

ANNUAL REPORT 2022

Dialogue in times of uncertainty

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peaceinstitute

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LOOKING BACK ON 2022



NILS DUQUET, DIRECTOR, FLEMISH PEACE INSTITUTE

In 2022, a large-scale war with global implications gripped Europe. The Russian military invasion of Ukraine caused terrible scenes of violence and throughout the world the fear of another world war – and even the use of nuclear weapons – was and is palpable.

The Flemish Peace Institute was established by the Flemish Parliament in 2004 to contribute to peace and violence prevention in our own society and in the rest of the world through research, advice and information activities.

At its basis was the Flemish idea of peace, and the slogan “Nooit meer oorlog” (Never again war), relating back to the trenches in Flanders Fields, came up during the discussion of the invasion of Ukraine in the Flemish Parliament. Needless to say, that war once again put the themes around which we work in the spotlight. It made our research on arms exports and nuclear disarmament, but also our work on polarisation in society and how to deal with a violent past, even more topical.

However, the war in Ukraine also brought to the surface a more fundamental question: What does peace mean? Is peace merely the absence of violence, the silencing of weapons? Or does peace mean more than that? At the Flemish Peace Institute, we are convinced that peace is more than just a “negative peace”. With our research, we want to contribute to what is often called “positive peace”. This concept is much more difficult

to define, but therefore no less important. This peace is aimed at removing or transforming the causes of violence. In this way, we can create the basic conditions necessary for a non-violent, sustainable and just society. Especially in times of war, thinking about and working for peace should definitely be a priority.

The Flemish Parliament immediately condemned the Russian military invasion and expressed its solidarity with the Ukrainian people. It also demanded that Russia fully withdraw its military forces from Ukraine and urged the pursuit of a peaceful solution through diplomatic channels, in line with the principles and obligations of international law. The Flemish Parliament further asked the Flemish government to consider what humanitarian aid and other assistance Flanders could provide. Here, the Flemish Peace Institute could take up a role.

In 2022, the Flemish Peace Institute began a new line of research into the possibilities and limitations of a peace-oriented Flemish foreign policy. Flanders alone will not be able to stop the war in Ukraine, but we are convinced that Flanders can play an important role in promoting peace and violence prevention in Ukraine and in other parts of the world thanks to its own competences in foreign policy. Indeed, Flanders has competences in several policy areas that are closely related to positive peace, such as education, the economy and foreign trade, development cooperation, youth, culture,

Flanders, as a peaceful region with a long-term vision based on its own competences, can transcend the purely military logic in Ukraine but also in other countries plagued by violence and armed conflict.

media, immovable heritage and so on. All of these competences contribute in the longer term to societies that are more robustly able to stand against the outbreak of violence. Flanders, as a peaceful region with a long-term vision based on its own competences, can transcend the purely military logic in Ukraine but also in other countries plagued by violence and armed conflict.

Over the past year, in the first phase of the ongoing research on a peace-oriented Flemish foreign policy, we examined how other countries and federated states in Europe have developed peace-oriented foreign policies. In the next phase, we analysed Flanders' foreign policy. Concerning the opportunities for Flanders to develop a truly peace-oriented foreign policy – and the related challenges – we entered into dialogue with various stakeholders from the Flemish government, diplomacy, cultural and economic sectors of civil society, and academia. In 2023, we will publish the results of this analysis and explain them in the Flemish Parliament.

However, this research on a peace-oriented foreign policy is only one of many research projects of the Flemish Peace Institute. The activities of the institute are driven by the Strategic Plan 2020–2024. In it, research obviously remains the main activity. In 2022, the institute published no fewer than ten research reports, eight analytical notes and

four advisory notes, and we also contributed to some ten external publications. (A complete list can be found on page 37.)

Last year, researchers from the cluster “Weapons, peace and violence” examined the defence-related sector in Flanders, export controls on conventional weapons and dual-use products, the illegal arms trade and firearms violence. In the “Conflict, peace and society” cluster, research was conducted into (online) polarisation and other aspects of radicalisation, peace education and group violence in Flanders. In this way – in line with the strategic plan – both research clusters were able to perpetuate existing research lines while at the same time starting up several new research projects.

The Flemish Peace Institute’s research always starts from the idea of multi-voicedness and engaging in dialogue with various stakeholders. That is also why we chose “Dialogue in times of uncertainty” as the overarching theme of this annual report. Constructive dialogue is not always easy, but it is necessary. After all, peace cannot be captured in a single definition or slogan. Different perspectives are needed to thoroughly analyse a problem and to formulate constructive advice. In this annual report, our researchers therefore enter into dialogue with various inspiring foreign partners and researchers, in search of new ideas on peace and violence prevention that can provide additional inspiration today.

In 2022, we organised no fewer than 12 of our own events and webinars, and the director and researchers presented at some 40 events organised by other organisations. National and international media coverage of the Flemish Peace Institute’s work also reached new heights in 2022.

Engaging in dialogue is really part of our researchers’ DNA. Consequently, they very often present their research results to various target groups during information activities organised by the Peace Institute. In this way, they increase the impact of their in-depth research and targeted advice on policy and practice.

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The Flemish Parliament remains the primary target audience of the Flemish Peace Institute. We therefore closely monitored the various activities of the parliament concerning peace. Three times we provided explanations within the Foreign Policy Committee. With the members of that committee, we also went on a working visit to a company active in the defence sector and to Ostend Airport’s customs. Additionally, we are pleased that our research and advice are being used by members of parliament



in their legislative and monitoring activities. But our research is also used by other policy-makers – for example, on nuclear disarmament or investigations of the illegal arms trade. Many practitioners, for instance in education, local authorities, civil society or the police, also use it to support their work. Finally, in 2022, as in previous years, the institute worked closely with several Flemish universities and research groups.

The research work of the Flemish Peace Institute also has an international resonance. For instance, since 2022, the institute has been coordinating a large-scale research project, funded by the European Commission, on firearms violence in Europe (Project INSIGHT), and in recent years the institute has worked intensively with both the United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research (UNIDIR) and the European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction (EMCDDA) in the context of research into new innovative methods to improve arms export control and reduce drug-related firearms violence in Europe, respectively. Furthermore, the institute's director and researchers are regularly invited to give lectures and consultations abroad and questioned by the international media. In this way, we also engage in an international dialogue about our research and are able to put Flanders on the international map as a peaceful region.

The Flemish Peace Institute's founding decree states that the institute shall cooperate with similar organisations in its activities, both nationally and internationally. In 2022, the institute took the initiative to strengthen the dialogue and cooperation between different European peace institutes. Specifically, it started mapping the activities of other peace institutes. This resulted in two consultation events in which peace

In May 2023, the Flemish Peace Institute, together with other European institutes, will hold an international conference at the Flemish Parliament.

how peace research in Europe can further contribute to policy and practice. In this way, the Flemish Peace Institute wants to take a leading role in continuing to strengthen the dialogue between European peace institutes.

Strengthening dialogue with other peace institutes is part of our Peace Focus. With this project, we want not only to strengthen international cooperation but also to create extra attention towards current peace themes at home and stimulate thinking about peace. We do this partly by organising events at symbolic moments. Last year, for instance, we organised a screening of the documentary Trenches and a discussion

institutes from all over Europe exchanged views on contemporary challenges for peace research. In May 2023, the Flemish Peace Institute, together with other European institutes, will hold an international conference at the Flemish Parliament. The aim of this conference is to present some important evolutions in peace research and to reflect together on



Nils Duquet, director at the Flemish Peace Institute and Jan Peumans, Chair of the Board of Directors.



Youngsters visit the Flemish Parliament and decide who deserves a nomination for the Nobel Peace Prize.

evening on the war in Ukraine on International Peace Day. Furthermore, we again invited an inspiring guest speaker – author Geert Mak – to the 11 November Lecture, which we traditionally organise together with Ypres (the “Peace City”) and the In Flanders Fields Museum. In addition, we continued to build on our ongoing Nobel Prize work, in which, for the second year in a row, youngsters were given the opportunity to decide for themselves during an event in the Flemish Parliament who deserves the nomination of the Flemish Peace Institute for the Nobel Peace Prize. Moreover, a new educational package developed for this purpose will be distributed in the coming months to anyone who wants to encourage young people – in the classroom or beyond – to think about peace.

In summary, then, 2022 was a very productive year for the Flemish Peace Institute and in particular for the Scientific Secretariat. As director, I would like to thank the Peace Institute team, which in 2022 consisted of five researchers, a communications manager and two office managers, for their commitment, enthusiasm and high-quality work. I would also like to thank our Chair, the board of directors and the Scientific Council for their constructive cooperation and valuable dialogue. And of course we owe sincere thanks to the Speaker and the various departments of the Flemish Parliament for supporting our work in 2022.

Finally, I would like to stress that, in these uncertain times and with policy-makers hounded by the war in Ukraine, important choices are being made. Those choices will have long-term consequences for peace and security. Sufficient transparency, political and public debate, and democratic control are therefore crucial. So let us stay focused on dialogue, on how we can cooperate better in the future and on how we can ensure that we invest sufficiently in peaceful coexistence in Flanders and beyond. Flanders' powers are important levers in this regard. When it comes to a peace-oriented foreign policy, the Flemish Parliament can be both the driving and the monitoring body. With research work, advice and information activities, the Flemish Peace Institute will therefore continue to provide the Flemish Parliament with full support in this area in the years to come.

PEACE INSTITUTE 2022 IN FIGURES

18

Research reports and analyses

4

Advisory notes based on our research

3

Presentations to the Foreign Policy Committee of the Flemish Parliament

3

Own webinars for which 311 people registered

9

Own live events

1

Working visit with members of the Flemish Parliament's Foreign Policy Committee and board of directors of the Flemish Peace Institute

39

Substantive contributions to external information activities

86

Times featured in the media, 26 times of which on television or radio

8

Online newsletters

165

Posts on social media

The Flemish Peace Institute in dialogue

The Flemish Peace Institute is anything but an ivory tower. In 2022, during our contacts with the Flemish Parliament and within our 12 own events and 39 contributions to external activities, we permanently broadened our horizons by entering into dialogue with numerous external parties. This annual report reflects that DNA of dialogue. Our four researchers entered into dialogue with international interlocutors, aiming to enriching their and your views on current topics around peace. Four interviews full of intriguing insights on mutual radicalisation, Ukraine, the Balkans and the contemporary arms industry are the result.



Deradicalisation after mutual radicalisation: Annelies Pauwels speaks with Dr Fathali Moghaddam

Dr. Fathali M. Moghaddam is a professor of psychology at Georgetown University. He was also editor-in-chief of *Peace and Conflict: Journal of Peace Psychology* from 2014 to 2021 and is currently an editor at Cambridge University Press. He has published extensively on radicalisation, inter-group conflict, human rights and duties, and the psychology of democracy, dictatorship and politics. Researcher **Annelies Pauwels** interviewed him about Ukraine and his book *Mutual radicalization: how groups and nations drive each other to extremes*.

In your book you describe mutual radicalisation as a situation where two groups or countries become more and more extreme in their positions about one another. This is a cyclical process, as each move by one of the parties leads to further radicalisation of the opponent. It is also very dangerous, as it can spiral out of control. Do you think the current conflict between NATO and Russia fits the concept of mutual radicalisation?

Fathali M. Moghaddam: The current conflict between Russia and NATO has all the dangers of mutual radicalisation. Of course, I completely understand how NATO has got into this situation of mutual radicalisation with Russia. The invasion of Ukraine is wrong. Nobody is disputing that. What we're really debating is how to proceed, so that the long-term consequences are less detrimental.

In this conflict, Russia and NATO are radicalising without necessarily wanting to. They are not looking at the big picture, but at the next step of the opponent and how to deal with it.

The key feature of mutual radicalisation is the power of the collective process overcoming rational individuals. Individually we can sit down and think rationally about how we are doing the wrong thing, but when we become part of a collective, that force pushes us forward and we radicalise without wanting to. In this conflict, Russia and NATO are radicalising without necessarily wanting to. They are not looking at the big picture, but at the next step of the opponent and how to deal with it. And each step is met by more radicalisation by the opponent. For example, at the moment, they are looking at the spring offensive and are building up militarily: they are becoming more and more radical as they prepare for the restarting of movement on the battlefield.

We can see a ratcheting-up in the conflict. On the NATO side, we can see increased radicalisation in the weapons that are being provided. We also see an escalation in the kinds of targets both sides are firing at.

Once you ratchet up the threat, it is very difficult to come back down. Once you have introduced tanks on the Ukraine side, you can't then take them away. Once you have ordered a call-up of all young men on the Russian side, you can't suddenly say, "No more of this."

Your model of mutual radicalisation identifies three stages: group mobilisation, with each group taking positions and distancing themselves from out-groups around particular issues; extreme in-group cohesion, when conformity and obedience increase within groups and the distance between groups grows; and identity transformation, when the identity of each group changes on the basis

of enmity towards the out-group. Each of these stages sees the opposites drift further apart. Can you identify these stages in the Russia–NATO relations?

Fathali M. Moghaddam: We have now completed the stage of group mobilisation. Each group has developed ideas about justice and injustice: they see the other group as unjust and their own cause as just. In the perception of the Russians, NATO wants to destroy Russia and is attacking Russia through Ukraine. NATO, on the other side, sees the invasion of Ukraine as the beginning of an expansion into all of Eastern Europe. So, the threat of both sides is a perception that is, you could say, exaggerated. But that is what propels each side; perceptions move the conflict, not reality.

Since the beginning of the war, it has become both within NATO and Russia more and more difficult for anybody to speak against the conflict in a way that is not exactly in line with the view of their group.

The next stage is extreme in-group cohesion. Here, each side is looking to expand its own group in opposition to the other group. Examples of this are the military training exercises that Belarus recently undertook with Russia, but also the expansion of NATO to countries that had so far adopted policies of neutrality.

In this stage, conformity and obedience within each group increase. Since the beginning of the war, it has become both within NATO and Russia more and more difficult for anybody to speak against the conflict in a way that is not exactly in line with the view of their group. On the Russian side, this has resulted in any Russian who questions the war becoming victimised. On the NATO side, enforcing conformity occurs much more subtly – it doesn't involve arresting people and putting them in prison. But we know from research on conformity that you can enforce it in many subtle ways. People in their everyday lives conform to social norms, almost unconsciously, without thinking about being conformist. In this conflict too, the way things are structured to keep us in line is very subtle. And we conform to it with the acknowledgement that we could do things differently.

In your work you have analysed various cases of mutual radicalisation. Are there other cases involving nuclear powers?

Fathali M. Moghaddam: The use of a very powerful threat like nuclear weapons does come up in other cases of mutual radicalisation – for instance, the United States and Russia in the 1960s. The risk is that those making that threat are trying to draw a red line, saying, “If you go beyond this, we are going to use the ultimate weapon.” But the problem with red lines is that they are often crossed because the leadership does not have control of what happens on the ground. Conflict can be generated by leaders, but it can't be controlled by leaders.

And because leaders can't control what is happening on the ground, they're making threats that make the situation worse, not better.

Do you see viable options for deradicalisation in this process of mutual radicalisation?

Fathali M. Moghaddam: The danger of this conflict is that it may expand to other countries – for instance, if Belarus gets pulled in, if NATO expands, or if other countries start supplying weapons or other types of resources. But those dangers can also lead to a possibility for deradicalisation. My suggestion for deradicalisation is that first, the two main groups must come to see the situation in a way that is similar. They have to recognise mutual radicalisation the way it has happened. If they start with a perception of the situation that is completely different, it is impossible to come to a process of deradicalisation. Their perceptions have to change first. Other countries – China, Belarus, India – can be instrumental in developing a better understanding of the conflict, closer to how Russia is thinking. This may get deradicalisation moving.

NATO also should hold an internal meeting – perhaps involving a combination of politicians and academics – to critically rethink what happened. That's very difficult to do at the moment, because NATO allies are in the second stage of mutual radicalisation. They are all mobilised and extremely cohesive, and their identities are centred around this conflict. It is nevertheless urgent because we don't know where the lines of conflict will be next winter. If we start now to make plans in a different direction, we could have some positive outcomes in two or three years. If we don't, this war could go on for ten years.

You have in the past highlighted the need to avoid mutual radicalisation becoming an intergenerational issue, with the next generations adopting a similar enmity towards the other party. What can we do to work with young people from a long-term perspective?

Fathali M. Moghaddam: We should reverse the process of isolating all of Russia. We should start in the arts, in ballet, in the symphony orchestra and so on. Opening that process may help to reverse what's happening and is needed to gradually reconstruct the image of Russians. Otherwise, it may have detrimental long-term consequences.

Various case studies in your book involve a broader ideological opposition between Islam and the West. Is here too an ideological divide present?

Fathali M. Moghaddam: Yes, I think there is an ideological divide. This divide is based on the perception that NATO is more democratic, and Russia and its allies are more dictatorial. But we have to keep in mind that many countries have remained neutral and not all of those neutral countries are on the dictatorship side. Also, it is too simplistic to divide the world into democracies and dictatorships; it is more accurate to place most countries on a continuum from dictatorship to democracy.

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A more open and prosperous Russia will not come when Russia feels it is being threatened. We know from the psychology of group relations that when people feel threatened, they do not support human rights, they do not become more demo-

cratic; instead, they become more supportive of strong and centralised leadership.

We have to somehow get out of looking at the situation from the perspective of somebody trapped in this process of mutual radicalisation. Until then, we won't be able to see or recognise a constructive solution.



Pathways towards a culture of peace: Maarten Van Alstein speaks with Velma Šarić and Tatjana Milovanović of the Post-Conflict Research Center in Sarajevo

The Post-Conflict Research Center is a non-governmental peacebuilding organisation and research centre based in Sarajevo, Bosnia. Researcher **Maarten Van Alstein** went in search of a breath of fresh air in a dialogue on peace with **Velma Šarić** and **Tatjana Milovanović**, Founder and Program Director at the research centre where the work towards a culture of peace and conflict prevention in the Western Balkans takes a central place.

Could you tell us more about your organisation and how you got involved?

Velma Šarić: Being a teenager at the time, I was deeply affected by the war. That is probably the only reason why I ended up in the field of peacebuilding. As a country, we are still dealing with a lot of division. There is not, for example, one shared historical narrative about the war – there are three different narratives. Between 25,000 and 50,000 women were sexually abused or raped during the war. Sarajevo experienced the longest siege in modern history. More than 1,600 children were killed in Sarajevo alone. We are still dealing with the consequences of the genocide in Srebrenica. Transitional justice and post-conflict reconstruction are going slowly. We are a country in the heart of Europe, but we still have the phenomenon of segregation in our education, with the system of “two schools under one roof”. Kids physically go into the same building but are taught completely different curriculums. In that context, we are trying to find innovative approaches to engage young people in peacebuilding conversations. One of these methods is Balkan Diskurs, a pan-ethnic youth platform where we provide a free space for young people to make their voices heard.

That is our vision: to see diversity as something to celebrate, while on an individual level it is important to feel safe and warm in your own community.

Tatjana Milovanović: We use multimedia and the creative arts, but we also focus on research and monitoring the peacebuilding field in the region. The primary target audience of many of our programmes is young people, but we also do a lot of work with survivors and victims of

the Bosnian war and genocide. Our goal is to empower them to tell their stories and help them in their everyday life and their fight for their rights, while also documenting their stories of survival.

In a post-conflict society, after the experience of sexual violence and genocide, memories are very painful and bitter. On your website you say you are dedicated to fostering a culture of peace. What does that mean for you?

Tatjana Milovanović: In our work with young people we ask them what peace means to them. It is such a big term. At the same time, it has a very practical side. In Yugoslavia people lived together peacefully. Ordinary people did not expect the war to happen. Then after the war they were pushed into this very westernised way of thinking, involving big terms such as “democracy” and “civil society”, “peacebuilding” and “transitional justice”. Many people thought of peace in the sense of the ending of actual fighting. What we now try to do is make young people think about peace in a positive sense as well, as both individual and communal. The first dimension is very subjective. It is a sense of feeling safe in your own community, feeling the safety of your identity in your community.

At the same time, we welcome the diversity of this country. That is our vision: to see diversity as something to celebrate, while on an individual level it is important to feel safe and warm in your own community.

Especially now with the war in Ukraine and what we are witnessing in Europe, Bosnia and the Balkans should be a constant reminder of the kinds of consequences war entails.

intervention and a lot of international diplomacy. In a country divided into ten cantons and political districts with 186 ministries, we try to remind people of the necessity of cherishing peace. Many young people don't have the experience of a sense of belonging to the country. They don't feel that politicians care about their future, their education, their well-being. So cultivating a culture of peace involves reminding young people that peace is more than merely not having a war – that it is also about celebrating the diversities we have in a country with different ethnic and religious groups. We always need to talk about and cultivate this culture of peace because it is extremely necessary. Especially now with the war in Ukraine and what we are witnessing in Europe, Bosnia and the Balkans should be a constant reminder of the kinds of consequences war entails.

Velma Šarić: From a historical point of view, and keeping in mind that the Dayton peace accord actually is the Bosnian constitution, the war did not stop because of an agreement between people, but because of a military

We do not know when the war in Ukraine will end, but what, in your view, can we learn from Bosnia and Herzegovina in terms of how a post-conflict society can build a culture of peace?

Tatjana Milovanović: I think Ukraine and people in the region might also learn from our experiences now, while the war is still raging. We have already had several conversations with Ukrainian activists, especially women leaders, about this. We first talked about the importance of documentation. In Bosnia that proved to be incredibly valuable for later judicial processes and war crime trials. For example, it is important to think now about how we will be able in the future to prove the identities of missing people. The International Commission on Missing Persons was established because of the war in Bosnia, and there is

a lot of technical and practical expertise that unfortunately now can also be implemented in Ukraine. When it comes to the peace agreement and the post-conflict

After any conflict or war, the building of peace is such a long-term process. It takes decades to really heal.

period, a lot of people in Bosnia feel that the Dayton accord was a forced agreement that left a lot of unfinished business. The real work actually starts after a peace agreement is signed. Because our country did not have enough support to help people, there are still many people in Bosnia suffering from the consequences of the war, especially women survivors of sexual violence and rape. I think that only a couple of thousand of them actually spoke about their experiences. I think that collectively, as a society, we have failed to give them

proper reparations, proper psychosocial support and proper mental health support, which are all incredibly necessary. Also, many people who lived through the siege of Sarajevo did not receive support after the war. Even 30 years later, a great number of people are still affected by their war-time experiences. Obviously, through transgenerational trauma, their children are also

affected. After any conflict or war, the building of peace is such a long-term process. It takes decades to really heal. There is no coming out of it in one or two years' time. In fact there is not really any way of coming out of it. Society will constantly have to deal and re-deal with the violent past. That is definitely a lesson we learned.

Velma Šarić: I want to mention something that the international community is already doing right at this moment, and that is understanding that what Ukraine needs now is military help. We are happy to see that they are not struggling with embargos on weapons like we had to do. Another important issue is that of local ownership. It is important that the international community listens to local people and local civil society organisations.

In terms of processes of reconciliation, in Bosnia we learned that we lost the years immediately following the peace agreement. People were tired from the war, and this had an impact on their willingness to actually build peace. It taught us a very important lesson: the first steps to build a culture of peace need to be monitored closely and evaluated in a sustained manner. We skipped that period, unfortunately. We moved too quickly towards European integration and NATO processes. That still causes a lot of problems in terms of dealing with the past and transitional justice.

We moved too quickly towards European integration and NATO processes. That still causes a lot of problems in terms of dealing with the past and transitional justice.

What can the international community and a region like Flanders do to assist in these efforts?

Velma Šarić: As to concrete ways a region like Flanders can assist, I strongly believe in enhancing the accountability of local governments and trying to lead them towards European values and processes of democracy and human rights. Projects that increase attention towards the rights of minorities – such as the Roma and Jewish communities, and people in mixed marriages – are also important. We also need to invest in building up economic capabilities and in social projects that bring people together. If people can provide for their families and give their children opportunities, there is a common ground where agreement can be found.



Weapons after the war: Astrid De Schutter speaks with Bojana Balon, head of SEESAC in Belgrade.

What happens to weapons when a war ends? Potentially interesting parallels can be drawn between the war in Ukraine and the conflicts in the Western Balkans in the 1990s. **Astrid De Schutter** therefore entered into conversation with **Bojana Balon**, head of SEESAC (the South Eastern and Eastern Europe Clearinghouse for the Control of Small Arms and Light Weapons). They talked about how, in the context of the situation in Ukraine, (preventive) measures can be taken to reduce the risk of proliferation and misuse of small arms and light weapons (SALW).

First of all, could you explain what SEESAC does?

Bojana Balon: SEESAC was established in 2002, primarily to support the governments in the Western Balkans with small arms and light weapons control measures in the aftermath of the conflicts in the region as the proliferation of SALW poses a serious threat to post-conflict peacebuilding. We provide advice, facilitate regional cooperation, implement projects and through them support the strengthening of the capacities of stakeholders to control and reduce the illegal possession, proliferation and misuse of SALW. We are also responsible for the overall coordination of SALW control efforts among the various stakeholders and for monitoring the progress at the regional level. We additionally pay special attention to integrating a gender perspective in the security sector. Women and men are exposed to and suffer from misuse of firearms in different ways, and this needs to be understood if policy responses are to address the needs of both women and men. SEESAC functions as a joint initiative of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the Regional Cooperation Council (RCC). In the last 20 years, SEESAC has developed a lot of expertise on the topic.

We are very curious about that expertise. What conditions should be in place to minimise the risk of proliferation and misuse of small arms and light weapons?

Bojana Balon: Based on the experience in the Western Balkans but also on that of other regions around the world, there are several preconditions for SALW control. First of all, it is about coordination. In the Western Balkans, strong coordination mechanisms within the governments bring together all of the institutions that are relevant to all aspects of SALW control. In the Western Balkans, these commissions or coordination bodies on SALW control are normally led by ministries of the interior and bring together the ministries of foreign affairs, defence, the economy, foreign trade, justice, and health, as well as customs and the prosecutor's office, and they coordinate and monitor the work of the governments on SALW control.

Second of all, there needs to be a good understanding of the situation: what are the trends in the distribution of small arms and light weapons, what is the impact of SALW on citizens, what are the public perceptions of SALW, and what are the institutional and legal set-ups, capacities and challenges in the implementation of SALW control measures? In the Western Balkans, SEESAC conducted several surveys on SALW. We supported the SALW commissions to develop the methodology, collect and analyse the data, and formulate recommendations, including to identify data that was not available. These surveys are publicly available on our website (www.seesac.org) and have been used by the authorities in policy-making.

Thirdly, SALW need to be regulated by a legal framework – one that is aligned with the international legal framework and, in our region, also increasingly aligned with the EU acquis. SALW strategies usually outline a coordinated

In the context of post-conflict SALW, often the focus is on prevention of trafficking, but the impacts of firearm misuse on community security and in domestic violence also need attention, as does the use of firearms in suicides.

governmental action, with clearly defined goals and targets and a monitoring plan. To effectively combat illicit trafficking, regional cooperation is of the utmost importance. Cooperation at the strategic and operational levels is important for the exchange of good practices, lessons learned, and understanding of trends, and this can increase the detection,

investigation and prosecution of trafficking. In the context of post-conflict SALW, often the focus is on prevention of trafficking, but the impacts of firearm misuse on community security and in domestic violence also need attention, as does the use of firearms in suicides.

As you mentioned, SEESAC has developed a lot of expertise and good practices on SALW control. What lessons can be learned from the Western Balkans in this regard? Can we – and if so how – apply these lessons to the situation in Ukraine, even if arms control seems like a distant dream at the moment?

Bojana Balon: First, it is important to note that you cannot just take an intervention that is working in one country or region and implement it in another. It is not enough to only have expertise on SALW control – you also need relevant contextual knowledge of the region, the (political) sensitivities and the challenges that the context might pose for the implementation of the intervention. This contextual knowledge is also very important for facilitating cooperation between the various stakeholders and local ownership. In addition, it is important to adopt a comprehensive approach to tackling the proliferation and misuse of SALW as everything is very much interlinked.

This means developing and implementing policies based on data; creating a legal, policy and institutional framework; ensuring SALW stockpile management in line with international standards; and ensuring there is marking, tracing and record-keeping regarding weapons. It is important to provide support in strengthening investigation capacities and bringing those who illegally possess, misuse or traffic weapons to justice, and also to raise awareness among the population on legal provisions with regards to possession of firearms, and the dangers weapons pose.

What is unique in the Western Balkans is that regional cooperation on various aspects of SALW control is very active. Several platforms exist that bring together experts from across the region – at the policy level, representatives of SALW commissions regularly meet, and at the operational level, representatives of police, customs and prosecutors' offices from across the region meet in the South East Europe Firearms Experts Network.

The region has developed a joint regional Roadmap for a sustainable solution to the illegal possession, misuse and trafficking of SALW and ammunition – a plan with clear targets and key performance indicators that was adopted by heads of state and governments at the Western Balkans Summit in London in 2018. It resulted in a comprehensive coordination and monitoring mechanism in which all the stakeholders take part and contribute – governments in the Western Balkans, donors (such as the European Union, Germany, France and others), and key international and regional organisations. This concept has been recognised by many for its impact on the progress in SALW control that has been recorded in the region. It has even influenced the development of a SALW control roadmap in the Caribbean and the EU action plan on firearms trafficking.



Investing in defence?

Diederik Cops speaks with Bruno Oliveira Martins of PRIO

As a result of the deteriorating geopolitical landscape and further triggered by the Ukraine war, defence budgets have been on the rise across Europe. An important priority in these investments is increased attention to military research and development, as illustrated by the Belgian Ministry of Defence's €1.8 billion budget for military research and development (R&D), the European Union's €8 billion European Defence Fund (EDF) and NATO's €1 billion Innovation Fund. Interestingly, all these programmes aim to include innovative technologies, developed by companies and research institutes, in the military realm. The dual use of these technologies is hailed as an opportunity for both the civil sector and the military sector. However, this triggers important challenges.

Our researcher **Diederik Cops** talked to **Dr Bruno Oliveira Martins**, coordinator of the security research group at the Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO), about the novelty of these evolutions, the related challenges and the relevance of the “responsible research and innovation” (RRI) concept in these discussions.

What is your sense of the changing dynamic between civil society and the military? What are the challenges and opportunities that this new dynamic is bringing about?

Bruno Oliveira Martins: For as long as weapons have existed, scientific knowledge has been mobilised to contribute to military endeavours, develop new weapons and strategies, and so on. The more scientifically cutting edge and demanding these new weapons became, the greater the involvement of civil research. What I think is different now is that previously, the trigger and initiative would come from the military. Now, the majority of cutting-edge innovations are happening in the commercial civilian sphere and not in the military. Precisely because of this, you have the military going to the commercial sphere, to the

industries and to the research environments to ask for an operational solution that they need.

The 1990s and the early 2000s were characterised by international liberalism in many parts of the world. We started to see much more excitement about all the possibilities of dual-use technologies, while neglecting the security concerns that would emerge out of these possibilities.

Since the 1990s and 2000s, we have seen an inversion of the dual-use dilemma and of the narratives and discourse surrounding dual-use technology. Specifically, emphasis was put much more on the potential benefits, economic spillovers and so on, rather than the concerns. This was partly a

product of the security environment of the 1990s and early 2000s, characterised by international liberalism in many parts of the world. We started to see much more excitement about all the possibilities of dual-use technologies, while neglecting the security concerns that would emerge out of these possibilities. In a way, the fact that actors such as the European Union started to become serious about RRI (Responsible Research and Innovation), was a response to this inversion of the dual-use dilemma.

Could a growing intertwining of the military and the civil at company level be one of the reasons for the inversion of the dual-use dilemma?

Bruno Oliveira Martins: You're right in saying that, in many ways, a clear-cut distinction between military and civil research doesn't really apply in the real world. The more we get into interpersonal relations – the places where people meet and those kinds of things – the more we see interactions. Moreover, from the late 1990s, an increasingly dominant public policy paradigm advocated for a so-called triple helix of innovation: the most impactful and societally relevant innovation would come if three groups of actors – research institutions and universities, industry, and government – were combined. A similar approach could also be seen in the logic of the security research programme in the EU framework programmes (the 7th Framework Programme, Horizon 2020 and Horizon Europe). As for the EDF, the structure is different but this model of cooperation between research environments and industries, particularly small and medium-sized enterprises, is something that is very much at its heart.

As a consequence, the EDF does not exclusively serve defence objectives. Today, the way the European Commission thinks about security and defence is not only in terms of strategic and geopolitical objectives but also very much in terms of industrial policy and advancing the industrial technological base in Europe beyond defence companies.

In that sense, I would like to touch upon the concept of RRI, which you already mentioned briefly. Investments in dual-use technologies are exclusively approached with a positive lens, while the challenges and concerns related to investing in civil innovations and integrating them into military applications are often overlooked. What role could the concept of RRI play here? How might it help to guide policy-making, research institutes and civil companies in making decisions about how to engage with the military sector?

Bruno Oliveira Martins: As an idea, RRI emerged in the 1970s, when scientists realised that they shared concerns about particular ways in which science and technology were developing. This was when the first efforts of so-called anticipatory governance started to emerge. One example is the congresses that were organised by the scientific community in the United States to regulate future developments in DNA modification technology.

From 2014, the European Union made RRI a principle in all research funded by Horizon 2020. So RRI encapsulates various issues that need to be kept in mind in a project, including provisions on research ethics, gender issues, open and democratic access to information. RRI should ideally be a component of all

research so that it advances knowledge in a way that is transparent, open to public scrutiny and ethically sound. However, recent analyses show very low levels of impact and of actual engagement with these issues in EU-funded projects. RRI is understood differently by different actors, and it is where different scientific cultures clash. A university researcher, an industry developer and a national border guard have very different objectives and ways of looking at problems. It is difficult to reconcile all these perspectives, and this impacts

A university researcher, an industry developer and a national border guard have very different objectives and ways of looking at problems. It is difficult to reconcile all these perspectives, and this impacts severely on whether RRI actually makes a difference.

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It is also interesting to start questioning the fact that since the European Union opened up for military R&D through the EDF, it has automatically been the case that some of the crucial dimensions of RRI cannot really be observed. One example is transparency, where security protec-

tions often prevent access to actual technical aspects of the innovation, the patents and so on. The democratic dimension of innovation is also very much at stake. If we look deep into the EDF regulation, the issue of RRI is not sufficiently addressed, despite its ethics provisions. Notwithstanding some contact points, RRI and ethics are not the same thing.

To what extent can a framework for RRI be useful in guiding decision-making processes and helping researchers and engineers within civil companies and research institutes to decide on their involvement in military projects?

Bruno Oliveira Martins: Raising awareness is very important. We need to understand that, for example, a computer engineer developing algorithms that might end up killing people on the other side of the world five years later might have had no training whatsoever on politics, ethics, philosophy or the humanities. And that is not necessarily their fault. It is extremely important that researchers from non-technical areas participate in debates about technology and innovation.

How then do you interpret the difficult issue of balancing the argument that unbounded global innovation is needed to maximise human welfare against concerns about the illicit proliferation of military technologies and the misuse of certain innovative technologies?

Bruno Oliveira Martins: I don't see permanent innovation as something good in itself just like that. There is innovation that takes us in very positive directions, but there is also innovation that shifts attention, resources and funds away from other issues that are much more important and relevant.

Additionally, a lot of the challenges we have today with regulating dual-use technologies happen when the technology is already out there: "This technology

exists – how shall we regulate it?"

Some of these problems would be mitigated if there were much more anticipatory governance – if the debates about the ethical or unethical potential uses of a particular technology happened much earlier. The truth is that potentially concerning research into dual-use technologies hap-

The truth is that potentially concerning research into dual-use technologies happens in various areas and this has been the case for many years. Furthermore, when you infuse those areas with AI, the potential for risk widely expands.

pens in various areas and this has been the case for many years. Furthermore, when you infuse those areas with AI, the potential for risk widely expands.

For example, a group of researchers used a generative AI approach previously developed for drug discovery applications and found that it could easily design hundreds of nerve agents, including VX. Although this study was set up as a thought experiment, it clearly shows that if one waits for the products of research to come onto the market before regulating them, it will be too late. It is important to understand that the risks of some types of research are much wider and they need to be regulated much earlier. This is where the mechanisms surrounding RRI need to become more stringent to prevent some of these things from happening.

INFORMATION ACTIVITIES

PRESENTATIONS IN THE FLEMISH PARLIAMENT

26/04/2022

- 🌀 **Presentation of the 2021 annual report *Flanders and the world: connecting through peace*** to the Foreign Policy Committee of the Flemish Parliament

15/11/2022

- 🌀 **Reflections on education through memories: contribution of our researcher Maarten Van Alstein to the hearing on the Holodomor** within the Foreign Policy Committee of the Flemish Parliament

29/11/2022

- 🌀 **Presentation and exchange of views on *Advice of the Flemish Peace Institute on the Flemish government's annual report on the arms trade 2021 to the Flemish Parliament*** within the Foreign Policy Committee of the Flemish Parliament

OWN WEBINARS

21/04/2022

- 🌀 **Online polarisation: dealing smartly with trolls, conscience clearers, followers and more**
Panel: Baldwin Van Gorp (Institute for Media Studies at KU Leuven), Bart Vyncke (Institute for Media Studies at KU Leuven), Karl De Rycke (Social Media Manager at HLN and VTM News) and Karien Lantmeeters (Staff Member at Positive Identity Development and Connection, Genk)

27/04/2022

- 🌀 **How the ATT could strengthen transit controls of military goods**
Panel: Diederik Cops (Researcher at the Flemish Peace Institute), Tom Nijs (Chair of the Diversion Information Exchange Forum and Legal Advisor at the Flemish Department of Chancellery and Foreign Affairs) and Sabine Visser (Chair of the working group Transparency and Reporting and Cluster Coordinator of arms export control at the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs)

31/05/2022

- 🌀 **Ukraine: Obstacles to peace**
Panel: Laurien Crump (Utrecht University), Ludo De Brabander (Vrede VZW), Nils Duquet (Flemish Peace Institute) and Heleen Touquet (University of Antwerp)

OWN PHYSICAL EVENTS

27/01/2022

- 🌀 **School event – The Flemish Peace Institute's Nobel Prize programme**
With Maarten Van Alstein and Dennis Vanden Auweele (Flemish Peace Institute), Inge Vrancken (VRT-NWS) and Maud Martens (Vrede VZW)

17/02/2022

- 🌀 **Seminar – Chemical and biological dual-use trade and industry in Flanders**
with Diederik Cops (Flemish Peace Institute), Milan Godin (Legal Expert, Strategic Goods Control Service), Katleen Janssen (Legal Expert, KU Leuven Research and Development) and Nele Derynck (Head of Non-fiscal Legislation Service, Belgian customs)

31/03/2022

- **Presentation – Annual report 2021 – Flanders and the world: connecting through peace**
Event on the occasion of the presentation of the 2021 annual report to the Flemish Parliament

08/06/2022

- **Seminar – Firearms violence in Belgium: in search of a more complete picture**
With Nils Duquet and Dennis Vanden Auweele (Flemish Peace Institute), Marianne Cappelle (Belgian Federal Prosecutor's Office)) and Febe Liagre (Directorate-General for Migration and Home Affairs, European Commission)

17/06/2022

- **Working visit with the Foreign Policy Committee of the Flemish Parliament and the board of directors of the Flemish Peace Institute**
Working visit to BMT Aerospace (Oostkamp) and customs at Ostend Airport at the request of the Foreign Policy Committee

21/06/2022

- **Lunch seminar – Flemish defence industry**
Seminar following the publication of the research report *De defensiegerelateerde industrie in Vlaanderen: doorlichting van een sector op scherp* (The defence-related industry in Flanders: screening a sector on edge)

21/09/2022

- **Peace Day 2022 – Ukraine: peace, conflict and humanitarian law**
On the International Day of Peace, we spoke at Cinema Lumière Antwerp about some aspects of the conflict that are often underexposed. With Laura De Grève (Red Cross Flanders), Aleksey Yudin (Ghent University) and Nils Duquet (Flemish Peace Institute)

10/11/2022

- **11 November Lecture 2022 by author and historian Geert Mak**
With the St George Quintet

13/12/2022

- **Expert seminar – Due diligence in the defence sector**
Internal seminar with experts on the application of due diligence in companies' assessments of arms exports

EXTERNAL PUBLIC OUTREACH

11/01/2022

- **Lecture – Dealing with controversy and polarisation in the classroom**
Part of the project “From polarisation to connection” run by the city of Roeselare and the municipalities of Izegem and Hooglede (with Maarten Van Alstein)

27/01/2022

- **Academic session – From past to present: reflections on remembrance education**
Organised by Lions Club Lier, the city of Lier and the Anne Frank Foundation (with Maarten Van Alstein)

31/01/2022

- **Webinar – Polarisation, depluralisation and disinformation: how can we evolve from social threat to social enrichment?**
Organised by the Wij-Zij Network in collaboration with OCAD (CUTA-Coordination Unit for Threat Assessment) and the Agentschap Binnenlands Bestuur (Domestic Governance Agency) (with Maarten Van Alstein)

15/02/2022

- **Guest lecture – Illicit arms trade and violent conflict**
At the Free University Amsterdam (with Nils Duquet)

17/02/2022

- **Guest lecture – Conflict and peace**
At the University Colleges Leuven-Limburg (with Maarten Van Alstein)

21/03/2022

- **Presentation – Mainstreaming radical narratives: spontaneous phenomenon?**
“Key actors and trends” at the Radicalisation Awareness Network’s “Workshop on mainstreaming of radical discourse among young people” (with Annelies Pauwels)

23/03/2022

- **Colloquium on autonomous weapon systems** (with Nils Duquet)

27/03/2022

- **Panel discussion – Deradicalisation: (how) does it work?**
At the Docville film festival (with Annelies Pauwels)

07/04/2022

- **Contribution to the panel discussion at the launch of the book *Antipode* by Hind Fraihi**
(with Maarten Van Alstein)

21/04/2022

- **Presentation – Local memories of war and peace: the Great War in Ypres**
At the online expert meeting of the Konrad Adenauer Foundation
(with Maarten Van Alstein)

27/04/2022

- **Training – Dealing with controversy and polarisation in history classes**
At the University of Antwerp (with Maarten Van Alstein)

28/04/2022

- **Lecture – The impact of the illegal arms trade on peace and violence** (with Nils Duquet)

06/05/2022

- **Contribution on firearms trafficking and the impact of new technologies on this trafficking**
At the Constructive Dialogue on Firearms organised by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (with Nils Duquet)

20/05/2022

- **Lecture – Polarisation, conflict and radicalisation: a conceptual explanation**
(with Maarten Van Alstein)

24/05/2022

- **Lecture – Strengthening evidence-based evaluation in P/CVE**
At the INDEED Research Forum (with Annelies Pauwels)

25/05/2022

- **Guest lecture – The international trade in conventional weapons**
At the University of Antwerp (with Diederik Cops)

25/05/2022

- **Presentation – P/CVE practices to counter contemporary manifestations of right-wing extremism in the EU**
At the Radicalisation Awareness Network’s thematic research meeting “Transnational right-wing extremism in Europe” (with Annelies Pauwels)

02/06/2022

● **Lecture – Polarisation, conflict and radicalisation**

At the conference of the European Peace Research Association (EuPRA) in Tampere (with Maarten Van Alstein)

13 - 15/06/2022

● **Lectures at Stockholm Criminology Symposium**

(with Nils Duquet and Dennis Vanden Auweele)

16/06/2022

● **Presentation – Moving up the priority lane: how to make transit controls on military goods more effective, efficient and transparent**

At the annual COARM-NGO conference Brussels (with Diederik Cops)

20/06/2022

● **Webinar – What can we expect from the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons?**

Hosted by Pax Christi (with Diederik Cops)

04- 07/2022

● **Lectures at the European Consortium for Political Research**

(with Nils Duquet and Dennis Vanden Auweele)

14/09/2022

● **Interactive lecture – Controversy and polarisation: insights and strategies**

InFLOOD project at the University of Antwerp (with Maarten Van Alstein)

23/09/2022

● **Presentation and panel discussion at the annual conference of the European Society of Criminology (Eurocrim)** (by Nils Duquet and with Dennis Vanden Auweele)

29/09/2022

● **Interactive debate – Conflict and (online) polarisation at development organisation 11.11.11** (with Maarten Van Alstein)

4 -5/10/2022

● **Presentation – The EU's P/CVE policies and approaches in the MENA region: state of the art and emerging challenge**

At a thematic research meeting of the Radicalisation Awareness Network (with Annelies Pauwels)

15/10/2022

● **Moderation of a panel discussion – “The public debate in a stranglehold” with Yasmien Naciri and Karl Drabbe**

At the Hannah Arendt Institute's Facts to Act festival (with Maarten Van Alstein)

17/10/2022

● **Guest lecture – Searching for peace**

at UCLL Hogeschool Hasselt (with Maarten Van Alstein)

20/10/2022

● **Participation in panel discussion – Addressing the increasing links between arms trafficking and other forms of organised crime**

Organised by the Mexican government (with Nils Duquet)

08/11/2022

● **Guest lecture – Illegal and legal arms trade in Europe: trends, challenges and gun violence**

At KU Leuven (with Nils Duquet)

10/11/2022

● **Contribution to the “Policing and population” panel at the reflection day
“Food for thought continued”**

Hosted by the Centre for Policing and Security and the Circle of Police Leadership
(with Annelies Pauwels)

15/11/2022

● **Peer-to-peer exchange of views – “Conflict and polarisation: insights and strategies”**

With counsellors from the Agentschap Integratie en Inburgering (Flemish Integration Agency) (with Maarten Van Alstein)

18/11/2022

● **Lecture – Conflict and polarisation: insights and strategies**

For students of the Training in Socio-economic Policy course at VOSEB,
University of Antwerp (with Maarten Van Alstein)

18/11/2022

● **Guest lecture – Global proliferation of small arms and light weapons**

For students of the course High Studies in Security and Defence at the Royal Higher Institute for Defence (with Nils Duquet)

02/12/2022

● **Workshop – Conflict and polarisation: insights and strategies**

At Frictiefest, a study day on polarisation organised by Avansa East Brabant,
the Wij-Zij Network, VVSG (Association of Flemish Cities and Communes) and
AglI (Flemish Integration Agency) (with Maarten Van Alstein)

06/12/2022

● **Presentation – Transit and transshipment: lessons from the Arms Trade Treaty**

At a virtual side event of the Ninth Review Conference of the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention (with Diederik Cops)

09/12/2022

● **Lecture – Firearm violence in Belgium**

At the Politeia study day on gun legislation (with Nils Duquet)

13/12/2022

● **Lecture – Basic concepts and insights on the radicalisation process Workshop –
Lone actor violence: an invisible and unpredictable threat?**

At the radicalisation and extremism introductory training course of the Agentschap Binnenlands Bestuur (Domestic Governance Agency)
(with Annelies Pauwels)

15/12/2022

● **Presentation – Local approach to radicalisation in Belgium**

As part of a European Union Agency for Law Enforcement Training (CEPOL) training course (with Annelies Pauwels)

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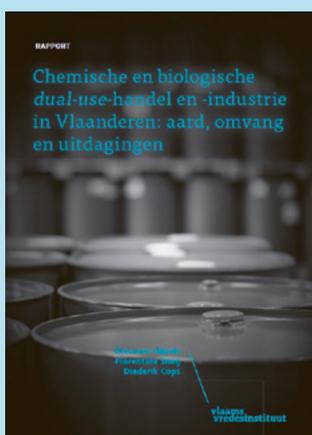


25/01/2022

International nuclear disarmament and policy options for Belgium and Flanders

Lode Dewaegheneire, Veronica Vella and Sylvain Paile-Calvo

Translation of a report published in December 2021 that was commissioned by the Flemish Peace Institute. This report examines different future scenarios and policy options regarding nuclear disarmament.



16/02/2022

Chemische en biologische dual-use-handel en -industrie in Vlaanderen: aard, omvang en uitdagingen (*Chemical and biological dual-use trade and industry in Flanders: nature, size and challenges*)

Giovanni Gijssels, Florentine Sneij, Diederik Cops

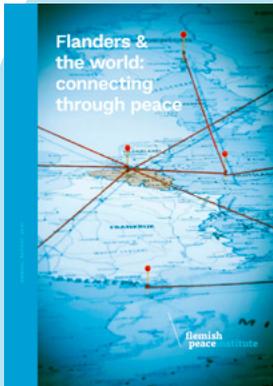
With this report and the accompanying advice, the Flemish Peace Institute aims to help guide better export control of chemical and biological dual-use goods and technology.



16/02/2022

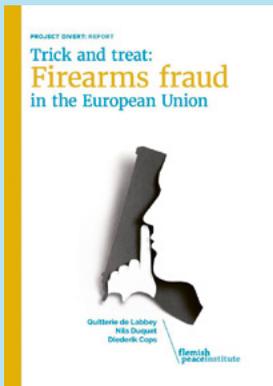
Advies over de controle op de handel in biologische en chemische dual use goederen vanuit Vlaanderen (*Advice on the control of trade in biological and chemical dual-use goods from Flanders*)

In this advice, the Flemish Peace Institute advocates, among other things, a new, legally conclusive enforcement and sanctioning system and a dual-use decree to build a Flemish enforcement capacity with administrative sanction capabilities. The Strategic Goods Control Service (dCSG) should also be strengthened, and cooperation with federal customs and the security, intelligence, investigation and prosecution services should be improved.



31/03/2022

Annual report 2021 – Flanders and the world: connecting through peace

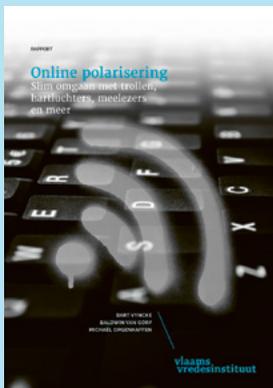


11/04/2022

Trick and treat: firearms fraud in the European Union

Quitterie de Labbey, Nils Duquet and Diederik Cops

The European project DIVERT focuses on the illegal diversion of weapons in Europe. The Flemish Peace Institute coordinated the project and wrote a third report in 2022 focusing on firearms fraud (following earlier reports in 2021 on non-regularisation and theft of firearms).



21/04/2022

Online polarisering: Slim omgaan met trollen, hartluchters, meelezers en meer

(Online polarisation: dealing smartly with trolls, conscience clearers, followers and more)

Bart Vyncke, Baldwin Van Gorp and Michaël Opgenhaffen

Commissioned by the Flemish Peace Institute, researchers Bart Vyncke, Baldwin Van Gorp and Michaël Opgenhaffen of the Institute for Media Studies (KU Leuven) used content analysis of 74 online debates and 40 in-depth interviews with social media users to look for causes of harmful polarisation and possible ways of dealing with it constructively.



21/04/2022

Advies over het omgaan met online affectieve polarisering

(Advice on dealing with online affective polarisation)

In an opinion on online affective polarisation, the Flemish Peace Institute calls on the Flemish authorities and local governments to, among other things, support initiatives that develop and offer training to employees while also addressing the well-being and safety of employees who face harassment or threats, both online and in the physical world.



25/04/2022

Under the radar: Transit of military goods – from licensing to control

Diederik Cops and Kathleen Vanheeuverswyn

Translation of a report published in November 2021 that focuses on transit and the transport of military goods, with or without transshipment, through a territory. For several years, a steep decline has been observed in the number of requested licences for the transit of military goods through Flanders. At the request of the Foreign Policy Committee of the Flemish Parliament, the Flemish Peace Institute went in search of explanations.



04/05/2022

The role of education in the prevention of violent radicalisation and polarisation – Insights from the Flemish case

Kevin Goris and Maarten Van Alstein

This analysis identifies the importance and coherence of education-related measures in the Flemish action plan to prevent violent radicalisation and polarisation.



04/05/2022

Managing a whole-of society approach to preventing and countering violent extremism – Insights from the Flemish case

Annelies Pauwels

This analysis covers the various challenges faced by an integrated, preventive approach to violent extremism, focusing on the difficulties experienced by policy-makers as they navigate their way between different areas of tension.



23/05/2022

Fraude met vuurwapens – België in Europees perspectief
(Firearms fraud: Belgium in European perspective)

Nils Duquet, Dennis Vanden Auweele and Annemiek Dols

Firearms fraud is a method of diverting such weapons from the legal sphere by unlawfully obtaining, possessing or trading firearms or ammunition through deceit of others and by deliberately concealing, suppressing or distorting the true facts. This analysis applies the findings from Project DIVERT specifically to Belgium.



23/05/2023

Niet-geregulariseerde vuurwapens: België in Europees perspectief
(Non-regularised firearms: Belgium in European perspective)

Nils Duquet, Dennis Vanden Auweele and Stijn Dormans

Three major types of non-regularisation can be distinguished in Europe and Belgium, namely after an armed conflict or a period of political transition, after inheriting firearms or after a regulatory adjustment. This analysis applies the findings from Project DIVERT specifically to Belgium.



23/05/2022

Diefstal van vuurwapens: België in Europees perspectief
(Theft of firearms: Belgium in European perspective)

Nils Duquet, Dennis Vanden Auweele & Annemiek Dols

Belgium registers a relatively high number of firearm thefts – some 620 annually from 2011 to 2018, mainly from private individuals. This analysis applies the findings from Project DIVERT specifically to Belgium.



08/06/2022

**Vuurwapengeweld in België –
Op zoek naar een completer beeld
(Firearms violence in Belgium: in search of
a more complete picture)**

Dennis Vanden Auweele, Quitterie De Labbey and Nils Duquet

Belgium is – despite a decline since 2006 in the number of firearm deaths – anything but immune to firearm violence. In this report and advice, the Flemish Peace Institute highlights important blind spots and areas of concern for policy in Belgium.



08/06/2022

**Advies inzake de preventie van vuurwapengeweld
in België
(Advice on the prevention of firearm violence
in Belgium)**

In this advice, the Flemish Peace Institute advocates, among other things, strengthening operational capacity to enforce firearms legislation and detect criminal offences involving firearms. Further points of attention include an obligation to report blank firing weapons that are not yet subject to a licence and the development of a strategy on 3D-printed firearms. Furthermore, it will be crucial to better register firearms offences and modernise the Central Weapons Registry.



21/06/2022

**De defensiegerelateerde industrie in Vlaanderen:
doorlichting van een sector op scherp
(The defence-related industry in Flanders:
screening a sector on edge)**

Diederik Cops and Elias Viaene

The Flemish Peace Institute believes that monitoring the end use of defence-related goods from Flanders is crucial. New examples – such as the use, possibly even in Ukraine, of Flemish Barco displays in Russian Pantsir-S1 air defence systems – prove how important it remains to monitor Flemish defence-related goods closely.



23/06/2022

Cumulatief extremisme: de rol van beeldvorming (*Cumulative extremism: the role of perception*)

Annelies Pauwels

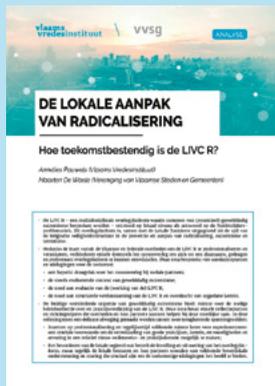
In this analysis, researcher Annelies Pauwels takes a closer look at the phenomenon of cumulative extremism and its possible implications for policy-makers.

27/06/2022

De lokale aanpak van radicalisering: hoe toekomstbestendig is de LISC R? (*The local approach to radicalisation: how future-proof is the LISC R?*)

Annelies Pauwels and Maarten De Waele

In this analysis, researcher Annelies Pauwels of the Flemish Peace Institute and Maarten De Waele, an expert on local prevention of violent extremism at the Association of Flemish Cities and Municipalities, examine the future resilience of local integrated security cells concerning radicalism, extremism and terrorism and the obstacles that are preventing the LISC R from developing into a sustainable, supported and well-functioning consultation platform.



05/07/2022

Leren over oorlog, conflict en vrede: gids voor de praktijk (*Learning about war, conflict and peace: guide to practice*)

Maarten Van Alstein

How should teachers and schools approach themes such as violence, conflict and peace? In order to provide inspiration and starting points, researcher Maarten Van Alstein of the Flemish Peace Institute reviews the scientific literature and the new, provisional Flemish attainment targets for secondary education in this practical guide.



04/10/2022

Advies bij het jaarlijkse verslag van de Vlaamse regering aan het Vlaams Parlement over de verstrekte en geweigerde vergunningen voor wapens, munitie en speciaal voor militair gebruik dienstig materieel en daaraan verbonden technologie. (*Advice on the Flemish government's annual report to the Flemish Parliament on issued and refused licences for arms, ammunition and equipment specifically for military use and related technology*)

In this advice, the Flemish Peace Institute lists urgent steps that could help Flanders continue to pursue its own policy that reduces the risk of an unwanted arms race.



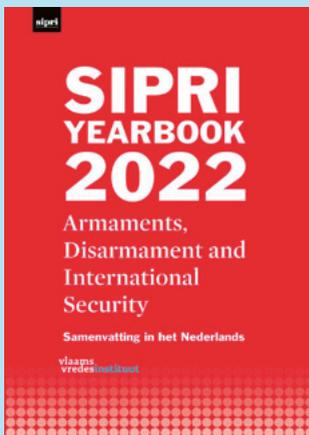


04/10/2022

Vlaamse buitenlandse wapenhandel in 2021
(Flemish foreign arms trade in 2021)

Diederik Cops

This analysis provides an overview of the main trends in military equipment trade from, to and through Flanders in 2021. It notes that the value of licensed Flemish exports and transfers of military goods reached 143 million euro in 2021. This is the highest value since the entry into force of the Arms Trade Decree in 2012 and strikingly higher than in 2020, when only 42.2 million were licensed.



17/10/2022

SIPRI Yearbook 2022 –
Samenvatting in het Nederlands
(Summary in Dutch)

The Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) Yearbook is a reference work on global peace and security trends, and a leading independent source of data and analysis on armament, disarmament and international security. The Flemish Peace Institute published once again in 2022 the official Dutch-language summary of the well-known yearbook.



27/10/2022

Pulling the trigger: gun violence in Europe

Nils Duquet (ed.), Szymon Buczyński, Piotr Chlebowicz, Sanja Čopić, Quitterie de Labbey, Mirjana Dokmanović, Matteo Dressler (with support from Clara Vandewege and Sofie Waebens), Declan Hillier, Paul James, Katharina Krüsselmann, Matt Lewis, Marieke Liem, Jarosław Moszczyński, Tomasz Safjański and Dennis Vanden Auweele

This report contains the seven country studies – Belgium, Estonia, the Netherlands, Poland, Serbia, Spain and Sweden – undertaken during the second phase of project TARGET, a European study on firearms violence coordinated by the Flemish Peace Institute.



28/11/2022

Polarisation and conflict: A non-violent approach

Maarten Van Alstein

Translation of a report published in July 2021 where an original framework is developed that can provide guidance to those – professionally or as interested citizens – who want to know more about polarisation in Flanders and beyond.

EXTERNAL CONTRIBUTIONS FROM OUR RESEARCHERS

Our researchers are not limited to our own initiatives as forums for disseminating their insights.

For example, Maarten Van Alstein contributed to the pedagogical project “Clash in the classroom”, a three-part podcast series by Knack, the Hannah Arendt Institute, Klasse, GO! Education of the Flemish Community, the Flemish Peace Institute and the Wij-Zij Network.

Annelies Pauwels contributed to two online programmes for the Radicalisation Awareness Network (Special Report episode 4 and the discussion programme The View). The network is a European initiative aiming to connect frontline workers from across Europe to exchange knowledge, first-hand experience and prevention opportunities on violent extremism in all its forms.



EXTERNAL PUBLICATIONS:

Van Alstein, M. (2022) **Srebrenica: the last genocide in Europe, but nobody knows**. Alma Mustafić on the play “Dangerous Names”, in Testimony between History and Memory, 135, pp. 34-41

Van Alstein, M. (2022) **'Words of memory: Vasily Grossman'**, in Testimony between History and Memory, 135, p. 33.

Van Alstein, M. (2022) **'Petrified history?'**, in Zwart Wit Woke. Op zoek naar Nuance, Streven Vrijplaats, May, pp. 106-109.

Van Alstein, M. & Pauwels, A. (2022), **'Polarisation: A Short Introduction'**, RAN Spotlight, April, pp. 8-10.

Spapens, T. & Duquet, N. (2022), **'Terrorists' acquisition of firearms and explosives: criminal, legal and grey sources'**, in: Paoli, L., Fijnaut, C. & Wouters, J. (red.), The Nexus between Organized Crime and Terrorism, Cheltenham Glos: Edward Elgar Publishing, pp. 104-125.

Cops, D. & Duquet, N. (2022), **'The role of non-nuclear weapon states in NATO on nuclear disarmament'**, working paper submitted as part of the First Meeting of the States Parties to the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, Vienna, June.

Scientific Council 2022 evaluation report

FEBRUARY 2023

The Scientific Council evaluates the quality of research at the Flemish Peace Institute and advises the board of directors and the Scientific Secretariat on important trends in peace and security research.

As in previous years, in its evaluation of the quality of the Peace Institute's research, the Scientific Council relies mainly on the institute's in-house publications. However, the council follows with interest the many other activities of the institute, including publications by the researchers in external publications and lectures and contributions to other events. The council considers it important that the Peace Institute can continue its activities as an independent peace research institute attached to the Flemish Parliament.

The council is very impressed by the various activities undertaken by the institute in 2022 with the aim of bringing the findings from its research to the attention of various audiences, including not only the Flemish Parliament itself but also a broad spectrum of policy-makers, civil servants, administrators, researchers, teachers, journalists and other interested parties. The emphasis is naturally on the Flemish context, but contributions to more international events show that the institute's research can also count on interest abroad. Events have strengthened the institute's visibility in the scientific field, particularly participation in panels at the Radicalisation Awareness Network's thematic research meetings in March and May and at international conferences such as those of the European Society of Criminology and the European Consortium for Political Research, as well as guest lectures at universities at home and abroad. The council's stance is that the lectures, webinars, panel discussions and workshops – in which all researchers participate in varying compositions – are very valuable for sharing the institute's research findings and introducing them into Flemish society and into the relevant policy fields and sectors (such as education, prevention of polarisation and radicalisation, and strengthening monitoring and control of arms trade and use). The institute also makes good use of the experience and expertise gained during the Covid-19 period in organising online events that increase accessibility and reach, and also often remain available on the website.

As also noted in previous reports, the Scientific Council has seen the Flemish Peace Institute grow into a respected source of reliable information and of empirical advice to the Flemish Parliament. As in previous years, the Scientific Council structures its assessment on the basis of the two thematic research areas in which the Peace Institute carries out work.

Weapons, peace and violence

Several reports and research papers were published in this cluster in 2022, including *Chemical and biological dual-use trade and industry in Flanders: nature, size and challenges* (February 2022); *Firearms fraud: Belgium in European perspective, Non-regularised firearms: Belgium in European Perspective and Theft of firearms: Belgium in European perspective* (Dutch-language reworkings in May 2022 with a focus on Belgium of three English-language reports from 2021); and *Firearms violence in Belgium: in search of a more complete picture* (June 2022).

In June 2022, the institute published *The defence-related industry in Flanders: screening a sector on edge*. This very solid study offers a comprehensible and at the same time complete and insightful overview of the Flemish defence-related industry. The study regularly refers to companies with branches in several regions, and the industry itself organises itself at Belgian rather than regional level, via BSDi (Belgian Security and Defence Industry). This raises the question of the extent to which one should speak of a Belgian rather than a Flemish defence-related industry. A potentially interesting follow-up to this study would be a more elaborate prospective section, for instance on possible consolidation and its impact.

Conflict, peace and society

In 2022, the Peace Institute developed several activities to offer insights into processes of polarisation, especially in the world of social media and the internet. The report *Online polarisation: dealing smartly with trolls, conscience clearers, followers and more* was published in April 2022 and was the prelude to a webinar on 21 April. The Scientific Council's reviewer stressed that the report aimed at more than what was mentioned in the introduction, namely to "take users of social media platforms as a guide, offering them concrete advice on how to counter affective polarisation." Instead, a significant part of the research involved analysing different types of user and the construction of arguments and mechanisms that foster affective polarisation. Comprehending these underlying factors is crucial to understanding the rationales and backgrounds of possible intervention strategies.

Another important publication in this cluster, in line with a broadening of the research agenda, which in recent years has focused on radicalisation and extremism based on religious belief, was the report *Cumulative extremism: the role of perception* (June 2022). The Scientific Council praised the thoroughness of the research underpinning this report and its clarity. The scientific reviewer made some methodological comments on the constructivist approach used in the report, but nevertheless highly commended the way in which the researcher unravels which intervention strategies might suit the cumulative effect of forms of extremism.

A report published in June on so-called local integral security cells concerning radicalism, extremism and terrorism (LISC R) (*The local approach to radicalisation: how future-proof is the LISC R?*) meticulously describes how these consultative structures were set up, how they were gradually expanded and what goals were pursued in the process. The Scientific Council judged that the occasional structural challenges faced in this process are well clarified and that the report is scientifically sound, partly because of how it draws from the scientific literature and partly because it builds on previous empirical research by the institute. One suggestion was to include a textbox covering the main ‘socio-preventive’ actors participating in these platforms as well as an overview of the development of the numbers of municipal platforms over time. This could further underline the importance and development of platforms as a policy instrument.

Finally, the Scientific Council took note of the report *Learning about war, conflict and peace: guide to practice* (July 2022). The reviewer underlined the relevance of this paper, which offers starting points and suggestions for working on peace education in secondary education in accordance with the Flemish attainment targets. Within the research programme “Conflict, peace and society” and building on years of research experience in the field of peace education, this report fits perfectly within the profile of the Flemish Peace Institute by offering a scientifically based manual for peace education. An introductory chapter is followed by a thorough reflection on peace education, based on a broad overview of the recent scientific literature on the subject. The second chapter zooms in on points of reference in the attainment targets for secondary education in Flanders, and is divided into a section on war and violence, a section on non-violent conflict management, and a section on learning about, through and for peace, each of which provides the reader with concrete suggestions for getting started with peace education. In an excellent concluding chapter, the author comes close to arguing why peace education is useful or even necessary. The reviewer was very complimentary and spoke of “a well-written, well-constructed, well-researched, well-executed and relevant study”. An editorial suggestion was to highlight the relevance better or earlier and make the author’s conceptual choices clearer more early.

Peace-oriented foreign policy

During 2022, the Peace Institute launched a new research project titled Peace and Foreign Policy. The relevance of this research is beyond doubt and the Scientific Council encourages it. It fits perfectly within the political context of the Flemish Parliament, within which the Peace Institute operates. In a first phase of this research, an analysis was commissioned of the peace orientations of various European countries and federal states. In 2023, the final report of this research will be published, incorporating an analysis the peace orientation of Flanders' current foreign policy and a comparative analysis of the research results from the various countries studied. From this analysis, lessons will be drawn regarding the possibilities and limitations for Flanders in developing a peace-oriented foreign policy. According to the reviewer of the Scientific Council, it was advisable that, in this first research phase, each of the cases be systematically asked about the relations between levels of government (rather than only asking questions where the relations between levels of government happen to emerge or stand out). Moreover, the possibility could be considered of adding, as a transition between the first and second parts, a cross-sectional analysis that regroups the research findings thematically. and therefore does not only push forward the distinction between – federal or non-federal – states and regions that was previously thought to be meaningful as all-important. This could further increase the relevance of this research, especially its transferability to the Flemish context.

In conclusion, according to the Scientific Council, the research carried out by the team of researchers associated with the institute was up-to-date, comprehensive and of excellent quality.

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