commemorate, celebrate, communicate**

3.1 In the year that marked the 100th anniversary of the end of World War 1, EU citizens not only commemorated the fallen but also considered the cost of conflict. By understanding the path that led to peace, policy-makers learn the lessons of history and how the processes of peace took root. Commemoration of key times of peace are reminiscent of the legacy of war and the spirit of solidarity prevailing in the aftermath. The coming years will see key events marked, such as: 30 years since the fall of the Berlin Wall and peace in Lebanon (2019); 25 years after the Dayton Peace Agreement (2020); 2018 also marked the 20th anniversary of the Good Friday/Belfast Agreement and the second anniversary of the Colombian peace accord. By highlighting its support for these agreements, the EU promotes the value of its efforts worldwide.

3.2 To reflect the European Year of Cultural Heritage, attempts to galvanise Europe's learning from conflict into a force for greater good should include a vital new cultural component. Cultural diplomacy has been highlighted by the EC High Representative, Federica Mogherini, as a key tool for EU international diplomatic relations. Examples from protecting heritage sites to promoting cultural identities and language help create stable polities in which different ethnic/national religious/linguistic groups feel secure and more prepared to peacefully engage. While the virtue of cultural diplomacy in external relations is recognised, with growing intra-European polarisation, the concept is just as applicable to tackle discord within the EU. The sixth-century Irish pilgrim, Columbanus¹, described as the patron saint of a united Europe, provides the legacy, the story and the cultural connection for a new EU global strategy to promote shared understanding and action through peace. As such, this initiative adopts the White Dove international peace symbol in his name.

4. **The WhiteDoveWay**

Combining modern methods of social interaction with ancient ways of spreading the word, the WhiteDoveWay charts a new direction for the EU by connecting its past, present and future.

¹ Sixth century Irish pilgrim described by EU founding father Robert Schuman as "the patron saint of all those who seek to build a united Europe".

4.1 **Leading the Way – injecting EU leadership into global peace-building**

By actively supporting the creation of stable, just, fair and prosperous societies around the world, the EU goes further than promoting peace. While EU efforts may not always be as successful as wished, the promotion of EU values encourages countries experiencing conflict to move beyond violence. The EU PEACE Programme in Northern Ireland, and EU support for the Colombian peace process are valuable examples. Further models of engagement are the 2015 EU Youth Strategy to ensure young people in the EU are not marginalised. Also, by creating greater coherence and cohesion between its cultural, defence, aid, trade and conflict resolution strategies and with international agencies, the EU could take the lead in global peace-building.

4.2 **Showing the Way – through Information, Communication and Education (ICE)**

Leading by example and promoting its core values, the EU can show the way by engaging more creatively in ICE strategies. Exchange of experience between grassroots peace-builders in Europe and beyond is vital. The establishment of European Peace Centres providing training in mediation, negotiation, dialogue and consensus-building, as proposed in previous opinions², and working in partnership with civil society peace-builders is key. By showcasing its work through well-resourced, well-targeted education and information programmes, the EU increases understanding of its role and justifies its efforts to its citizens, showing them the value of multicultural engagement and helping restore their faith in the origin of the European project.

4.3 **Walking the Way – a Cultural Route accessible to all**

4.3.1 This permanent path of peace, from Northern Ireland to Nicosia, will engage people from all walks of life in a physical and mental effort to forge new friendships and meet others willing to share their experience of conflict. Stretching 5 000 km across Europe, this Cultural Route, following in the footsteps of Columbanus, will go beyond the pilgrim's original route from Ireland to Italy to pass places profoundly touched by war and conflict, such as the Western Front, South Tyrol and the Balkans, linking people and places along the way.. Travellers will hear stories about the lasting legacy of conflict but also, most importantly, the mechanisms that create peace. The WhiteDoveWay will also set up learning hubs and branches to northern, eastern, central and southern Europe, so walkers can select routes to take in as many site visits as they see fit. The WhiteDoveWay would encourage these "branches" to extend both within and outside the EU, recognising not just physical pathways but cultural links, such as to Scotland and in particular Iona, and the peace-building links to places like Ukraine and the Middle East. It could also find ways to connect to other already well-established routes, such as the Camino de Santiago.

4.3.2 It will include an online portal creating a virtual and interactive experience with audio-visual components from each site and the same oral history accounts heard on the journey for those who do not have the mobility to walk the WhiteDoveWay. The virtual trail would be used as an educational tool to teach peace-building in schools and further develop moments of creativity and understanding based on relevant local history and potential links into the route to encourage

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EESC opinion on the Northern Ireland peace process, 23/10/2008, [OJ C 100, 30.4.2009, p. 100](#)

EESC opinion on The role of the EU in peace building in external relations: best practice and perspectives, 19/01/2012, [OJ C 68, 6.3.2012, p. 21](#)

widespread ownership across the EU and beyond. Modelled on technology used for cadet training in civilian protection and conflict prevention, it creates a virtual reality experience of conflict and peace-building. As a technological textbook, this meets the educational requirements of the digital age and supplements age-old teaching techniques which focus more on war-mongers than peace-builders.

5. **New EU budget (MFF) to maximise peace-building and civil society inclusion**

5.1 While there are no simple answers to the search for peace-building solutions, there are ways to change strategies and priorities to mitigate the worst effects of conflict. The renewal of the EU budget provides a valuable opportunity to do so by creating "coherence, coordination and complementarity" between EU peace-building policies and within the EC where the complexity of structures makes practical coordination, between the EEAS and others, difficult. Similarly, there must be coherence between EU trade, aid, security and development policies and recognition of the need to "join the dots" of policy and practice between EU institutions, Member States and other major donors.

5.2 **Focus on conflict prevention**

The new EU budget proposals for 2021-2027 relating to external action must give peace building greater priority. These proposals include a 40% increase for security to EUR 4.8 billion, a new EUR 13 bn Defence Fund, EUR 6.5 bn for "military mobility", through the Connecting Europe Facility, and funding for external action increasing by 26% to EUR 120 bn. Crucially, the EC proposal for an "off-budget" EUR 10.5 bn "European Peace Facility" for joint engagement in non-EU countries is ideal for ensuring that EU action will be genuinely geared towards conflict prevention. In 2017, the EU adopted a regulation creating new support under the Instrument contributing to Stability and Peace (IcSP) to foster capacity building of military actors – Capacity Building in support of Security and Development (CBSD). The European Peacebuilding Liaison Office (EPLO) repeatedly raises concerns about this and the need to have greater civil society input.

5.3 **Civil society inclusion – focus on women and youth**

It is increasingly accepted that civil society is crucial to ensuring the effectiveness and long-term sustainability of any peace-building strategy. Cooperation with grassroots actors serves not only to increase understanding of conflict from the bottom up, but also local "ownership" of the process by helping promote more "conflict-sensitive" peace-building and positive reinforcement. UN Resolution 2419 highlights the role of young people in negotiating and implementing peace agreements as does UN Resolution 1325 on the role of women. Trade union activity and business, large or small, also has a vital role to play in the mobilisation of civil society. Vulnerable groups, particularly victims, must receive expert attention and the "good neighbourly" approach to relations in the community and the workplace is also important. "Structured dialogue" between the EU and civil society also creates ground-breaking and lasting relationships as evidenced by the EESC in relations with EU neighbours in Africa, Asia and beyond.

5.4 **EU awareness-raising**

Given that citizen awareness of EU peace-building is limited, the new budget must place greater emphasis on ICE strategies, particularly the use of both traditional and social media. While concern about the dangers of social media and the potential threat to democracies is real, the use of media to bring about positive change is underused. Peace journalism, cultural diplomacy and intercultural dialogue should receive increased resources in the new EU budget. Education also plays an important role, teaching children and young people not only to "tolerate" but also to respect difference. This has been exemplified by the Special EU Programmes Body and Integrated Education Movement in Northern Ireland.

5.5 **Best practice sharing**

The EU has vast experience in areas such as South-East Asia, the Middle East, Central America, the Balkans and Sub-Saharan Africa. Some of this has been highly successful, some less so. Learning lessons from history, the EU must respect and promote the ethical approach to intervention as exemplified in the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative³ which, by encouraging full participatory processes involving civil society, helps combat exploitation and corruption and promote good governance. These lessons, bad or good, must advise policy. While there is no "one size fits all", there are core principles common to conflict zones which cannot be ignored. This sharing of experience should be better established, particularly between internal and external EU action which has lacked a systematic approach to shared learning so far. This is a missed opportunity and a major policy flaw which must be addressed.

5.6 **The way forward**

The centenary year of remembrance of war and celebration of peace and cultural heritage marks a timely moment for the EU to re-establish its worth in the world, not just as an economic powerhouse but as a global leader in building, securing and promoting peace. Focusing on peace in the face of the terrorist threat at home and abroad, the EU can look to its own experience as an example of what can be achieved but must be continually nurtured to encourage intercultural dialogue, tolerance, solidarity and mutual respect.

By providing a route map for an EU-led Global Peace-building Strategy alongside a physical and virtual peace trail for travellers, the WhiteDoveWay serves as a beacon showing a way to live, learn and connect in an increasingly globalised world. People, young and old, from different socioeconomic, generational, faith, cultural and community backgrounds, coming together from far corners of the EU and beyond will learn about different cultures and traditions and build new connections based on greater understanding of EU values.

Using the White Dove symbol to signpost the direction of travel, the WhiteDoveWay would not only be a legacy to EU peace-building throughout the world but also a new vision for the EU and a message of hope in increasingly challenging times.

³ As mentioned in the EESC opinion on Securing essential imports for the EU – through current EU trade and related policies, 16/10/2013, [OJ C 67, 6.3.2014, p. 47](#)

In the politics of peace-building, where there's a will, there's a WhiteDoveWay.

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