Technocratic and Political Logics in EU Intelligence:  
The Case of Early Warning for Conflict Prevention

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ABSTRACT

The European Union has claimed conflict prevention as a hallmark of its foreign policy since the Gothenburg programme of 2001. However, it is now widely accepted that the EU’s has often been acting too late for reasons this paper will explore. Effective early warning is dependent not only on mastering epistemic challenges related to knowledge production and learning, but also bureaucratic and political tasks as warnings need to be communicated, prioritised and acted upon. The EU’s strong focus on improving information gathering and analysis contrasts with its reluctance to tackle the cultural, bureaucratic and political obstacles to the effective use of intelligence in EU foreign policy. By studying how different parts of the EU’s emerging intelligence and foreign policy community interconnect in the warning-response process, the paper aims to illuminate not only the causes of the performance problems, but also sheds light on the boundaries between technocracy and politics in foreign policy-making.

1 The author acknowledges past support from a Starting Investigator Grant of the European Research Council for the Foresight project (No 202022). The paper draws on sections of the Egmont working paper by Brante, Meyer, de Franco, and Otto, 2011.
1. Introduction

The European Union (EU) has firmly embraced the case for conflict prevention in a number of policy documents, making it a hallmark of its approach to international security and conflict in contrast to conventional foreign policy. In 2001 the EU Commission presented its ‘Communication on Conflict Prevention’ and the European Council at Gothenburg agreed on the ‘EU Programme for the Prevention of Violent Conflict’, both highlighting the centrality of conflict prevention as a foreign policy objective.\(^2\) Subsequently, one could find commitments to prevention in the Treaty of Lisbon, which mandated that ‘[t]he Union shall ... preserve peace, prevent conflicts and strengthen international security ...’ and listed ‘peace-keeping, conflict prevention and strengthening international security’ as the objectives of the EU’s Common Security and Defence Policy.\(^3\) The European Security Strategy of 2003 demanded ‘… we should be ready to act before a crisis occurs. Conflict prevention and threat prevention cannot start too early’, and the implementation report five years later stated that ‘[p]reventing threats from becoming sources of conflict early on must be at the heart of our approach’.\(^4\) The Foreign Affairs Council concluded in June 2011 that ‘preventing conflicts and relapses into conflict … is therefore a primary objective of the EU’s external action.’\(^5\)

However, the current literature seems to agree that the EU has fallen significantly short in translating its aspirations into institutional practice and success on the ground. The failure to mobilise preventive action in the cases of Darfur in 2003 and Georgia in 2008 were just some of the more high-profile instances where the EU has been behind the curve of events and tended to concentrate on crisis management, rather than effective prevention. Similarly, the upheavals in

\(^3\) Treaty of Lisbon, Article 10a, 2c & new article 28a
the Middle East with fighting in Libya and Syria have taken the EU by surprise and limited its options for a political settlement with less bloodshed. A major review commissioned by the EU of its conflict prevention and peace-building capacities pre-Lisbon highlighted an overconcentration of resources on a very small set of countries already experiencing conflict (rather than upstream) and an insufficiently robust and high-level engagement with the countries falling short of requirements for peace and human rights protection. It appears that the EU, certainly before Lisbon, suffers from the ‘missing middle’ syndrome between long-term structural prevention through instruments such as conditionality for EU accession and development policy, and short-term responses to emerging crises and risks of violence through military and civilian missions.

The core interest of this paper is to understand how the performance of the EU’s conflict prevention policy has been advanced or indeed limited by the early warning capacities of the evolving EU intelligence apparatus. The focus of this paper thus closely relates to growing interest in the ‘value-added’ or ‘utility’ of what is termed EU intelligence and the contribution it can make to better EU foreign policy. It is not per se interested in whether the emergence of EU intelligence units and capacities shifts power away from national authorities or makes EU foreign-policy-making less intergovernmental and more supra- or transnational. However, both strands inquiry intersect in whether EU intelligence can bring about a convergence of analytical as well as political judgments within national capitals and speed-up decision-making.

Drawing on the US-dominated literature in intelligence studies the paper highlights the importance of warning intelligence for shifting attitudes of decision-makers to a problem and triggering a short-term and hopefully preventive response. In contrast to other studies focusing on EU intelligence, which tend to concentrate on obstacles to information collection and efficient

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7 The only comparable study in this area is Montanaro, Lucia and Schünemann, Julia (2011). Walk the Talk. The EU needs an effective Early Warning system to match its ambitions to prevent conflict and promote peace. Fride & International Alert /Initiative for Peacebuilding-Early Warning, p. 12. Available at http://www.ifp-ew.eu/. Accessed 13 April 2011
processing, we build on the strategic surprise literature to argue that effective early warning is dependent not only on mastering epistemic challenges related to information gathering, but also on other tasks such as analysis, communication, prioritization and policy-planning. These are affected by other obstacles than the restrictions on the EU to gather information through the eponymous under-cover agents or the fluctuating willingness of member states to share intelligence with EU structures. We outline in some detail what these obstacles are and which tasks the EU therefore has to master. Some of these tasks are generic in nature, some are idiosyncratic to the EU as a multi-national body.

Drawing on interviews with EU and national officials, we then assess how the EU has been mastering these different tasks and what factors help or hinder this performance. We argue that the EU has become increasingly better at information gathering, despite its partial reliance on national intelligence services voluntarily sharing information. What is, however, more problematic from the perspective of performance are the cultural, bureaucratic and political obstacles to the effective communication and use of intelligence in EU foreign policy. These are relatively immune to the reallocation of resources, institutional reform or even Treaty change to provide a new legal basis for EU intelligence. The problem is thus not too much politics in early warning for conflict prevention, but too little understanding of how politics needs to be factored into the design and practice of intelligence.

2. Assessing warning intelligence in a multi-national setting

It is notoriously difficult to present an accurate and fair assessment of the success of preventive foreign policy, as it involves counter-factual reasoning about the trajectory of a given conflict had action not been taken (in cases of potential “success”) or whether action has been taken but was

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10 Around 60 interviews were conducted over a prolonged period reach from 2010-2013, involving official from EU INTCEN, SITCEN, former DG-RELEX, EEAS, PSC as well as officials in selected European capitals.
simply not effective or was considered but not deemed wise because of the trade-offs, costs and risks were deemed too great. Similarly, to assess warning intelligence in a particular case requires us to assess not simply whether a conflict or crisis was accurately predicted or not, but also whether this was possible with the available information and analytical instruments at the time, whether decision-makers had actually received clear warnings, whether they should have believed the warnings given the track-record of the source, and whether indeed they made the right judgment about prioritising it. In all of these assessments one has to avoid 20/20 hindsight, but place oneself as far as possible in the shoes of the actors at any given moment in time. Such studies have been undertaken so far, with very few exceptions, only for cases involving the United States, but they did generate a number of clear insights about the generic tasks involved in effective early warning, although some of these may need to be modified for the case of the EU.  

One key message from the literature is that achieving timeliness and accuracy in warnings is more difficult than is currently assumed. Hindsight bias in assessments of past humanitarian catastrophes has led to the assumption that there is no problem of warning, only a problem of political will. On the contrary, achieving high accuracy in early warning is difficult and requires not only access to reliable and high value information about developments on the ground, but also combining different types of methods of analysis and overcoming errors rooted in cognitive heuristics such as mirror-imaging and motivational biases such as denial and wishful-thinking. Furthermore, actual or perceive political biases pervades the relationship between warning sources and recipients. Richard Betts cites an example from the US Intelligence Community: 'Traditionally, liberal policymakers have suspected analysts in the intelligence

agencies in the military services and the Defense Intelligence Agency of hawkish predispositions. Conservative policymakers have suspected analysts in the CIA and the State Department’s Bureau of Intelligence and Research (INR) of dovish inclinations.\textsuperscript{12} Warning sources are often aware of the suspicions of recipients and tone down their warning messages accordingly. Sources that are seen as ‘alarmist’ or as afflicted by party-political or national biases will struggle to be heard, regardless of their objective expertise or the evidence contained in the warning. Sources also anticipate the reaction from recipients and the impact on their professional careers should the forecast events not happen or if recipient act on the warning. Depending on the career incentives, they may decide not to warn at all, hedge their warnings to preserve ambiguity in both directions, or delay warnings until the indications are very strong even if this severely constraints the space for preventive action. In sum, effective warning response involves interlinked tasks of forecasting, communication and prioritisation, each of which can be affected by a number of problems. See Figure 1:

\textsuperscript{12} Betts (2007), p. 77.
All tasks and the actors involved in the loop are interconnected. The tasks are linked because of the bottom-up nature of the process so that failure at one stage is likely to lead to failure at subsequent stages. For instance, inaccurate forecasts which have been successfully communicated to decision-makers will inevitably affect the performance of the preventive policy being undertaken. Conversely, decision-makers can negatively influence the ability of experts to

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produce relevant forecasts if they do not inform them sufficiently about what information they need and when. Therefore, it would be profoundly misleading to focus only on the decision-making stage in order to ascertain the performance of preventive policy. At the same time, also the actors involved in the warning-response process are linked together through evolving relationships. Both warning producers and consumers develop a shared history as they interact and communicate, which means that actors’ experiences with one another establish reputations and patterns of interaction. This, in turn, can create both incentives and disincentives for effective communication and trust. Warning producers within bureaucracies are often highly receptive to what they perceive to be political agendas as well as preferences and they consider the implications of their warning products for policy as well as for their careers. Conversely, decision-makers in the case of warning about conflict do not simply trust producers’ judgements, but often remake these judgements according with the input of their own sources and worldviews. Moreover, they often consider the political utility of experts’ knowledge as limited to avoid blame for failure and claim credit for success.

Task 1: Forecasting violent conflict

Early warning relies on good forecasting of the probability and severity of a latent conflict escalating into violence. On the one hand, forecasting conflict can be carried out with highly institutionalised and indicator-based warnings systems providing quantitative outputs or, on the other hand with more qualitative, semi-intuitive expert prediction of conflict dynamics. In governmental and intergovernmental organisations, the latter tend to be the prevailing approaches. Experts can be intelligence analysts, diplomats in embassies, special representatives and envoys, military personnel on missions, journalists and NGO field officers. Regardless of which method is being used and which type of expert is involved, forecasting for preventative purposes presents some generic challenges relating to accuracy and relevance.
Accuracy is the extent to which a forecast is correct in its description of potential futures, their causes, consequences, and timing. Accuracy can only be measured ex-post, even though ex-ante we can gauge experts’ confidence in the quantity and quality of the available evidence coupled with the past reliability of applicable theories or models to make sense of that evidence. Genuinely novel risks are more difficult to accurately forecast as theories could not be previously tested and may not be applicable. The key analytical challenge for analysts is to know when – as in most cases – past developments can be extrapolated into the future and when – in the exceptional case – aberrant scenarios must replace them.¹⁴

**Main Problems:**

- certain countries or regions are ‘off the radar’ of Western actors as personnel resources are overly concentrated on just a few other areas, leading to a lack of sufficiently early and detailed information about events that may trigger violence (ethnic riots etc);
- certain types of conflicts are more difficult to forecast than others;
- relevant information for forecasting is not shared among analysts working in different parts of the bureaucracy or intelligence organisation;
- analysts may lack the necessary country expertise and training to make sense of data (insufficient hand-over in embassies, too much personnel rotation etc) and/or may be affected by various forms of cognitive biases;
- problems also arise when countries are too much ‘on the radar’, particularly in cases of ‘frozen conflicts’ when analysts may be excessively used to high levels of tensions and recurrent skirmishes.

Relevance connotes the usefulness of the knowledge included in the warning with regard to decision-making aimed at prevention and the extent to which it relates to issues and areas considered crucial by consumers. Forecasts can lack relevance to decision-makers either because they leave out risks important to decision-makers altogether or because they are too vague in their assessment about what is going to happen when, how and with what probability. Relevance

typically rises with the specificity of the forecasts and does not necessarily imply that forecasts have to be coupled with recommendations. Simply saying country “X” may become unstable without saying more about questions of likelihood, timing and the different types of specific consequences arising from it is not very helpful to policy-planners and decision-makers contemplating whether, when and how to act. The problem is that the reality of forecasting is not always compatible with the needs of decision-makers. Good forecasting of socio-political events (or non-events) is by its very nature vague and uncertain, while decision-makers like to have not only reliable, but also very precise and specific assessments of when things are likely to happen, how and with what kind of consequences: ‘In many cases, there is a conflict between what intelligence at its best can produce and what decision makers seek and need’. ¹⁵

Main Problems:

- insufficient sharing of relevance criteria between warning producers and consumers, partly out of concern to preserve analysts’ objectivity;
- inadequate knowledge of the instruments at the consumers disposal;
- overdue pressure on experts to minimise margin of error, thus increasing incentives for vague forecasts or forecasts that are not actionable.

Task 2: Warning about violent conflict

The next stage involves the communication of a given risk to those with the capacity to act upon it. It is usually the most neglected aspect in post-mortem studies of under-reaction as investigators look for warning signs, but do not investigate whether these signs were translated into intentional communicative acts of warnings. Moreover, whether these warnings actually reached the target recipient and were understood as such is frequently not scrutinised. ¹⁶ Just as

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spotting discontinuities requires analytical boldness, communicating them necessitates a certain degree of courage. A former US National Intelligence Officer for Warning advised his staff, ‘you have to be used to being the dumbest guy in the room’.\textsuperscript{17} What he had in mind was that his subordinates were not alone in thinking about the future – their customers also did it, and did it with great confidence. As outbreaks of war generally reflect discontinuities to established patterns, to warn is hence often the process of challenging the customers’ prevailing assumptions and as a consequence risk being seen as ‘out of the loop’. The challenge is to persuade the latter that the warning should be believed as credible and that it deserves further attention.

**Message resonance** is the extent to which a warning is tailored and communicated in a way that persuades the decision-maker to accept the judgement and interpretation of the evidence by the warning communicator. Messages about impending conflict resonate more, for instance, when they highlight those consequences that the recipient cares most about, rather than those that only the warning producer considers most important. They are also more likely to have an impact when they include evidence that the recipient considers most credible and translate analysis into a language that is understandable. Hence, warning producers need not only communicative skills but also to know how decision-makers ‘tick’, i.e. how they process information and learn, what their worldviews and assumptions about certain countries and leaders are, and on what issues they require a higher bar of proof.

**Main Problems:**

- warnings may not be intelligible as warning communicators are often specialised in conflict analysis but not communication, or lack sufficient knowledge about recipients to adequately tailor the message;
- bureaucratic bottlenecks may prevent speedy and direct communication;
- there may be organisational disincentives hindering the communication of challenges to prevailing views and policies;

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there may be high dissonance between the key judgements and the customers’ ‘mindsets’ and political inclinations.

Source credibility is crucial as decision-makers may lack either the time or ability to judge the reliability of the evidence, but also because they tend to be wary of being manipulated for political reasons. The conventional way for sources to acquire credibility is through relevant academic qualifications and/or experience of the country/region in question as well as through building up a successful track-record in analysis and warning. However, source credibility will also be a function of decision-makers’ assessment of the source as politically neutral, friendly or opposed to the recipients’ political beliefs. Being seen as neutral is not the only road to credibility, inconvenient messages can also be persuasive when recipients know the source’s political views well and can thus compensate for biases in message content. Hence, close political advisors in national administrations tend to have higher influence than more ‘neutral’ intelligence analysis and military professionals and may be more trusted when warning about humanitarian consequences than NGOs relaying the same message.

Main Problems:

- some organisations may give their analysts strong incentives to ‘over-warn’ which will limit receptivity (cry wolf syndrome);
- whereas ‘under-warning’ may hinder building up a track-record;
- source credibility is generally reliant on pure chance, as impact too often depends on trusted individuals with relevant knowledge and compatible political views between warning producer and consumers, rather than on robust processes, institutional knowledge, and sound criteria for judging source credibility.

Task 3: Prioritising the warning

Given limited organisational, political, and material resources, political institutions need to decide which warnings deserve a follow-up and which ones do not. Responding to every
warning in any corner of the world is a recipe for either paralysis or failure, even for a resourceful actor such as the EU. To make this judgement requires an organisation to assess:

**Importance:** how grave is the harm that is anticipated in absolute terms from the perspective of stated interests and legal obligations as well as in relative terms given that other issues may compete for attention and the same resources? As violent conflict may have a range of consequences further questions arise, for instance: what is the expected scale of violence? How many and whose lives are threatened? Could refugee flows follow? Are regional spill-over effects likely? Could international or home-grown terrorism be nurtured? Could there be any implications for strategic self-interests? Could there be violations of international law and norms?

**Main Problems:**

- policy-planners may simply not know which criteria are being applied by senior decision-makers;
- different parts of a government (foreign affairs, development, defence, trade/business) care about different types of consequences and resolving these differences takes time and may lead to a narrowing down of the list of countries concerned to the lowest common denominator;
- warnings may focus on direct humanitarian consequences, but ignore secondary effects, which do impinge on self-centred interests.

**Urgency:** when exactly is the escalation of a conflict and associated consequences likely to occur? What and when is the window of opportunity? Which kind of instruments are relevant and what is the lead time required for these? And how does the degree of urgency compare to competing demands on attention and resources, especially already escalating or ongoing crises?

**Main Problems:**

- early warnings are notoriously vague about the timing of harm (‘X is going to become a problem’);
- warnings may not provide an adequate basis for thinking about different response options;
• resources for prevention are not ring-fenced against demands from imminent or current crises (‘the crocodile near the canoe, not the waterfall down the river’);
• urgency is sometimes defined in terms of the media calling ‘to do something’, which tends to be too late.

Task 4: Considering Action

This task overlaps with the previous one in the sense that both negative and positive opinions about whether ‘something can be done’ about a given conflict influence the receptivity of organisations. The key problem to acknowledge is that preventing conflicts involves costs and risks and that doing so is a political not a technical decision, as even the distribution of aid can be construed as siding with a party in a conflict. Preventive action in one case may send a message to other groups that Western intervention is predictable and can be provoked. These and other considerations may determine that a decision is taken that ‘little can be done’ in given circumstances. The two key judgements revolve around:

Feasibility: is it possible to achieve the objectives of prevention with the resources available in the short and the medium-term? How likely is it that the necessary political will can be mobilised and sustained in the short and medium-term? What are the costs and benefits of different kinds of action that could be contemplated to address the threat?

Typical Problems:
• warnings are often communicated too late for the mobilisation of the available instruments;
• there is systematic asynchrony between operational and political feasibility, i.e. the optimal point of use for a given instrument is too early for it to be mobilised and sustained politically;
• decision-makers may be excessively pessimistic about political feasibility and over-optimistic about operational feasibility.
**Proportionality**: what are the opportunity costs of action? Is the use of resources proportional in relation to the problem at hand and to alternative uses for a different foreign affairs issue? Can the preventive action required have unintended implications of a magnitude that is greater than the anticipated threat? How can the potential consequences of preventive action be balanced against those of inaction/alternative actions?

*Typical Problems:*

- policy/contingency planning is too often under-resourced, undervalued and under-practiced in civilian areas in contrast to military planning to respond to crises;
- policy-planning tends to take place in policy-silos (military, political economic, environmental, migration, terrorism), which means that risks/costs occurring outside the silo are insufficiently noticed;
- consideration of risks and alternatives may not take place for fear of leaking/undermining political support for action.

### 3. Assessing EU Warning Intelligence

#### 3.1 Task 1: Anticipating Future Crises

With regard to *Task 1* – anticipating future threats – EU analysts face the same epistemological challenges as their national equivalents. The fundamental uncertainties and complexities of thinking about future political, social, and human behaviour do not depend on what organisation you work for. The creation of the EEAS and related foreign affairs structures after the Lisbon Treaty has increased the EU’s informational infrastructure and its potential to perform better than single EU member states. It has access to a range of sources to gather sufficiently specific information about atrocity risks and dynamics. In particular, its network of 141 EU delegations (including those at international organisations) is a formidable source of information from the ground. Moreover, the EU has various kinds of field missions in different countries (humanitarian assistance, civilian or military missions), Special Representatives for
particular regions (and recently one for human rights) as well as some technical capabilities for gathering and analysing intelligence, such as the EU satellite centre and systems for monitoring and analysing reports from various kinds of open sources, including international and local news media.

The EEAS has also gained the technical expertise of some countries and regions through the recruitment process of diplomats from member states. These make up a third of all EEAS personnel, although it is not clear yet whether the influx of national diplomats has noticeably strengthened the availability of country expertise. Such expertise would be particularly important for personnel in EU delegations, but many delegations are understaffed and despite recent efforts to remedy the problem, not yet adequately trained in the analysis of the factors and dynamics leading to violent conflict and mass atrocities. A significant amount of staff time is taken up by the management of development/aid programmes so that less is available for the kind of research and analysis needed for high quality warning. In order to make warnings actionable, expertise is needed about the use of different types of preventive instruments but this expertise is not available in all delegations, in particular regarding the use of military assets to stop escalating violence against civilians, as delegations do not include military personnel. The EU currently invests in training activities for officials in Brussels and the delegations in conflict analysis, but country expertise takes many years to acquire and cultivate, and even though it may exist in some member states, it is not yet systematically used for the purpose of EU foreign policy. The overarching problem, which is not unique to the EU, is that career incentives in foreign services centre on competence in managing processes or being an expert on a policy or issue, rather than a country or region. We also note that there is currently no career track for either intelligence analysis per se, nor for warning in contrast to the US. The EU’s relevant structures thus depend on personnel with such training from member states intelligence services.
Opportunities and limitations also characterise the EU’s access to member states’ or other actors’ intelligence. In fact, in addition to its own sources, the EU (and EEAS) has access to the diplomatic reporting of member states through various channels such as the COREU system, exchange of information within meetings of Council working groups and the PSC ambassadors. The EU Intelligence Analysis Centre (INTCEN) draws on various openly available sources such as those provided by NGOs, think-tanks, universities or the news media, whereas the Intelligence Directorate of the EU Military Staff (EUMS INT) can also draw on intelligence provided on a voluntary basis by national defence intelligence organisations. This means the EU does not have direct access to raw or primary intelligence although the delegated national officials within EU INTCEN may have access to this, but no EU INTCEN products contains information about the sources or methods of how the intelligence was gathered. At the same time, for most purposes, finished assessments from member states can provide access to a substantial part of member states’ collective insights. The challenge to be addressed here is not only that some member states are more willing to share intelligence than others, but also that even those who do share in principle sometimes restrict access when particular countries are concerned or particular situations arise. As a result, the EU encounters problems in assessing the reliability of information as well as with the quantity of the information supply, particularly in situations of crisis. At the same time and without being able to independently verify this claim, the previous and the current directors INTCEN, William Shapcott and Ilka Salmi, emphasised in interviews that member states have become increasingly willing to share intelligence. Salmi stated very recently that ‘[t]here has been a slight increase over the years, if I compare with 2008-2009 for example, both quantity and quality-wise.’

The dependence of EU institutions on information provided by member states is particularly pronounced in the area of human and military intelligence, such as that produced by

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18 For more information about INTCEN, see Davis Cross 2013, Duke 2014, and Fägersten 2014.
19 Interview with EU official Brussels, summer 2013.
undercover agents on the ground. This is important when trying to overcome secrecy and deception and to gauge the intentions of third country governments, paramilitary groups or the leadership of particular political or religious movements. The EU staff does not have a legal basis for such activity and is unlikely to receive these competences from member states. There are also good reasons for the EU to stay out of this field of activity for the foreseeable future, given the suspicions they may provoke among third countries and the elevated risks of leaking within a multi-national organisation. However, EU delegation personnel are not precluded from conducting non-clandestine research or fact-finding missions and EU military missions do have reconnaissance capacities attached to them, although civilian missions are often constrained in what information they can gather. Overall, whilst the access to reliable information for risk assessment and forecasting is one of the EU’s relative strengths, the EU’s access to sources is most constrained when it comes to current intelligence about fast-moving situations on the ground, like those with the potential to escalate into mass atrocities.

With INTCEN and the Crisis Response Unit (within the EEAS) focused on the shorter-term (typically 3 – 6 months ahead for INTCENT, breaking news and watch-keeping for the SITROOM) and fact-based assessment, there is also a gap in theory-grounded forecasting of conflict and mass atrocity risks over the medium to long term. However, steps are currently being taken to remedy this situation at least partly. The EEAS’ Division for Conflict Prevention, Peacebuilding and Mediation Instruments is currently developing two new tools with the aim of strengthening the EU’s ability to anticipate and respond to violent conflict: an Early Warning Risk Matrix (EWRM) and a Country Conflict Assessment (CCA) Format. The former is meant as a light-touch tool to visualise the risk of violent conflict through presenting assessments at three levels: 1) long-term vulnerabilities (‘root causes’), 2) medium-term issues (‘proximate causes’), and 3) potential real-time triggers. It is not intended to replace expert analysis, but aims to better monitor medium and longer-term trends and developments in conflict risk areas through an effective use of open-source intelligence (OSINT), combined with reporting from EU
delegations. It is proposed that this would also cover some of the indicators related to mass atrocities and would be updated bi-annually. The second tool being developed, the CCA, leaves some room to forecasting and warning about mass atrocities. The CCA is the product of a review and update of an existing tool developed more than ten years ago by DG RELEX and it is recommended that EU delegation staff fill it in using the sources mentioned above. It identifies ten problem areas, which include the risk of mass atrocities. For each of them, the delegation has to prepare a series of statements to then present a ‘strong statement’ for each country, which feeds into the EWRM and can start a discussion process.

The development of EWRM and an updated CCA should be welcomed as they are tools with the potential to trigger in-depth analysis on situations at risk. They thus provide a stronger basis for better informed decision-making and holding decision-makers to account for acting or not acting on medium-term warnings. However, the historical problem with the EU’s dedicated longer-term warning products has been that they were not widely known and were not considered very helpful by end-users. It is conceivable that these new and revised analytical products will gain higher recognition, credibility and, ultimately, impact but there are also some significant obstacles on the way:

First, the risk of adopting an approach based on indicators and checklists is that staff who are providing the assessments underpinning the indicators may not have the necessary in-depth country expertise to do so. This can be a problem in some cases. Even when country expertise is present in delegations, field missions or in Brussels, analytical tools can be used too rigidly so that they prevent these experts from questioning key assumptions underlying the models and spot genuinely surprising developments that are typically not picked up by existing indicators.

Second, even if risk assessments are as accurate as possible, they may fail if they are not being perceived as relevant by decision-makers. Research has shown that policy communities and decision-makers tend to value highly granular, qualitative and in-depth analysis and are sceptical about the utility of watch-lists. They also value intelligence which shows awareness of feasible
options that are available to them. The danger is that too many resources go into the analysis of instability and mass atrocity risks and too little into efforts to improve policy planning and dialogue with the relevant decision-makers.

### 3.2 Task 2: Warning communication and reception

One of the principal concerns is how early warning signals can be wired into EU decision-making mechanisms to trigger timely and, if necessary, urgent actions and address the challenges from a long-term perspective. Despite the developments over the last few years, the present practice and preventive culture clearly need improvement. The current format and content of global overviews which are prepared and submitted each semester to the Intelligence Board and, if the board judges it to be necessary, the High Representative (HR), do not always trigger adequate follow up to address the identified risks.

INTCEN has developed a direct communication channel with the High Representative and the senior management through a ‘morning highlight’ product, delivered through a delegated briefer, but the emerging organisational culture of the EEAS is not very conducive to fast-tracking warnings from country experts and geographical desks up to more senior decision-makers. The emphasis on seniority and line-management structures in the communication of intelligence hinders the timely communication and processing of warning, but also harms its credibility through the dilution of knowledge. This is a common problem for national foreign affairs ministries as well, but they can learn from organisations dealing with considerable risks such as fire services, aircraft carriers and power plants. These provide special procedures for the urgent communication and use of expertise wherever it is located in the organisation.

In some cases, the ideal recipient of warnings should not be the top of the EEAS hierarchy, but local actors with an interest in and capacity for action. Acting without explicit authorisation from ‘Brussels’ is no doubt a difficult area for heads of EU delegations, but research has identified examples where individual ambassadors or groups of ambassadors of Western
states have the capacity to influence local leaders in impending crises and without needing large resources or taking considerable risks to reputation or lives. In the past, such as in the case of Georgia 2008, research has noted that high quality warnings from the EU delegation in Tbilisi were being ignored as these delegations were considered removed from policy-making.

The follow-up is easier if EU delegations work in the field and have the necessary expertise to identify conflict, instability and mass atrocity risks, but it is also necessary that all delegations clearly understand that they are expected to play a warning role and that warnings will be welcome, even and especially if they are ‘inconvenient’. There is considerable variation between delegations in how they see their role. While some delegations occasionally highlight risks, research has revealed instances of delegations thinking that they have communicated a warning, while this was not perceived as such in Brussels due to a lack of common understanding about what constitutes a warning. Indeed, issue of language are non-trivial problems for a multinational body such as the EU as the previous director of SITCEN, Shapcott argues:

‘In some cultures and some administrations the words “intelligence indicates” are an “Open Sesame,” a phrase that gets your information noticed and registered. That said, there are others for whom the phrase is a complete turn-off, or a warning. Phrases such as “we assess that” can be read by some to mean “we have a mountain of intelligence which, when carefully considered, leads us to the following conclusion in which we have a high degree of confidence.” It can be read by others to mean “we have very little intelligence, so we are making an inference that . . . ’ 21

3.3 Task 3: Effective prioritisation

As the EU’s resources to prevent and respond are limited, it needs to make a judgement about which situations are potentially the most grave and where it could make the biggest difference, either alone or in close collaboration with other organisations such as the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) or the African Union. It is well-known that the EU struggles more than most states to establish priorities for external action and implementing them consistently across different geographic contexts. EU strategic documents are often vague on key issues because agreement among Member States would otherwise not be possible. This problem is also visible in the area of conflict prevention and with regard to the crucial question of what kind of criteria should be used to prioritise resources. For instance, the six-monthly watch-list of countries at risk of instability needs to be agreed by all Member States, which means that particular countries can be vetoed, while other countries are placed high for reasons unrelated to the risk of instability. The politicisation of the watch-list as well as its initial length of 40 plus countries means that the organisation had used informal watch-lists instead, although more recently the length of the watchlist has been reduced. Within the EEAS structures and in particular INTCEN an informal understanding exists about which types of crises in which parts of the world member states would care most about, but such an informal understanding is not optimal from the perspective of reaching prioritisation decisions. There is no open discussion, not to mention agreement, about the criteria that should be used for the prioritisation of countries that deserve most attention from the EU. Everyone knows that particular member states are more likely to take the initiative in EU foreign policy and mobilise resources for it if certain interests are touched upon, but these interests or issues are not openly addressed by EU intelligence structures for fear of being seen as biased. Rightly or wrongly, all intelligence products, especially those that are closely connected to particular individuals such as Special Representatives, or senior officials, run the risk of being seen through their lens of the officials nationality and, can get easily discounted as being influenced attributed interests and world-views along the lines of “of course, this is what the French would say”.

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The second major area of concern for judgements of urgency is that generally organisational receptivity to early warnings is much lower than to late warnings. This generic problem has been exacerbated in the case of the EU because of the political signals that were sent under the previous High Representative who sought to enhance crisis management and build-up military prowess and operational experience. In the Commission, conflict prevention enjoyed a high level of prioritisation, but was hindered by co-ordination problems between DGs. The first post-Lisbon High Representative has sent conflicting signal about the relative importance of prevention as compared to crisis management. The interviews as well as the analysis of pertinent texts revealed that EEAS still lacks a clear understanding of what ‘acting early’ actually means. When the EU’s first post-Lisbon High Representative Catherine Ashton talked in speeches about the need for preventing conflicts, she never said what kind of prevention she had in mind, nor was it specified in the European Security Strategy or its Implementation Report.

This is not primarily a personal failing of Ashton but perhaps more a sign of what Cuyckens and de Man have called the ‘conceptual overstretch’ of conflict prevention as a policy paradigm.\textsuperscript{22} It can mean anything, even blurring into crisis management in the sense of trying to ‘prevent’ even worse from happening once a crisis has erupted. Neither is there an understanding of the important differences between structural and operational conflict prevention; the former can be planned and implemented top-down, whereas the latter requires planners and decision-makers to respond relatively quickly to bottom-up warning signals in order to avoid risks and grasp opportunities.

3.4 Task 4: Considering preventive action

The EU’s leadership in foreign policy is predominantly reactive, rather than preventive, in attitude. Resources and attention have primarily been given in the early years of the EEAS to divisions focused on crisis management and response, especially the Crisis Response Unit. Member states have contributed to this focus on crisis response by emphasising the need for prevention while *de facto* using the Foreign Affairs Council (FAC) primarily to discuss current or immediate crises. The current mandate of the Political and Security Committee (PSC) is limiting the role it can play in discussing emerging problems and framing medium-term preventive policies. It partly explains why the PSC has concentrated its attention on the preparation for and response to imminent or current crises. The Sahel region could be one example of a case raised briefly three years ago but then not prioritised for preventive action. As current or immediate crises tend to monopolise the schedule of the PSC or the FAC, the EU’s decision-making system struggles to create and ring-fence the space for member state representatives to discuss upcoming problems systematically and at regular intervals, including mounting risks relating to mass atrocities.

Having said this, it is an encouraging sign that conflict prevention has recently been discussed in the PSC as a follow-up to the FAC conclusions of June 2011. The underlying issue is that member states differ in their capacities, available capabilities, the emphasis that they place on prevention in general and mass atrocities in particular, and whether they think the EU should play a leading role in this area in the first place. Some member states believe the EU should develop its comprehensive approach and implement it globally, whereas others see the EU as being a specialist provider of certain services in particular thematic areas. It is also a positive sign that the EU has recognised the challenges of mobilising for prevention and is instigating a conflict early
warning – early action system, currently being piloted in the Sahel. The new system is intended to identify countries at risk of violent conflict and to mobilise action across EU institutions to prevent it. If the new system works, it could make a contribution to EU efforts to prevent mass atrocities.

Finally, judging the feasibility of preventive action is vastly complicated because different instruments are owned by different institutions as well as Member States and require different levels and procedures of authorisation. The complexity of the EU’s institutional structure and the large number of actors with a say implies that feasibility judgements are difficult and there is little scope for flexibility in response to changes in dynamic conflict situations, leading to a fragmented, slow and unresponsive process of policy-planning. Furthermore, judging the potential effectiveness of these instruments on the ground requires in-depth geographic and issue expertise, which is dispersed across the system or not available at all. There are no robust procedures for warning-response, which means that too much depends on individuals and their expertise. This setting tends to slow down response and impede consistently high-quality judgements on feasibility and proportionality.

4. Understanding the limitations of EU intelligence

This section aims to confront our findings with the theoretical expectations regarding the performance of warning intelligence in a multi-lateral organizational setting in general and the EU in particular. So far the literature has very few answers regarding the capacities of intelligence units within international organizations given the lack of mature scholarship in this area. While some studies have focused on the use of intelligence in the UN’s policy development,\(^{23}\) relatively little scholarly work has been done on multinational warning-response problems relating to the

\(^{23}\) E.g. Chesterman (2006); Cockell (2003); Dorn (2006); Sebenick (1997).
EU and the OSCE. The existing comparative reviews of early warning and response mechanisms are rich in detail, but where the theoretical basis for assessing performance remains underdeveloped or strongly focused on the accuracy of the forecasting, rather than the warning-response gap. The only comparative study with some theoretical grounding in the literature of warning-response problem is the review by Debiel and Wulf of three African warning-response systems and the lack of such a mechanism in the cases of the Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN) and the Pacific Island Forum (PIF). They highlight not only generic warning-response problems affecting any actor in their view but also argue that performance in the African cases has suffered from a lack of political interest on the part of many of the states involved to adequately resource both the warning infrastructure, but more crucially, to respond to such warnings given their own role in some of the conflicts. Apart from this contribution, the literature in this area is characterised by a strong focus on the institutional development and questions relating to information gathering and sharing. The literature typically reflects three assumptions about what matters for performance: (1) It is taken for granted that organization and structure are key variables in deciding success or failure of warning processes; (2) It is assumed that the more information and intelligence that is fed into warning processes, the higher is the likelihood for good performance; (3) It is believed that technical solutions for relaying and sharing warnings will make processes more efficient.

However, according to the already discussed strategic surprise literature none of these assumptions is necessarily valid in the case of the post-Lisbon EU for three reasons:

1. **By bringing together more products of analysis and political reporting from across the whole of the EU system as well as Member States, analysis does not necessarily become better nor agreement easier. The risk is that without rationalisation, the ‘noise’ in the system simply increases. This would make the difficult job of picking out weak signals and prioritising warning messages of various kinds even more complicated. Moreover, while there may be some benefit in centralising information collection, there is more than good in centralising analysis as the literature has repeatedly highlighted the benefits of challenging conventional wisdoms and allowing for systematic analytical challenge to avoid assumption drag and other sources of analytical error.**

2. **If organisational culture is a key factor for ensuring that more junior officials with relevant expertise about a country are encouraged to speak out and be listened to, the sheer increase in size of the EU foreign policy apparatus through the merging of Council and Commission DGs leads to a strengthening of hierarchical relations and restrictive formal and informal communication rules. Given that the EEAS has been and still is to an extent in a state of flux in terms of its organisational structure and changing personnel, officials struggle to develop strong relations of trust and understanding between producers and consumers of warning and as a result close-down opportunities for fast-tracking warnings and using informal channels of communication. This is associated with less warning as well as to a mismatch between producers and users expectations.**

3. **A larger entity with the new double-hatted HR on top increases the risk of decision-bottlenecks as compared to the old system, which suffered from incoherence but allowed different parts greater autonomy for action. In conflict prevention it can sometimes be better to trade-off perfect co-ordination of instruments for speed of reaction. The risk is that opportunities to intervene early will be missed while waiting for the green-light from**
the top, which may take too long in a pyramid with a much broader base than before.
Moreover, the EEAS has created new ambiguities as to whether it is the High
Representative or the Political and Security Committee who is the main consumer of
warnings.

On the other hand, we believe that the broader intelligence studies literature is unduly sceptical
about the value and impact of multi-lateral intelligence, which mainly attributed to member
states’ reluctance to share or share anything of value with the central bureaucracy, rather than on
a bilateral basis. The reason lies partly in concern about leaking and protection of sources and
methods of collection, but also in questions of power in so far as member states may not wish to
endow IOs with too much autonomy and ‘information-superiority’ in an area of national
sensitivity. However, this scepticism is at least partially contradicted by the findings which show
that EU intelligence function have grown in depth and scope, that they enoy relative autonomy
from member states and the benefit of operating in a relatively de-politicised and legally ill-
de ned space, and they have indeed developed quite significant capability for the collection and
analysis of OSINT as well as increasing assessment from member states. Indeed, it is correct to
observe that EU INTCEN and associated structures were allowed to evolve precisely because
they were not set-up as an ‘agency’, but established within existing structures of the Council and
later the EEAS. The Director of INTCEN, Salmi himself seems to see little benefit in trying to
change this status:

‘The Lisbon Treaty clearly states that national security is the competence of the member
states. And that’s of course interpreted in many member states as to include intelligence –
in my understanding as well. Only from the legal point of view, it would mean that we
would need a treaty change. Then it becomes hugely political: do we want to do that?

What would be the added value, keeping in mind that there’s a very intensive cooperation in European intelligence and security services anyway?\textsuperscript{29}

Therefore, an optimistic reading of EU’s potentials centres on the effects that EU could have on preventing conflicts on the ground because of the following reasons: first, they may have access to more information about potential conflicts than most states given their position as an information hub that can draw on reporting from its delegations on the grounds, reports from missions in the field as well as reports from their members sources in far as they share this information. This information superiority may be particularly pronounced for states and regions which are not commonly seen as economic or political priorities for states. Furthermore, given EU mandates in this area, they may have resources available to cultivate expertise in the area of conflict analysis and response in-house as well as act as a hub for transnational epistemic communities in this area. The diplomatic status of EU officials, the national diversity of its staff, and the fact that EU intelligence serves multiple masters, can also mitigate group-think and other psychological pathologies of warning-production and decision-making, including wishful-thinking and denial. The EU intelligence structure systematically utilise these different perspectives in their analysis with cross-checking, which led one senior EU official to claim that the famous ‘dodgy dossier’ on the Iraq-war produced by UK intelligence services would not have survived the EU production process.\textsuperscript{30} However, while multiple predispositions can be an asset for improving analysis, they turn into a liability when it comes to communicating warnings to diverse recipients. It makes tailoring warnings in EU considerably more difficult than in states as warning producers anticipate the cognitive misfit with its risk of a backlash from segments of the membership, and hence tend to wait with issuing a warning and if they do so, can be less nuanced and specific. In fact, case studies demonstrated that the EU analysts tend to handle the trade-off

\textsuperscript{29} Salmi, 2014
\textsuperscript{30} Interview, June 2010.
between objectivity and impact by prioritising the former. In other words, analysts tended to avoid pushing member states’ ‘hot buttons’ for fear of triggering controversy and lengthy debates, but by doing so, undermine the impact of their own products.

Conclusions

The post-Lisbon EU has the potential to become the leading provider of medium and long-term warning intelligence given its network of delegations, human resources and evolving capacities for the analysis of open source information and processed intelligence provided by member states. The area in need of most improvement is, however, not the epistemic side of information collection and analysis, but effective communication of intelligence and the ability of the policy planning and decision-making structures to process them quickly enough. A study by the Initiative for Peacebuilding concluded that the EU’s current efforts in early warning and response are characterised by ‘short-termism and ad hoc decision-making. It lacks prioritisation grounded in evidence, and sub-optimal decision-making contributes to inefficient policy-making’. We agree with the first part of the charge, but are not convinced that the core of the problem is technocratic in the sense that the paper talks of ‘sub-optimal, inefficient and evidence’. Similarly, we disagree with some of the emphasis in other writing on EU intelligence, which suggests that greater degree of member states sharing intelligence would be the solution.

The main problems for EU intelligence do not, in our view, arise from limitations in the access to relevant information or the way this information is organised, but from the pervasive influence of national pre-dispositions, bureaucratic rigidities and a lack of leadership from both

the EEAS and particularly member states on conflict prevention. There is a gap between member states support for prevention at the strategic and programmatic level and their de-facto focus in terms of attention and resources on crisis management through Council structures. Medium-term warnings are not appropriately prioritised and we sensed a lack of clarity about the criteria that are to be used for judging relative importance of a warning in terms of substance. Moreover, given the consensus orientation or unanimity requirements, EU’ decision-making takes far too long to reach the necessary agreement for action, meaning that opportunities for early action are frequently lost. We have seen that the EU’s warning-response nexus suffers more than states because there are multiple recipients of warnings with dispositional cleavages opening up between member states as well as within supranational bodies’ leadership.

The dilemma of EU intelligence is that it needed the de-politicised space to thrive in terms of intelligence cooperation and sharing, whilst the prevailing technocratic spirit is the greatest obstacle to intelligence having the desired impact on decision-making. Officials were given the autonomy to intensify their cooperation with each other despite national sovereignty concerns, whilst it is exactly the aversion of warning producers to create political controversies with their product that severely limits the impact and use of such warnings. Addressing this problem would require the EU to develop a greater shared sense of its political priorities, member states to ringfence more resources for preventive action, and for the leadership of both EEAS and member states to become more comfortable with having their worldviews challenged by the intelligence that the EU already produces. This is clearly a big ask, but not quite as big as some of the suggestions about the need to create a European CIA and to require member states to systematically share their intelligence with the EU.
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..and more cited in the footnotes…