

The European Union, Civil Society and Conflict Transformation

MICROCON Policy Working Paper 1

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The European Union, Conflict Transformation and Civil Society:

A Conceptual Framework

Nathalie Tocci¹

MICROCON Policy Working Paper 1

Abstract: The European Union considers conflict resolution as a cardinal objective of its foreign policy. It makes use of a number of policy instruments to promote conflict transformation through ‘constructive engagement’, which cover a range of sectors affecting conditions and incentives at the micro level. The EU has recognised the importance of engaging with civil society in situations of violent conflict, but needs to engage more with local civil society to make its policies more effective. This paper provides a conceptual framework and discussion to analyse which local civil society actors play a role in conflict and conflict transformation, through which activities they impact on conflicts and how, what determines their effectiveness, and finally how EU neighbourhood policies can enhance their constructive impact in peacefully transforming conflicts in its near abroad by engaging with civil society.

Keywords: Civil society, European Union, European Neighbourhood Policy, violent conflict, conflict transformation

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1. Introduction

The European Union, historically conceived as a peace project, has considered conflict resolution as a cardinal objective of its fledging foreign policy. The Lisbon Treaty explicitly states that the EU aims to promote peace (Title I, Article 3-1) and that its role in the world would reflect the principles that have inspired its creation, development and enlargement (Title V, Article 21). The Treaty identifies the contribution to peace, the prevention of conflict and the strengthening of international security amongst its core foreign policy priorities (Title V, Article 2c). More interestingly, the EU's conception of peace has been broad, long-term and organic, including the principles of democracy, human rights, rule of law, international law, good governance and economic development (Commission 2001). The promotion of structural and sustainable peace has been prioritized above all in the EU neighbourhood. This was made clear in the 2003 Security Strategy, which argues that the Union's task is to 'make a particular contribution to stability and good governance in our immediate neighbourhood (and) to promote a ring of well governed countries to the East of the EU and on the borders of the Mediterranean with whom we can enjoy cooperative relations' (European Council 2003). It was reiterated in the Lisbon Treaty which posits that the Union 'shall develop a special relationship with neighbouring countries, aiming to establish an area of prosperity and good neighbourliness, founded on the values of the Union' (Title I, Article 8). Most poignantly, the documents establishing the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) voice the Union's aspiration to contribute to the solution of regional conflicts (Commission 2004, p. 6).

These public pronouncements clearly suggest that the EU is intent in promoting conflict transformation and resolution, over and above conflict management and

settlement in the neighbourhood. In other words, the EU is not simply interested in pursuing the management of conflicts through negotiation and compromise, incentivized by external powers deploying conditional sticks and carrots. It rejects the idea that violent conflict is endemic to human nature and espouses the view that conflict resolution is possible through the search for mutually beneficial solutions that allow for the satisfaction of all parties' basic human needs (Burton 1990). Further still, the EU views as critical "indicators" of conflict prevention and resolution issues such as human and minority rights, democracy, state legitimacy, dispute resolving mechanisms, rule of law, social solidarity, sustainable development and a flourishing civil society (Kronenberger and Wouters 2005). This suggests that the Union aims at transforming the structural features of violent conflict, eradicating what Galtung (1969, 1994) defines as the seeds of structural violence: social injustice, unequal development and discrimination. While theoretically distinct, the EU's approach also fits what Richmond (2006) conceptually and more broadly defines as third-generation "peace-building approaches", which cover the wider economic, political and social make-up of countries both before, during and after the end of violent conflict.

Beyond foreign policy objectives, the EU is also endowed with policy instruments to pursue conflict resolution and transformation in the neighbourhood. Beyond the narrow sphere of European Security and Defence Policy and the peace-keeping and peace-building missions that it foresees, the Union promotes conflict transformation principally through its "constructive engagement" with conflict parties (Commission 2001, p. 8-9). By constructive engagement EU actors mean the deployment of a rich variety of measures of cooperation, which are normally specified in contractual agreements with third countries. These contractual relations take different forms, foreseeing different degrees of integration into and cooperation with the EU. They

range from the accession process aimed at the full membership of a candidate country, to looser forms of association, which envisage measures of economic, political and social cooperation with EU structures. As in the case of the accession process, these looser forms of association are also “contractual” in nature. Rather than a Treaty of Accession they foresee Association Agreements for the southern Mediterranean countries, Partnership and Cooperation Agreements for the former Soviet countries, Stabilization and Association Agreements for the Western Balkan countries and the future Neighbourhood Agreements (or Enhanced Agreements) for the southern and eastern neighbours. Beyond the goal of achieving varying degrees of cooperation with the EU, these contractual ties aim at fostering long-run structural change, such as conflict transformation, within and between third countries.

Within the tradition of conflict transformation, the role of civil society is of the essence (Lederach 1997, Rupesinghe 1995). Civil society organizations (CSOs) on the one hand are pivotal in providing the necessary support for peace, ensuring that any agreement negotiated by political leaders is ultimately accepted and implemented on the ground (Miall, Ramsbotham and Woodhouse 1999). On the other hand, civil society can provide the necessary push for peaceful social change, especially when the top echelons within a conflict context are unwilling or unable to budge on the fundamental conflict issues. This is not to say that civil society is always and necessarily a force for good. In so far as civil society is a reflection of society at large, in contexts of violent conflict and divided societies “uncivil society” inevitably exists and at times thrives. It can contribute to the polarization within and between communities, the reinforcement of horizontal inequalities and the legitimization or actual use of violence in the name of nationalism, exclusionary ideologies and at times even democracy, human rights and self-determination (Barnes 2005). In other

words, civil society is both an agent for change and a reflection of the conflict structure. By operating within a structure of conflict, often marked by state failure, authoritarianism, poverty and insecurity, civil society can be an actor in conflict escalation, inciting nationalism, ethnocentrism and violence (Paffenholz and Spurk 2006). Yet even in these cases, civil society remains a force to be reckoned with if the EU is intent in transforming conflicts in its troubled neighbourhood.

The EU has already acknowledged the importance of engaging with civil society in order to enhance the effectiveness of its foreign policy in general and conflict resolution policy in particular. To this end, since the late 1990s, the European Parliament and Commission have established regular contact with civil society actors through the Human Rights Contact Group, the Civil Society Contact Group, the Common Foreign and Security Policy Contact Group and the Arms Transfer Contact Group. Furthermore the European Peacebuilding Liason Office (EPLO), a sub-group of the European Platform of NGOs, established in 2002 an office in Brussels in order to improve civil society access to EU institutions and policy-making in the field of conflict resolution. The EU's principal focus has been on European CSOs. The Contact groups with the European Parliament include less than a dozen large European CSOs working in the fields of culture, environment, education, development, human rights, public health, social issues and women. The EPLO includes 23 national or transnational European CSOs and networks.²

Yet a critical value added in the search for more effective EU policies lies in greater engagement with *local* civil society in conflict contexts in the neighbourhood. These CSOs may often look rather different from European organizations working on

² <http://www.eplo.org/index.php?id=45>

conflict, and may well be non-voluntary in nature, less organized, less professional and with fewer human and financial resources than their EU counterparts. Yet whether formally organized or informal associations or non-voluntary groupings, local civil society typically has a greater understanding, legitimacy and stake in both conflict and conflict transformation (Bell and Carens 2004). Rather than acting as an external bystander, it is a first hand actor in conflict, and as such represents a necessary, albeit not sufficient, actor in promoting peace. As part of society, local civil society can recognize and understand the underlying root causes of greed and grievance underpinning conflict (Murshed 2008), the failure of the social contract to peacefully regulate social needs and desires, and consequently the polarization and tension between communities (see Microcon 2008). At the same time, local CSOs can act as the seed of group formation, mobilization, communication and empowerment, which are necessary to induce peaceful social change (Varshney 2001), but which may also create the necessary “opportunity” for conflict escalation (Microcon 2008). The EU itself is beginning to recognize the need to engage more with local civil society actors (Commission 2006b). As put by the former UN Secretary General (2004): ‘[i]f peacebuilding missions are to be effective, they should, as part of a clear political strategy, work with and strengthen those civil society forces that are helping ordinary people to voice their concerns, and to act on them in peaceful ways ... Engagement with civil society is not an end in itself, nor is it a panacea. But it is vital to our efforts to turn the promise of peace agreements into the reality of peaceful societies and viable states’. In other words, engaging with local civil society is of the essence to enhance the legitimacy, rootedness and thus long-term effectiveness of EU conflict transformation policies in its neighbourhood.

With this premise in mind, the aim of this paper is to provide a conceptual framework and discussion to analyse which local civil society actors play a role in conflict and conflict transformation, through which activities they impact on conflicts and how, what determines their effectiveness, and finally how can EU neighbourhood policies enhance their constructive impact in peacefully transforming conflicts in its near abroad by engaging with civil society.

2. Civil Society in Conflict and Conflict Transformation

Civil society can be broadly defined as the area of voluntary collective action, driven by shared values and/or interests which operates beyond the state, the market and the family, and which provides the web of social relations linking these three spheres (Barnes 2005, Paffenholz and Spurk 2006, Fischer 2006). In view of its tight interconnection with the conflict structure, local civil society at times promotes the civic values and practices necessary for a peaceful transformation of conflict, while at other times directly contributes to the causes and symptoms of conflict. As such civil society is not understood here as a normative concept but rather as an analytical category of actors to be investigated in order to ascertain what their precise impact on conflict is.

A typology of actors

Who constitutes local civil society in conflict contexts? In view of the broad and analytical definition given of civil society, we include a wide variety of actors in our study. Table 1 adapts the categorization provided by Diamond and McDonald's (1996) multi-track diplomacy model to distinguish between eight different types of

actors, which can be engaged directly or indirectly in conflict and conflict transformation: conflict professionals, economic actors, private citizens, training and education bodies, activists, religion-based actors, funding bodies, and communication actors. Although there is inevitably some overlap in the membership and roles of these different categories, these eight groupings are sufficiently delineated to allow for a precise identification of the different CSOs involved in conflict (Marchetti and Tocci 2007).

Table 1: CSO categories

	Nature of actor	Examples
1.	Professionals engaged in conflict/resolution	Technical experts and consultants, Research centres and think tanks, Professional NGOs
2.	Economic	Trade unions Business associations Professional associations Cooperatives and self-help initiatives Organized crime networks
3.	Private Citizens	Individual citizens, Diaspora groups, Family and clan based associations
4.	Training and Education	Training NGOs Schools and universities
5.	Activism	Public policy advocacy groups Social movements Student groups Women groups Combatant groups
6.	Religion	Spiritual communities Charities Religious movements
7.	Funding	Foundations Individual philanthropists
8.	Communication	Media operators Art

Local civil society potential for conflict escalation and transformation

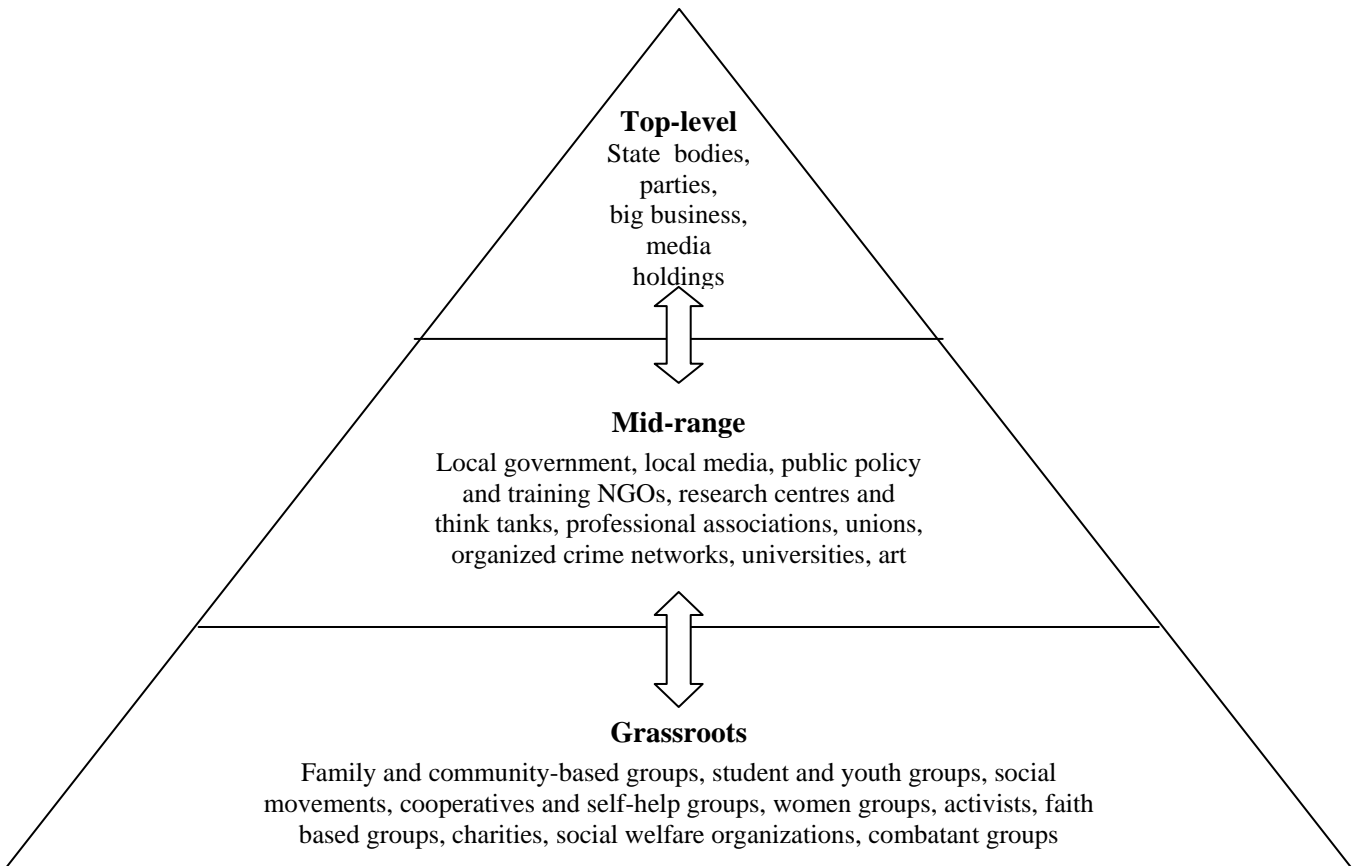
Precisely how and why does local civil society contribute to conflict escalation as well as transformation? As noted above, civil society, while being distinct from the state, the family and the market, acts as the social glue between the three, thus undertaking an essentially political function in society. In other words, civil society is distinct from, while interacting with, politics and policy across all its domains (Chazan 1992, p.281). As analysed by Lederarch (1997) and reproduced in Figure 1, civil society is active at both mid- and grassroots-levels of society. At mid-level there are elite civil society actors ranging from universities and research centres, professional NGOs, unions and professional associations, local media groups, artists, as well as overtly “uncivil society” groups such as organized crime networks. At grassroots level we find CSOs and networks such as community, women, student and faith-based groups, social movements and activists, combatant groups and supporting institutions, cooperatives, self-help organizations and charities.

Most important, civil society links the three stylized levels of society in Lederarch’s pyramid. On the one hand, mid-level CSOs are closely tied to top-level policy-making through their interactions with parliaments, executives, big business, foundations and major media holdings. Through their advocacy, policy research, and negotiation support activities, mid-level CSOs can both ease conflict settlement and press top echelons to modify the structural features of governance that gave rise to conflict in the first place. These mid-level actors build personal and professional relations with the top echelons and provide a pivotal function because of their unofficial nature. Compared to the top level, mid-level CSOs in fact normally enjoy more political independence, and thus more creativity and flexibility, as well as greater ability to

operate beyond the limelight of the media. This allows these actors to act as critical norm entrepreneurs in conflict transformation (Wallace and Josselin 2001). They also have better access to and dialogue with diverse sectors of society, being able to talk to different parties without losing credibility; and a greater inclination to work on long-term and structural issues rather than on the short-term ones determined by the current political agenda. Indeed as noted by Richmond (2005), many NGOs emerged in the 1990s precisely as a response to the peacebuilding requirements of states and international organizations.

On the other hand, mid-level actors are organically linked to grassroots CSOs, which are principal agents in the cultivation of “peace constituencies” in society writ large (Lederarch 1997). They do so by mobilizing the public to tackle and react to the underlying conditions of structural or open violence through education, training, capacity-building and awareness raising. Indeed many social movements are constituted by networks of like-minded NGOs operating at grassroots and mid-levels. Mid and grassroots CSOs also induce conflict transformation by fostering societal reconciliation, through inter-communal dialogue, peace commissions and by fostering functional cooperation and communication across communities. Finally, local CSOs can reach out to the wider public through service delivery, be this of a material (e.g., relief and rehabilitation) or psychological nature (post-war trauma therapy). Local civil society interactions with the public are of the essence to ensure that the voice of the people is not swamped in the evolution of both conflict and peace.

Figure 1: The Conflict Transformation Potential of Civil Society



Source: Lederarch (1997)

Yet precisely because of the linkages it provides across different levels of society, local civil society can also act as a factor in conflict escalation. As noted above, local civil society is an agent in conflict as well as a product of the conflict structure. As a microcosm of society, it inevitably displays the underlying causes and symptoms of conflict. In situations of violent conflict, local civil society actors can provide the rationale and moral justification for violence, partake and support violent actions, or contribute through discourse to the overall securitization of the conflict. In conflicts marked by ethnic or religious strife, civil society can promote ideologies based on racism, nationalism and intolerance, thus exacerbating communal divisions, enemy images and exclusive identities. In conflicts marked by socio-economic inequalities and political discrimination, civil society can reinforce the conditions of structural

violence and power asymmetry, divert resources away from productive activities, and dis-empower underprivileged communities.

3. Civil Society Activities

Beyond their role and linkage function in society, through which activities can local civil society contribute to conflict escalation and transformation? Do these actions impact directly or indirectly on the conflict? How can these activities be categorized? And do some civil society actions prevail at different stages of conflict and conflict transformation?

Direct and indirect civil society actions in conflict

The activities of local CSOs can be directly or indirectly linked to the conflict situation. Direct activities are those whose objective is to contribute explicitly to the conflict and its transformation. These actions can be directly aimed at conflict escalation. Combatant groups can mobilize for violent rebellion, research centres or religious leaders can provide the intellectual or moral justification for violence, discrimination or repression; universities and the media can foster enemy images and a securitized understanding of the conflict; and professional associations and unions can support and exacerbate ethnic or religious discrimination. On the opposite end of the spectrum local CSOs can be involved in peaceful conflict transformation. Social movements, student and women groups can mobilize for non-violent social change; NGOs can foster inter-communal dialogue, provide support to official negotiations, and engage in truth and reconciliation activities; universities, research centres and activists can monitor and denounce public policies and practices on the ground;

training NGOs, artists and youth groups can engage in peace education and the rearticulation of identities, interests and values within conflict societies. Last, local civil society can have a direct role in conflict transformation by operating on the symptoms of conflict. Hence charities, community-based groups and social welfare organizations can provide relief to affected populations; and professional NGOs can be engaged in trauma therapy, de-mining and reconstruction efforts.

Local CSOs can also be indirectly involved in conflict and conflict transformation by working on issues which are tied to the conflict. Hence, local CSOs can engage in activities pertaining to issues such as democracy, human rights, governance, security sector reform, justice, gender, education or development, i.e., all issues which are inextricably tied to the eruption, evolution and transformation of conflict. On the negative side, organized crime networks can indirectly sustain conflict by thriving on war economies and thus pressing for the continuation of conflict.

Methods of actions across stages of conflict

Local civil society activities can be divided broadly according to their general method and approach: they can be adversarial or non-adversarial; they can deal with the causes or with the symptoms of conflict. As in the case of CSO actors, this categorization of activities is not exclusive and there are significant areas of overlap. However defining activities according to these four broad methods of action can help organize and better understand a broad range of activities.

Adversarial actions can be roughly divided between largely grassroots actions aimed at public mobilization, and mid-level actions aimed at top-level advocacy, monitoring

and shaming. In both cases adversarial methods aim at transforming conflict by altering power relations and cost-benefit calculations within a conflict context. They aim at increasing the political, social, legal or economic costs for conflict parties persisting in a particular position or action. Hence on the one hand, social movements, activists, trade unions, and women, student and youth groups can raise public awareness of conflict issues and mobilize the people into adversarial collective action through demonstrations, strikes, campaigns and petitions. Artists and journalists can powerfully expose and sensitize the public to the causes and symptoms of conflict, as well as the underlying conditions of structural violence. On the other hand, particularly mid-level CSOs can engage in advocacy and denunciation vis-à-vis top-level echelons as well as the international community, basing their activities on fact-finding, early-warning and monitoring. Mid-level professional NGOs and bar associations can also engage in litigation with public authorities, in order to expose and seek rectification to injustices through legal action.

By contrast, *non-adversarial* activities can also be divided between dialogue and research activities, and are normally carried out by mid-level actors. Both types of activities are non-adversarial in the sense that they rely on non-coercive methods or persuasion and learning in order to induce social change in conflict. Dialogue activities can take different forms (Rothman 1998). Tracks 2 and 3 diplomacy activities are aimed at supporting official negotiations and working through differences between conflict parties. They include inter-communal dialogue projects between people sharing similar professional roles and experiences (e.g., unionists, students, women, religious leaders) in order to foster cross-communal trust and understanding, and subsequent changes in the perceptions of the “other”. They can include exclusively moderates across conflict divides in order to elaborate joint peace

proposals in a problem-solving fashion and act as pre-negotiation forums. Alternatively, they can engage extremists as well in order to allow all parties to voice their concerns, establish human contact and hedge against potential spoiling activities without necessarily seeking consensus between participants (Ropers 2003). Beyond dialogue, non-adversarial activities also include policy research and advocacy, aimed at identifying gaps in the analysis of conflict or proposing solutions for resolution to the top-echelons in order to sustain and complement official peace processes.

Local civil society can also deal with the underlying *causes* of conflict, by engaging in training, capacity-building and education activities. Through training courses or summer camps CSOs can help affected individuals in conflict to reckon with the past, reduce prejudices and stereotypes of the “other” and develop inclusionary and multiple identities. Training and education activities can also target “multiplier” agents such as journalists, professionals, NGO activists, teachers, youth workers, religious leaders, party activists or film-makers, which in turn have access to and can influence broader constituencies (Schmelzle 2006).

Conversely, civil society can operate on the material or psychological *symptoms* of conflict, by engaging in operational service delivery targeted to the needs of conflict societies. During periods of active violence, these activities can include inter-positioning, civilian peacekeeping and the protection of endangered individuals. In post-violence phases they include demobilization and disarmament of combatant groups, refugee repatriation and reintegration, de-mining, relief, rehabilitation and reconstruction. They can also be engaged in community building and integration, and individual or group trauma therapy.

Indeed different civil society activities and methods are best suited to different stages in the evolution and transformation of conflict (Anderson and Olson 2003). In stages of latent structural violence, where the principal aim is that of conflict prevention, actions aimed at early-warning, non-violent mobilization and awareness-raising are of the essence. During stages of active violence, activities such as relief, inter-positioning or civilian peacekeeping may be necessary. During post-ceasefire stages civil society actors engaged in multi-track diplomacy, dialogue, policy research and advocacy may play a critical role in pushing for peace agreements. Finally in stages of post-violence and post-agreement, operational CSOs may engage in reconstruction, de-mining, refugee repatriation, education and training, and truth and reconciliation activities. As discussed by Bell and Keenan (2004), in situations of conflict transition, some civil society actors focussing on particular functions may no longer be needed while others may have to revise their philosophies, mandates and modus operandi.

Table 2: Civil society methods and activities

Method	Activity
Adversarial	Grassroots awareness/mobilization: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Demonstrations - Strikes - Campaigns - Petitions - Art work - Journalism Top-level pressure: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Fact-finding and monitoring - Advocacy - Litigation
Non-adversarial	Dialogue: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Track 2 and 3 negotiations - Inter-communal dialogue Policy research and advocacy <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Conflict analysis - Proposing solutions
Operating on the causes of conflict	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Training courses - Summer camps - Capacity-building - Education
Operating on the symptoms of conflict	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Inter-positioning - Civilian peacekeeping - Protection of endangered individuals - Demobilization and disarmament - Refugee repatriation and reintegration - De-mining - Relief - Rehabilitation - Reconstruction - Community building and reintegration - Trauma therapy

4. The impact and effectiveness of local civil society in conflict

Civil society can have positive as well as negative impacts on conflict. Their activities can potentially represent prime forces in the escalation of violent conflict, while also driving the peaceful transformation of conflict. But exactly how can we categorize the possible impacts of local civil society actors in conflict? And what determines the effectiveness of these impacts?

Impact

As discussed by Marchetti and Tocci (2007), civil society can have fuelling, holding and peacemaking impacts. Local civil society fuels conflict when its activities exacerbate the greed and grievance causes of conflict, thus worsening the incompatibility of subject positions between conflict parties (Diez and Pia 2007). This can be done by discursively polarizing positions between the parties, legitimizing the persistence or aggravation of violence, discrimination or injustice, or inciting exclusive ideologies, nationalism, racism and xenophobia. Local civil society can also contribute to the material aggravation of the causes of conflict, by directly participating in violence or adding to the political, social or economic root causes of violent conflict.

On the other end of the spectrum, local civil society can contribute to the settlement, resolution and transformation of violent conflict. It can materially act to rectify the underlying structural causes of conflict, or it can discursively contribute to transforming subject positions within a conflict context, for example by including members from different communities, and thus allowing conflict parties to establish contact, build bridges and manage tensions between them (Varshney 2001).

Finally, local civil society can have a holding impact on conflict. Holding activities affect the material and psychological symptoms of conflict rather than its underlying causes. Hence, they neither augment nor diffuse the underlying roots of conflict, but rather influence the manner in which the resulting incompatibility of subject positions between conflict parties manifests itself. Operating on the symptoms of conflict does not entail that in the long-run holding activities may not have a positive or negative

impact on conflict transformation. On some occasions, operating on the symptoms of conflict, even if in a short-term positive manner such as providing relief, may sustain and prolong conflict dynamics by alleviating its most acute manifestations, legitimizing corrupt regimes or creating war economies. Holding actions such as operations aimed at securing a ceasefire may also provide the breathing space for a renewed round of fighting, or induce growing levels of domestic violence and violence against women, typical of low intensity violence periods in conflicts (Copper 2007). On other occasions, short-term holding actions may instead lead to long-term conflict transformation by providing a non-confrontational terrain in which communities can cooperate. Inter-communal initiatives for de-mining for example, while representing a holding operation, can indirectly build communication, trust and understanding between communities thus having a conflict transformation potential over time. Alternatively, holding activities operating on the most acute symptoms of conflict (e.g. violence, poverty, health, destruction) may help easing the conflict environment, thus creating a more fertile ground for an ensuing tackling of its root causes. In the long-term, holding actions therefore do not have a neutral effect on conflict. Holding can either prepare the ground for peace or set the conditions for a relapse into escalation.

Naturally establishing the precise impact of a civil society is no simple feat. As discussed by Anderson and Olson (2003) problems of impact assessment are of three different kinds. First, the causal relation between a particular CSO activity and an ensuing impact on the conflict may be extremely difficult to disentangle. Second, civil society impact is often unmeasurable, in so far as it relates to a gradual and highly complex shift in beliefs, visions, interests, identities and relationships. Third, while we may be able to determine the precise impact of one activity, the relationship of this

micro impact to the macro developments within a conflict are subjective and difficult to ascertain. In other words, impact analysis is often qualitative in nature and in part subjective. Yet it can nonetheless prove to be a highly fruitful exercise to be carefully conducted through interviews with CSOs, the recipients of their activities as well as through cross-checking interviews with other official and civil society actors acquainted with the specific activity under investigation.

Effectiveness

Beyond impact, a last key variable in the analysis of local civil society in conflict is its effectiveness, regardless of whether the activities in question are peacebuilding, holding or fuelling. We have identified five principal factors which determine the effectiveness of a particular local CSO activity in conflict: the rootedness and efficiency of the CSO itself; its relations with other CSOs; its relations with the top-level and in particular the state and the mainstream media; and its relations with the international community involved in conflict. A fifth and final factor is time contingent shocks and events, specific to each and every conflict context.

A first determinant of effectiveness is the nature of the CSO and in particular its rootedness and legitimacy in society on the one hand, and its organizational, financial and professional quality on the other. Excelling in both respects is rare. Often grassroots CSOs such as social movements or community-based organizations may be extremely rooted in society and enjoy in-depth local knowledge, yet they may lack effective organization and professionalism as well as a viable financial base. By contrast, mid-level CSOs such as research centres and NGOs, may be highly professional and efficient, but their elite nature may entail a lack or loss of touch with the needs and desires of the wider public. Other CSOs may instead be deficient in

both respects, being disconnected to society while also being overbureaucratized, oligarchical and inefficient.

A second factor shaping the effectiveness of a particular CSO is its interconnectedness within the wider civil society sphere in the conflict. This relates to the overall level and quality of social capital within a conflict country. To the extent that CSOs are aware of each other, work together and are able to strategize about the most effective division of labour between them in the pursuit of shared objectives, the effectiveness of their actions is enhanced. The greater the interconnectedness of the civil society sphere within a conflict context, and the higher is the potential for a transfer of know-how, increased professionalism and thus effectiveness of local CSOs. If instead the civil society scene is weak and fragmented, activities are duplicated while others not undertaken, and strategizing is embryonic or absent, the fuelling, holding or peacebuilding impact of CSOs is curtailed. Within a conflict, inter-CSO relations can take place both within and between communities and both can be important to enhance peacebuilding. Varshney (2001) analysed how inter-communal CSO activity can build bridges across conflict divides. However, when horizontal inequalities are high, building social capital within the more disadvantaged community can help reduce inter-communal inequalities and foster reconciliation (Stewart 2008). Indeed inter-communal civil society relations may contribute to peacebuilding only if inter-communal relations are not marked by high levels of horizontal inequality (Hewstone and Brown 1986).

A third determinant of effectiveness is the relationship between the CSO and state institutions and the mainstream media. Here the most evident point to make is that CSOs which are close to or accepted by the state tend to be the ones espousing

“establishment” views, and as such face no hindrance from or are politically supported by the state. These organizations also tend to benefit from the coverage of the mainstream media, which enhances the public resonance of their activities. Because of state support and media coverage, their actions may initially appear as being “more effective”. However upon closer inspection this effectiveness is merely a result of their role in reproducing the dominant discourse of the state. Conversely, organizations which are widely perceived as espousing stark “anti-establishment” views may initially appear as being largely ineffective in so far as they are often repressed or ostracized by official institutions, and their activities are either ignored or portrayed in a highly negative light by the mainstream media. However, precisely because of this, the effectiveness of these CSOs is greater than first meets the eye. These CSOs and their non-relations with the state and media may well have a similar impact to that of establishment CSOs. On other occasions instead, local civil society may receive little support yet little hindrance from the state, and enjoy little or no coverage by the mainstream media. This often tends to reduce their impact on conflict, given their low visibility. However on some occasions and particularly in the case of dialogue activities, operating beyond the limelight of the state, media and wider public may raise the effectiveness and chances of success of these activities.

A fourth determinant of effectiveness are relations with the international community. Relations with external actors involved in a conflict influence CSO effectiveness in three respects. First, working with the international level may raise the impact of a civil society action by winning over the support of external supporters. Support, as we shall see below, can take several forms, including both financial and political. Second, relations with external actors can raise the status and visibility of local civil society, thus increasing its effectiveness. When local civil society establishes ties with the

international level its role in the domestic conflict context may be taken more seriously. Hence, if international organizations rely on the local knowledge and analysis produced by CSOs involved in monitoring and fact-finding, the status, reputation and thus effectiveness of the latter vis-à-vis the domestic official level may improve. Lastly, relations with the international community can influence the effectiveness of civil society activity by affecting the roles of external players themselves. Especially in highly internationalized conflicts such as those in the Middle East or the Caucasus, influencing the roles of the United States or Russia is as important as affecting the roles of the conflict parties themselves.

Finally, the effectiveness of local CSOs depends on country-specific and time-contingent factors. The scope for effective CSO action depends on the extent to which the laws, institutions and political culture of a specific conflict country allow for and accept a “political” role of local civil society in conflict. Dominant political ideologies within a country also determine which CSOs may prove more influential and effective. In situations rampant nationalism for example, one could expect nationalistic CSOs to have greater resonance, support and influence than technical NGOs promoting multicultural or civic values. Specific events or trends in a country also have in some instances favoured the growth, development and effectiveness of civil society while on other occasions curtailed the scope for CSO activity.

5. The Role of the EU in the Neighbourhood

Particularly if the EU is intent in promoting conflict transformation, over and above conflict management and settlement, then it cannot afford to neglect the civil society dimension in conflict. As noted at the outset, the EU is prone to viewing and

intervening in conflicts in a bottom-up and structural manner, and many of its policy instruments can influence the conditions and incentives playing out at the mid or micro levels of conflict. This is true particularly of the EU's interactions with neighbouring countries. In particular the ENP, building upon existing contractual ties with neighbouring countries (e.g., the Association Agreements with the southern Mediterranean countries and the Partnership and Cooperation Agreements with the former Soviet countries) promises to enhance the depth and breadth of EU involvement in neighbourhood conflicts. Not only does the ENP consider conflict resolution as one of its key priorities. In its Communication (2006), the Commission argues that these conflicts 'are not only our neighbours' problems. They risk producing major spillovers for the EU, such as illegal immigration, unreliable energy supplies, environmental degradation and terrorism'. In its Communication (2007), the Commission adds that the Union has 'a direct interest in working with partners to promote their resolution, because they undermine EU efforts to promote political reform and economic development in the neighbourhood and because they could affect the EU's own security'. Furthermore, the manner in which the ENP is structured, making use of detailed Action Plans foreseeing long lists of priorities of action spanning across all policy areas, raises the scope for the EU's bottom-up and long-term involvement in conflict transformation. As put by the Commission (2007), '[T]he deployment of all available tools, whether first, second or third pillar, would increase EU influence and avoid the limitations of short-term crisis management'.

More specifically, the ENP views civil society as a key actor in the neighbourhood, being part of the democratic governance of the EU and of its neighbours, providing valuable monitoring and policy implementation functions, and contributing advice to EU institutions and neighbourhood states alike. The Commission, in the context of the

ENP has indeed established platforms for dialogue with CSOs from neighbouring countries, conducted within each partner country, primarily in view of the bilateral rather than multilateral focus of the ENP (Commission 2006b). In particular the EU has targeted and sought ties with CSOs working on issues such as democratization, human rights, , freedom of expression, women rights, education, environment and research in neighbouring countries.

The ENP can affect the civil society dimension of conflict in two ways. It can affect the *structural* features of conflict, thus impacting upon the political opportunity structure in which local civil society operates. In this way it can shape the effectiveness of civil society action, and in particular two of its critical determinants: intra-civil society relations, and relations between CSOs and the state. The implementation of the Action Plans agreed bilaterally with individual neighbourhood countries, by shaping the policies and institutional features of conflict countries, could influence the overall environment in which civil society operates, facilitating or hindering both CSO interactions, and the relationship and access of CSOs to the state. By covering a wide range of sectors such as institutions, infrastructure, health, education, trade and investment, the implementation of the Action Plans could thus play a role in shaping the overall environment in which CSOs operate, increasing or reducing the effectiveness of their actions in conflict.

The ENP can also affect the civil society dimension of neighbourhood conflicts by influencing CSOs as *agents* in conflict and conflict transformation. Particularly since 2006, the EU has recognized the need to strengthen the civil society dimension of the ENP. It proposes to enhance the quality and status of CSOs in the neighbourhood through exchanges between CSOs in the EU and the neighbourhood in the economic,

social and cultural realms, and by making use of the resources available under the European Neighbourhood Partnership Instrument (ENPI). The Commission (2006a and 2006b) has also openly suggested to enhance civil society participation in the ENP by encouraging neighbourhood governments to seek civil society involvement in governance. To this end, the Commission also organized an ENP Conference in September 2007, bringing together governmental and civil society actors from the EU and neighbourhood countries for the first time (Commission 2007, p. 11). In other words, the ENP aims at enhancing the quality and status of local civil society in the neighbourhood through training and exchanges, funding and by encouraging their political role within domestic environments.

But despite this general will to enhance its role in conflict resolution in the neighbourhood and strengthen the civil society dimension of the ENP, two critical policy questions remain open. First, which CSOs does the EU engage with in the neighbourhood? As discussed above, civil society can fuel conflict as well as promote peace. Does the EU correctly identify fuelling actors and activities? If so, does it and should it engage, ignore or weaken these CSOs, and only interact with peacebuilding ones? What should its approach be towards holding activities? Should it only focus on peacebuilding CSOs or also engage with holding ones in order to ensure that their activities would in the long-term cultivate the terrain for peace? Second, does the ENP succeed in raising the effectiveness of CSO peacebuilding activities, or does it instead, inadvertently, weaken the impact of these activities? How could the ENP raise the effectiveness of civil society peacebuilding actions? In order to answer these two fundamental policy questions we set out three hypotheses to guide ensuing empirical research into five conflicts in the neighbourhood. These three hypotheses

are by no means mutually exclusive, and we may well find that features of all three co-exist within the same conflict in the EU neighbourhood.

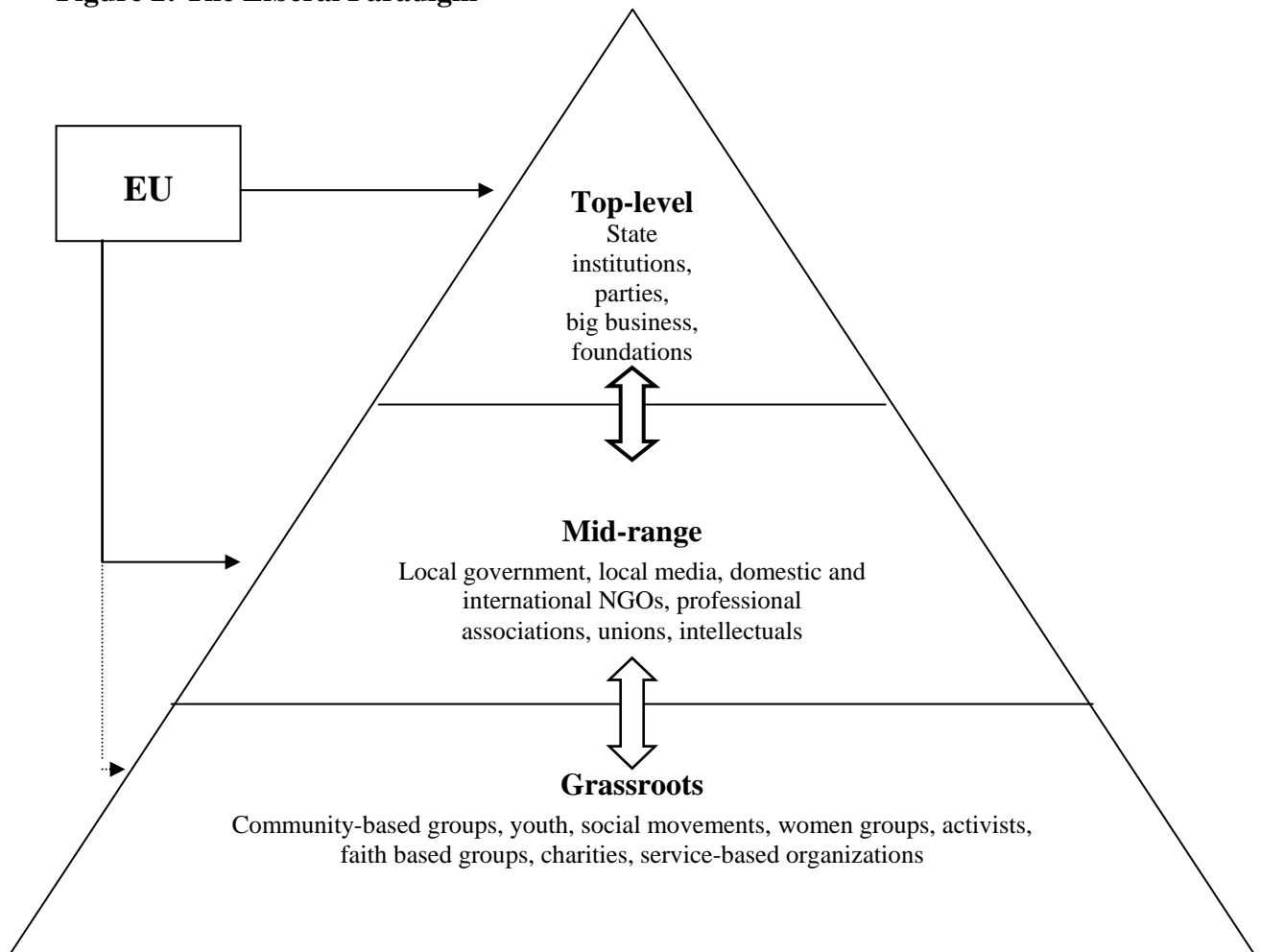
Hypothesis 1: The Liberal Peace Paradigm

A first hypothesis to be tested is that the EU contributes to conflict transformation by:

- a. strengthening the *structure* of local civil society by raising the interconnectedness between mid-level CSOs and top-level actors on the one hand, and mid-level and grassroots actors on the other, thus raising the effectiveness of civil society impact on conflict
- b. enhancing the *agency* of peacebuilding CSOs, while weakening or constructively altering the views and actions of fuelling/holding CSOs. The EU would do so primarily by engaging directly with mid-level CSOs (through dialogue and funding) and by indirectly reaching out to grassroots CSOs.

In meeting this hypothesis, the EU fulfils two principal aims. A minimum threshold objective is that of “doing no harm” (Anderson 1999). The EU thus ensures that its policies, be these aimed at structure or agency, do not have negative distortionary effects, such as delegitimizing peacebuilding CSOs through excessive co-option; or inadvertently strengthening fuelling CSOs by openly supporting, ignoring or actively attempting to weaken them. A maximum threshold objective is that of building local capacities for peace by empowering peacebuilding CSOs and weakening or altering the views of fuelling ones (Bigdon and Korf 2002). As illustrated by Figure 2, the EU would increase the interconnectedness of the three levels of society (point a. above), and on the other raise its effectiveness in conflict transformation by interacting with mid-level CSOs, which are in turn connected to grassroots CSOs and the wider public (point b. above).

Figure 2: The Liberal Paradigm



5.2 Hypothesis 2: The Leftist Critique

Under a second hypothesis, EU engagement with local civil society is detrimental to conflict transformation. This is not simply because the EU misidentifies local CSOs thus inadvertently strengthening fuelling CSOs and/or weakening peacebuilding ones. It is rather because the very fact of engaging with local civil society alters its nature and effectiveness in a manner detrimental to peace.

This could take place in two interlinked ways. First, EU interaction and engagement with local CSOs could lead to a seeming “depoliticization” of local civil society (Fischer 1997), rendering mid-level CSOs technical instruments at the service of top-

level echelons at domestic and international levels. This would lead to a mushrooming of holding CSO activities focussed on the symptoms of conflict, to the detriment of peacebuilding ones. For example it could take the form of EU engagement and support for liberal, technical, professional service-based and urban NGOs to the detriment of more overtly political CSOs such as trade unions, social movements, religious charities or community-based organizations operating in more local and rural contexts (Belloni 2001). EU (and other external) funding and support for civil society in conflict may in fact lead to an “explosion” of the NGO sector, also dubbed “non-grassroots organizations”, briefcase NGOs (BRINGOs), mafia NGOs (MANGOs), criminal NGOs (CRINGOs), government-owned NGOs (GONGOs), commercial NGOs (CONGOs) and my-own NGOs (MONGOs) (Reimann 2005, p.42). Driven by external funds, these organizations become veritable businesses, and may also enhance corruption in the civil society domain, inequalities and even creating new stakes in the continuation of conflict. Smaller or more political organizations would either be directly shunned by the EU or they would fail to meet the necessary technical/bureaucratic requirements to be allocated EU funds. As such, the potential for the constructive mobilization and politicization of society would reduce, diminishing the prospects for grassroots actors to alter the structural conditions of violent conflict.

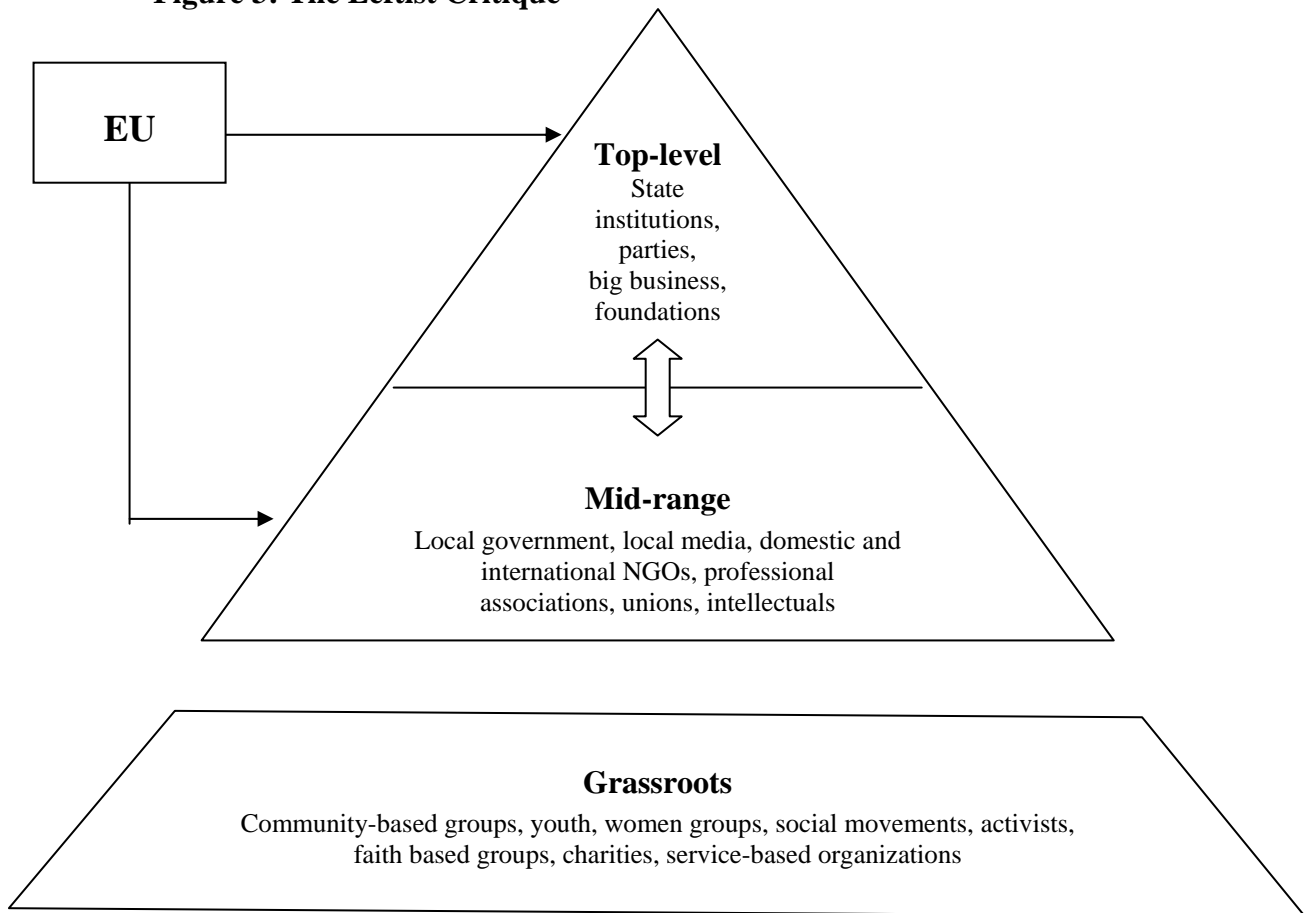
Second, EU and more generally external engagement with and support for civil society could excessively “politicize” and co-opt civil society, transforming local CSOs into spokesmen of external policies, priorities and proposed solutions, which may be alien to the needs and desires of the conflict parties themselves (see Ferguson 1990 and Chandler 1998). As put by Richmond (2005, p. 26), CSOs would act ‘as thinly veiled fronts for powerful state interests in that they act as a front for the

insertion of realist state interests in a disguised form'. Civil society would thus become driven more by the top-down supply of external funds than a bottom-up demand of societal needs and desires. In an attempt to justify or legitimize EU policies in conflict contexts, civil society actors would delegitimize themselves, to the point of being viewed as "traitors" in the eyes of grassroots CSOs and the wider public. The mere fact of being funded by an external actor such as the EU could also create the perception in the public's mind that a CSO acts on behalf of foreign rather than domestic interests.

In other words, under this second hypothesis, EU policies in conflict contexts would not be strengthened by engagement with local civil society, aimed at improving the rootedness and the transformative potential of the EU. The reverse would instead take place, whereby the EU would fundamentally shape and alter the nature of local civil society into a dependent functional substitute within the liberal paradigm of EU foreign policy, detaching and delegitimizing it in the eyes of the public (see also Chandler 2001). In doing so a limited and distorted form of civil society would emerge while existing local capacity would be harmed or destroyed (Richmond and Carey 2005). Civil society would lose its autonomy and become accountable to EU donors rather than its own domestic constituencies. It would respond to the EU's political priorities as well as the tendency to focus on short-term, outcome-driven and quantifiable projects, which may be far removed from the long-term, dynamic, process-driven and multidimensional needs of peacebuilding (Vukosavljevic 2007). As a result local civil society involved in peacebuilding would become ineffective at best or switch into holding or fuelling conflict at worst. As highlighted in Figure 3, the EU, by interacting with top- and mid- level actors would thus distort the nature of

civil society, contributing to a detachment of mid-level CSOs from grassroots ones and the wider public.

Figure 3: The Leftist Critique

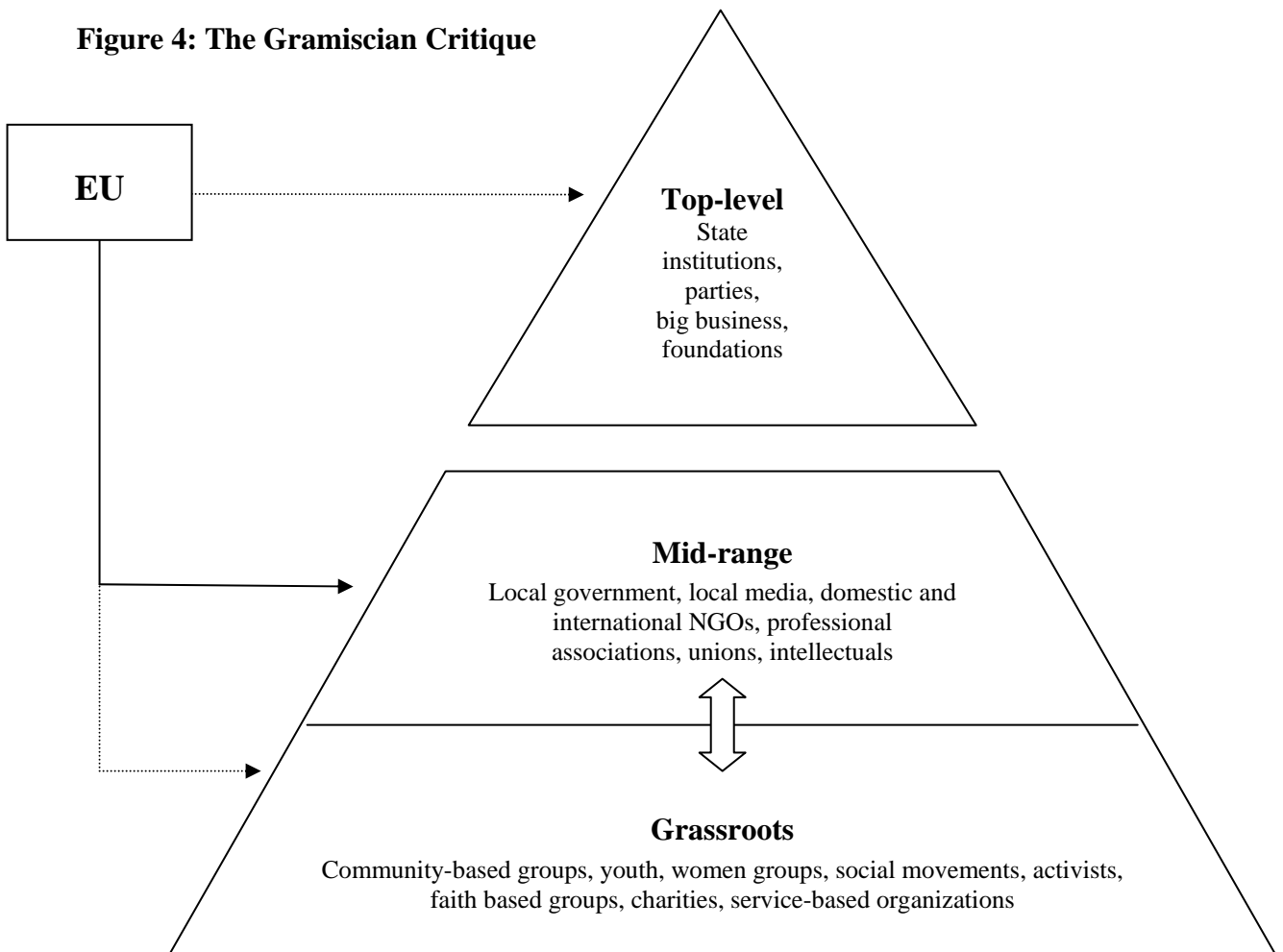


Hypothesis 3: The Gramscian Critique

A third and final hypothesis assumes that conflict is fundamentally driven by the top-levels of society and in particular by state-based actors. In turn, the potential for civil society to influence conflict depends fundamentally on the space the top-level and the state in particular leaves open to civil society engagement. If this space is limited or non-existent (i.e., in situations of authoritarian and illiberal contexts often found in conflict situations), then EU engagement with civil society alone is unlikely to yield a visible impact on conflict. Unless the EU exerts effective pressure on state actors to engage in democratic reform, thus altering the structure in which civil society

operates, EU policy is unlikely to induce conflict transformation. Likewise if the EU engages with state actors by supporting or failing to persuade neighbourhood states to alter their structural political deficiencies, then its support, engagement and financing of civil society cannot improve the effectiveness of EU conflict transformation policies. This is highlighted in Figure 4, which shows a detachment of the top levels of society from mid and grassroots actors. In this context, EU policy would ineffectively influence conflicts by engaging with CSOs yet failing to pressurize the top-levels to engage in structural change.

Figure 4: The Gramscian Critique



6. Guidelines for Empirical Research

The aim of this paper has been to provide a conceptual analysis and framework to understand the role and impact the EU may have on conflict and conflict transformation by interacting with local civil society in conflict contexts. Its purpose is to guide future empirical research into the EU's role, through civil society, in five conflicts in the neighbourhood: Georgia and Abkhazia, Moldova and Transnistria, Nagorno Karabakh, Morocco and Western Sahara and Israel-Palestine. More specifically, to allow for subsequent comparative analysis, the project would benefit if the empirical case studies were conducted by following a similar framework and structure, aimed at testing the three broad hypotheses outlined above. This could take the form of:

1. **The EU and Civil Society:** Based on secondary literature and an analysis of EU documents and declarations, provide a general analysis of EU involvement in the civil society domain of the conflict country/ies under investigation. In particular, outline which appear to be the general priorities and objectives of EU engagement with civil society, and which civil society actors and activities the EU appears to favour most and why, bearing in mind that development/democracy/peace processes may go along in tandem. Is the EU simply attempting to win legitimacy for its foreign policies through the engagement/co-option of civil society? Does it prioritize conflict resolution by bringing opposing sides together in dialogue? Does it principally focus on development objectives by focusing on service-delivery CSOs etc?
2. **CSO Typologies:** Based on the typology of actors provided in Table 1, select, study and interview one organizations at mid or grassroots levels, for each side of the conflict, and/bi-communal groups if/where relevant for each of the 8

types of actors (e.g., 1 CSO x 2 conflict parties x 8 types of CSO actors = 16 CSOs studied in each conflict).

3. **CSO Activities:** Analyse the activities of these organizations and whether their actions have direct/indirect bearing on the conflict; whether they are adversarial/non-adversarial; and whether they operate on the causes/symptoms of conflict.
4. **CSO Impact:** Analyse the impact specific activities and whether these activities lead to a) peacebuilding, b) holding or c) fuelling impacts on the conflict and why. In analysing impact (and effectiveness) consider interviewing other civil society or official observers of a particular CSO activity in order to cross-check analyses of impact and effectiveness.
5. **CSO Effectiveness:** Examine the factors that shape the effectiveness of these CSO activities and the role that a) relations with the state, b) intra- civil society dynamics, c) the rootedness and efficiency of the CSO and d) time/context specific factors play in shaping the effectiveness of these activities in the conflict.
6. **EU Impact:** Analyse (documents, secondary literature and interviews) EU involvement in the conflict and its interaction with the selected CSOs particularly through the ENP, as well as other EU policy frameworks already in place (e.g., the Partnership and Association or the Association Agreements). In particular focus on EU activities that help alter the structure within which CSOs in conflict operate as well as their ability to act as agents within the conflict environment in order to test hypotheses 1,2 and 3.
7. **Explaining EU Activities in the Civil Society Domain:** Map the results from section 6 with the analysis provided in section 1 in order to understand and

delve into the processes that drive EU actions in conflict contexts through civil society.

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