The European Institute of Peace: a new initiative for mediation and dialogue

In brief

A new peace organisation, unlike any other, was launched in May 2014: the European Institute of Peace (EIP). The EIP is backed by nine European governments, and its main purpose is to organise mediation and dialogue — including engagement with militant groups. Apart from this, the EIP's planned activities include evaluating the effectiveness of mediation/dialogue efforts, conducting conflict analysis and research, providing training, running a small grants programme, and bringing mediation/dialogue experts together to share their expertise. While the EIP has significant tasks ahead of it, it will need to work within limited resources, and it has no guarantee of long-term funding. There is also a risk that the establishment of the EIP could lead to the diversion of political and financial support away from other, equally important peace initiatives (including official EU peace initiatives, as well as peace initiatives by non-governmental organisations).

Introduction

In May 2014 ministers from nine European governments announced the launch of a new peace organisation: the European Institute of Peace (EIP). The EIP is based in Brussels, and its stated objective is to "[c]ontribute to and complement the global peace agenda of the European Union". However, the EIP is neither an official EU body, nor an international organisation in the usual sense of the term, nor a non-governmental organisation. Rather, it is a foundation established under Belgian law by nine European states (Belgium, Finland, Hungary, Italy, Luxembourg, Poland, Spain, Sweden, and Switzerland), with each state being represented on the EIP's nine-person board of governors. Of these nine states, eight are members of the EU — the ninth is Switzerland. The nine founding states have agreed to fund the EIP for its first three years. Apart from its board of governors, the EIP will also be supported by an advisory council, composed of mediation and dialogue experts from both within and outside Europe.[1]

The creation of the EIP had been under discussion for several years. Martti Ahtisaari (the former Finnish president and Nobel Peace Prize winner) suggested the idea in 2009.[2] The following year Carl Bildt and Alexander Stubb (at that time, the foreign ministers of Sweden and Finland) put forward the first formal proposal.[3] Another prominent advocate of the creation of the EIP was Franziska Brantner, a German Green politician who served as a Member of the European Parliament from 2009 to 2013.[4]

The planned functions of the EIP

According to published plans, the EIP's main focus will be on organising mediation and dialogue between parties to conflicts. Its staff will have mediation/dialogue expertise and will be expected to undertake most of this work themselves. The EIP may also organise mediations and dialogues facilitated by external experts. Aside from this main focus, the EIP's planned activities include evaluating the effectiveness of mediation/dialogue efforts (to help to make future efforts more effective), conducting conflict analysis and research, providing training (the details of which are not yet published), and making small grants to support mediation and dialogue projects. The EIP plans to work in collaboration with European national governments, with the European External Action Service (the EEAS — this is the EU's diplomatic service), with other EU institutions, and with international organisations such as the United Nations. In particular, the EIP plans to build a working relationship with the EEAS, which (among other things) could help the EIP to avoid duplicating the EEAS's work.[5]

At the time of writing (December 2014), the EIP is still recruiting its staff — the EIP is planning to recruit fifteen members of staff in total, and so far there are nine members of staff listed on the EIP's website. Over the coming months, the EIP is planning to complete its staff recruitment, and to establish its governance structures and a network of partners with which it can collaborate. Its early plans also include starting its first mediation efforts, its work on conflict analysis, its small grants programme, its training activities, and a fellowship programme enabling the EIP to receive the support of "fellows" seconded from other organisations.[6]

The potential strengths of the EIP

Once it is fully operational, we can hope for the EIP to have a number of important strengths:

1. The EIP's unusual status as a "semi-official" organisation — something halfway in between an international organisation and a non-governmental organisation — should put it in a strong position to conduct what is called "track-1½ diplomacy".[7]

    Track-1 diplomacy (traditional diplomacy) involves official discussions between government representatives, and *track-2 diplomacy* involves unofficial discussions between people who are in positions of influence but do not hold formal government or diplomatic positions. *Track-1½ diplomacy* involves off-the-record discussions that include both government representatives and those who do not hold formal positions.[8] One notable feature of track-1½ diplomacy is that it provides an avenue for governments to engage in discussions with militant groups.[9]

2. The EIP may be able to arrange for experts to be made available at very short notice, either to conduct urgent mediations or to provide urgent advice to the EEAS.[10]

3. The EIP may be able to function as a "hub" for expertise in mediation and dialogue — bringing experts together to share their knowledge.[11]

According to a 2012 report commissioned by the EEAS, the EU is weak in its capacity for track-1½ diplomacy with militant groups, for finding available conflict experts at short notice, and for bringing together expert knowledge of conflict.[12] The plans for the EIP can be understood as an attempt to address the weaknesses identified in the report. However, it is important to note that the views expressed in the report are contestable — while the report states that the EU has these weaknesses, this only represents the opinion of the authors of the report, rather than any widespread consensus. It remains to be seen to what extent the EIP will, in fact, be able to fill gaps in existing provision.

The limitations of the EIP

As well as acknowledging the potential strengths of the EIP, we also need to be aware of its likely limitations. Even when it is fully operational, the EIP will be a small organisation, with a modest budget and a small staff team. According to a 2013 report commissioned by the European Parliament, the EIP's annual budget is estimated at 3.1 million euro.[13] For comparison, the European Defence Agency — the EU body responsible for military cooperation — has 124 members of staff and an annual budget of 30.5 million euro, according to its 2013 annual report.[14]

	European Defence Agency	European Institute of Peace
Purpose of organisation	Military cooperation	Working for peace
Staff	124	15
Annual budget (€)	30.5 million	3.1 million

The EIP will need to be careful how it uses its resources. We should hope that it will be able to use its position to make a unique contribution to peace work, rather than merely duplicating work that is being done elsewhere. It will need to consider carefully which conflicts it should work on — given that its stated purpose is to support the EU's peace agenda,[15] it may be expected to concentrate its resources on those parts of the world where EU policy-makers consider that the EU has a strategic interest in ensuring stability[16] — i.e. Europe, Africa, and the Middle East.[17] While the EIP has stated that it will engage in multi-track diplomacy,[18] it may be of most benefit for it to concentrate primarily on track-1½ diplomacy. We should also hope that the EIP will have sufficient capacity to engage in conflict prevention work (i.e. working to build better relationships in areas where there is a risk of violent conflict), rather than needing to devote all of its mediation/dialogue resources to crisis management.[19]

Another very significant issue is how the EIP can secure long-term funding, given that its current funding arrangements only last for three years.[20] The EIP could seek future funding from the EU, from national governments, or from private donors (or from some combination of the three).[21]

Apart from resource issues, there is also the question of how the EIP can establish and maintain a reputation for being a reliably impartial third party. The EIP's success will depend on it being able to gain the cooperation of others (including external experts, network partners, national governments, European institutions, international organisations, and militant groups). The EIP could lose this cooperation if it comes to be perceived as being too close to the EEAS, to certain national governments, or to certain private donors — whether or not this perception is accurate. It is important, therefore, for the EIP to be careful to guard its (both actual and perceived) independence, even while it seeks to work closely with the EEAS and with European national governments.

Possible effects on peace work outside the EIP

While the EIP has the potential to play an important role in promoting peace, there is also a risk that its existence could divert support away from other peace initiatives.

There are two aspects to this potential problem. In the first place, we need to be aware that there are already a number of official EU initiatives to promote mediation and dialogue, including a dedicated Mediation Support Team in the EEAS.[22] The activities of the EIP could have the unintended consequence of diverting political and financial support away from work of this kind.[23]

In the second place, there is a risk that the EIP could end up in competition with the non-governmental organisations currently involved in mediation and dialogue work.[24] There are many non-governmental organisations established in this field,[25] and the EIP could end up competing with them for political support, for funding, for access to the EU institutions, and for access to those in positions of influence in conflict-affected areas. To some extent, however, the EIP may be able to avoid these pitfalls by working together with the relevant non-governmental organisations to ensure that the EIP complements their work, rather than duplicating their work or otherwise competing with it.

Overall, the most serious concern is that the allocation of funding to the EIP may lead to public funds being diverted away from the official EU initiatives and non-governmental organisations that currently do mediation and dialogue work. Such a diversion of funds could cause well-established peace initiatives, with good track records for effectiveness, to fail for lack of funding.

> *"If EU governments wish to avoid war, they need to be willing to invest in peace."*

However, there is no reason why such a diversion of funds would be necessary. If the EU Member States can afford 190 billion euro of military spending in one year[26] (roughly 520 million euro per day), then it must be possible for them to find 3.1 million euro per year for the EIP without diverting that money away from other peace initiatives. It is a question of political priorities. If EU governments wish to avoid war, they need to be willing to invest in peace.

Conclusion

The launch of the EIP merits a cautious welcome. On the one hand, we may expect the EIP to provide new capacity for mediation and dialogue, especially track-1½ diplomacy, and to create new opportunities for engagement with militant groups.[27] To a lesser extent, EIP may be able to contribute to other forms of peace work. If the EIP is able to work closely with the EEAS, then it may be able to use its position to advocate for non-violent approaches to conflict.

On the other hand, it should be appreciated that, even when it becomes fully operational, the EIP will be a small organisation, limited in what it can achieve. Moreover, the EIP will need to attract both political and financial support in order to succeed — and if this is at the expense of official EU mediation/dialogue work, or at the expense of peace initiatives by non-governmental organisations, then this could ultimately prove counterproductive from the point of view of promoting peace.

The Quaker Council for European Affairs supports non-violent conflict resolution, and would advocate for the EIP to receive the political and financial support that it needs. At the same time, the existence of the EIP should not be used as a pretext to reduce the support given to other peace initiatives.

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