

The EU and Conflict Resolution: Promoting Peace in the Backyard

NATHALIE TOCCI

Routledge (London, 2007), 202 + xvi pp.

ISBN 978-0-415-41394-7

It is widely accepted that the European Union has a powerful role to play in the resolution of conflict. Indeed, the EU has often been presented as the world's most ambitious conflict resolution project. However, such perceptions appear to be based on past purposes and results rather than contemporary and future challenges. Thus far, the role of the EU in conflict resolution has tended to be focused on two specific cases. In the first instance, it has been lauded for the way in which it has managed to extinguish the Franco-German tensions and rivalry that lay at the heart of European insecurity for the latter part of the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century. Secondly, and perhaps less obviously, through the mass enlargement of 2004, which saw eight former communist countries join the bloc, it has served as a vital element in the process of healing the Cold War divide between East and West Europe. However, while both of these are truly enormous achievements that have brought fundamental peace and stability to the European continent, the EU continues to face major challenges. The question facing EU decision makers is how the European Union can adapt, enhance and update its goal of conflict resolution in order to provide a means to address a range of conflicts that simmer away at the fringes of the Union.

The EU and Conflict Resolution: Promoting Peace in the Backyard seeks to address this very question: how can the European Union act to transform those disputes that lurk beyond its current boundaries? To do this, the first chapter presents an overview of the ways in which the European Union can address conflict. This theoretical chapter explores the evolution of the European Union's conflict resolution capacity, analysing such tools and mechanisms as conditionality, social learning and passive enforcement. In other words, what measures can the EU introduce to force a country to behave in a certain way, what can it do to alter the way in which a party understands and approaches a conflict and how can it encourage a country to adopt the rules of European behaviour? In order to explain the efficacy of each of these mechanisms, the work also examines a range of determinants shaping this efficacy. Unsurprisingly, the key conclusion is that, 'when full membership is an option, the EU's potential leverage is higher than in cases where relations are based on association, partnership or financial assistance.' Likewise, the perceived importance of the EU to a party is a key factor in deciding how a state responds to EU policies. Lastly, timing is all important. Expecting countries to make immediate changes in the hope of the long-term prospect of membership is problematic. Taken together, these ideas provide the basic

parameters for understanding the role the EU can play and assessing how successful it is going to be in its efforts to transform a conflict, or promote peace and stability.

Thereafter, the work explores the way in which these tools have been put into action across a variety of specific examples. The array of case studies tackled is impressive in its scope. In addition to Cyprus and the Kurdish issue, both of which have immediate resonance, the author also addresses the question of Israel-Palestine, Serbia and Montenegro and the conflicts in the Caucasus. As the author explains, these cases have been chosen precisely in order to explore how the EU's conflict management techniques can be applied across a range of different relationships. These examples are then revisited in the final chapter, where the work assesses what wider lessons can be learned from the cases about the way in which the European Union can contribute to conflict management, resolution and transformation.

In the case of Cyprus, the first conflict that is addressed, the author tackles the question of the degree to which the process of accession acted as a catalyst for a settlement process. This is a subject that she has addressed in her earlier work, and so is fairly familiar territory. In assessing the role of the EU, the point is made that when the EU first entered into membership discussions with the Republic of Cyprus, the expectation was that Cyprus would join when a settlement had been reached. However, as the process continued, this gradually became watered down. Eventually, this element of conditionality was abandoned in the case of the Greek Cypriots, but in fact strengthened in the case of Turkey. This, as the author suggests, brought about mixed results. It meant that whereas Turkey eventually came to understand the importance of solving Cyprus in terms of its own accession hopes, the Greek Cypriots were left in a position where they could adopt a hard line position with little or no cost to their own membership hopes. Indeed, this is where most observers now recognise that the EU made its most major mistake. In its fixation on the intransigence of Rauf Denktash and successive Turkish Governments, and assisted by the apparent moderation of successive Greek Cypriot leaders, it had neglected to consider the possibility that the Greek Cypriots might eventually elect a leader with equally hard line views as his counterpart across the Green Line. This is what happened in 2003, with the election of Tassos Papadopoulos. However, by that point it was too late to change things. As many EU leaders came to understand, this complacency was a huge mistake.

The obvious question is whether this was a mistake that could have been rectified before 1 May 2004, when Cyprus joined the EU – or even avoided altogether. The work appears to be strangely silent on this key question. In reality, though, it is likely that conditionality was a rather blunt tool, for both political and institutional reasons. Politically, it would have meant that Greece would have had to have dropped its threat to veto the entire enlargement process unless Cyprus was included. Even though the Greek Government supported the Annan Plan, would it have been prepared to punish the Greek Cypriots for rejecting it? Greece treads a very difficult path on Cyprus. If it had pushed the Greek Cypriots too hard it would have faced the inevitable accusation that it was trying to force Cyprus to accept a peace agreement to solve a problem that Greece had played a major part in creating. Secondly, even if Greece had been willing to back down, it would

have been very difficult to halt the accession process in order to disentangle Cyprus from the other nine acceding states. The Treaty of Accession being ratified by the national parliaments treated the countries as a group. To have presented an entirely new treaty would have taken the whole ratification process back to square one.

In this sense, and as is suggested, social learning and passive enforcement could have played a stronger role in the case of Cyprus. In the case of passive enforcement, the very interesting point is made that while the inability of a divided Cyprus to adhere to the *acquis communautaire*, the EU's body of laws, was initially seen as a hindrance on the island's accession, by the end of the process it had become a tool of rejecting the terms of a peace agreement. Simply put, whereas at the start of the process the concern was that a divided Cyprus could not meet the requirements of the *acquis*, by the end of the accession process the Greek Cypriots leadership – in rejecting the Annan Plan – argued that the model of reunification on offer was in fact in contravention of the *acquis* and so should not be accepted. As for the notion of social learning, this could have been a more fruitful line of approach. However, this is also a longer-term project. A mindset cannot be changed overnight. Suffice to say, the Papadopoulos Administration simply did not understand the underlying values of the European Union. Meanwhile, many others, most notably those favouring the European Solution, in fact adopted a wholly warped understanding of what it means to be a part of EU, viewing it as a way of achieving their nationalist ends. This could have been better tackled by the EU, but even then the chances of succeeding, given the short space of time available, were minimal.

This notion of social learning is rather interesting when one considered bilateral Greek-Turkish relations – a case not covered in the book. The process of rapprochement, which began in 1999, provides an extremely valuable insight into the ways in which the European Union can provide an impetus for a process of conflict resolution by shaping the thinking of decision makers. As this case shows, it is not so much the lure of membership for Turkey, the much vaunted 'power of attraction', that proved to be the defining influence on the process. Instead, it was the process of 'Europeanisation', the element of social learning, which became embedded in Greek political thinking, which acted as the spur for the momentous developments that took place in 1999.

After Cyprus, the work proceeds to examine the other cases. While the book provides a very interesting range of examples, and these are structured according to a specific range of relationships, it is nevertheless noticeable that it omits several key problems that Europe will have to face in the years ahead. Perhaps most obviously, while the work explored the interesting, and little analysed, case of the dissolution of the state union between Serbia and Montenegro, it did not examine the more obvious trio of Balkan conflicts: FYR Macedonia, Kosovo and Bosnia-Herzegovina. In the case of Macedonia, a peace agreement put in place in 2001 cannot mask the fact that deep divisions continue to exist between the large ethnic Albanian minority and the Slavic majority. At the same time, the ongoing dispute with Greece over the name represents a further destabilising influence. Meanwhile, over in Bosnia, efforts to forge a multiethnic state have all but failed. Over a decade has now passed since the Dayton peace accords brought an end to the vicious and bloody civil war and

yet the country remains deeply divided along ethnic lines and subject to international oversight. Lastly, Kosovo, which unilaterally declared independence in February 2008, poses perhaps the biggest challenge of all. What role could, or should, the EU play in all these cases? Given that the Western Balkans represents the next phase of EU enlargement – or, more correctly ‘EU completion’ as many officials rightfully note – it would have been good to see these cases addressed simply because of their salience for the Union.

Still, while there is a strong case for seeing these other examples addressed, especially given their immediate resonance and significance, one can also appreciate the fact that there are only so many studies that could have been covered. To this extent, while it would have been good to see some reference to the Greek-Turkish conflict or the remaining conflicts in the Balkans – or even to the question of Transnistria, another conflict in Europe’s backyard – the omission of these cases should not detract from the value of the work in laying out a model for understanding how the EU can shape disputes on its periphery. In addition to the recent co-edited book by Diez, Stetter and Albert, *The European Union and Border Conflicts* (Cambridge, 2008) – another work that uses case studies, but again curiously omits the Balkans – *The EU and Conflict Resolution: Promoting Peace in the Backyard* is an extremely interesting and very welcome addition to the developing body of literature on the role of the European Union in the management of conflict.

JAMES KER-LINDSAY