



PEACE IN FOREIGN POLICY

Peace nations in times of crisis

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This analysis looks at how different states (Norway, Sweden, and Switzerland) and sub-state regions (Catalonia, Emilia-Romagna, Flanders, Hessen, North Rhine-Westphalia, and Wales) in Europe developed a peace orientation in their foreign policy. It also examines how the war in Ukraine has impacted these approaches.

Confronted with shifting foreign policy priorities, the analysis explores novel pathways for shaping peace policy in Europe. Initially, it delineates how a robust historical national identity can serve as both inspiration and a foundation for a credible peace policy. Additionally, by exploring peace through various lenses and augmenting it with descriptive adjectives, it provides guidance to make peace tangible for policy practice. Drawing upon diverse adjectives such as agonistic, environmental, local, feminist, and multilateral peace, the analysis identifies a broad spectrum of policy domains and levels that can contribute to peace. This fosters a collective responsibility across all policy fields, transcending beyond foreign, security, and defence policies.

Furthermore, the analysis elaborates on how peace isn't merely a value to be projected but a relationship to be actively practiced. Engaging in the promotion of peace within foreign policy inevitably generates tensions. To mitigate the risk of subsequent erosion of legitimacy and trust, the analysis argues, governments should maintain transparency regarding the dilemmas and tensions inherent in their policies.

List of abbreviations

AU	African Union
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
EU	European Union
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization
FFP	Feminist foreign policy
GNI	Gross national income
ICC	International Criminal Court
ICJ	International Court of Justice
ILO	International Labour Organization
IOM	International Organization for Migration
ODA	Official development assistance
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OSCE	Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
PRIO	Peace Research Institute Oslo
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
SGBV	Sexual and gender-based violence
SIDA	Swedish International Development Agency
SIPRI	Stockholm International Peace Research Institute
UNESCO	UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNFCCC	UN Framework Convention on Climate Change
UNICEF	United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund
UNHCR	UN High Commissioner for Refugees
UNIDIR	United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research
WFP	World Food Programme
WHO	World Health Organization
WTO	World Trade Organization
WWF	World Wide Fund for Nature

Introduction

In addition to the illegal Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022 (and in 2014), recent flare-ups of violence in Ecuador, the eastern region of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Gaza, Sudan and elsewhere have painfully demonstrated the urgent need to rebuild peace and prevent further outbreaks of violent conflict. While we are witnessing a worrying increase in the number of violent conflicts, more people are being forcibly displaced or having to survive in conflict-affected regions.¹ Challenges like climate change and social inequality only add to the complexity of the issue.

Many therefore conclude that peace seems to be “under grave threat”.² As the world has become considerably less peaceful in the past 15 years, deputy UN Secretary-General Amina J. Mohammed called on states to rethink efforts to achieve sustainable peace.³

In this context, the question arises of what can be done to pull back from the brink. What can governments do to prevent further violent escalation of conflict and rebuild peace sustainably? In previous decades, countries such as Norway, Sweden and Switzerland seemed to be making extra efforts to promote norms of peace and conflict prevention on the international stage. These countries are often studied as “peace nations”. Moreover, it is not only states that can focus on the promotion of peace and conflict prevention; some sub-state regions also have policies and tools available to promote peace.

However, current developments have strongly affected the foreign policies of those nations and regions that have historically been committed to peace (referred to as “peace nations and regions” in this paper). The full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 fundamentally altered the Euro-

pean security environment, even though an increasing focus on territorial (in)security across Europe and globally could already be observed before 2022.⁴ The worsening international environment has sped up this process, with many countries reconsidering their foreign and security policies. At the same time, renewed geopolitical competition, a push from rising powers against Western dominance, and a global shift towards nationalist, illiberal and antidemocratic politics are challenging the multilateral system. Peaceful nations and the international system in which they were embedded are in crisis, while the need for cooperation and solidarity seems more urgent than ever. UN

Secretary-General Antonio Guterres therefore urges member states to resolve tensions and rebuild trust between them so multilateralism can be strengthened in a fragmented world order.⁵

This analysis takes a critical look at the policies developed by several European peace nations and regions, with two goals:

1. It aims to examine the methods traditionally used by European peace nations and regions to promote peace in their foreign policies. What can we learn from them? And how did they adapt their policies after the invasion of Ukraine?
2. It aims to imagine new ways forward for the concept of peace policy in Europe. How might we imagine a renewed foreign policy with a focus on building sustainable peace, taking into account previous policy experience, current circumstances and insights from the literature?

The first section of the analysis looks at the concept of peace nations and regions. Section 2 delves deeper into the policy tools these countries

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and regions use to promote peace and examines how the current context of the war in Ukraine and the changing geopolitical environment have affected those policies. Section 3 continues with a reflection on how we can reimagine peace policy in Europe and then looks at some concrete examples. The fourth and final section draws some conclusions.

Methodological background

This analysis builds upon the report *Flanders and Peace in Foreign Policy: Seizing Opportunities in Turbulent Times*, published by the Flemish Peace Institute in cooperation with Ghent University.⁶ By conducting a comparative study of foreign policies of three countries (Norway, Sweden and Switzerland) and six sub-state regions (Catalonia, Emilia-Romagna, Flanders, Hessen, North Rhine-Westphalia and Wales) in Europe, the report takes stock and indicates possible lessons to promote peace in foreign policy.

This analysis defines peace-oriented foreign policy as “the set of actions and policy initiatives of national and regional governments that directly or indirectly aim to contain violence in areas outside their territorial jurisdiction, to prevent violent conflict, and to strive for sustainable peace in societies abroad and in international relations”.⁷ This definition goes beyond very strict definitions of peacebuilding used within the UN system. Its focus is on policies outlined by national and regional governments and those aimed at foreign actors. Thus, the analysis pays no attention to policies aimed at avoiding internal conflict and violence (e.g. extremism and prevention of firearms violence), although it is important to acknowledge that internal and external security motivations cannot always be separated from one another.⁸

The policies of the case studies were approached through an analysis of policy documents, official statements, and in-depth interviews with poli-

cy-makers and other stakeholders. In addition, for the case of Flanders, focus groups were organised with various societal stakeholders (policy-makers, academics, representatives of civil society and socio-economic stakeholders such as trade unions and employer’s organisations). This analysis updates some of the original report’s information with the most current policy statements and documents at the time of writing.

It is important to note that the analysis and its reflections are based on the European context, or to be more precise the Western European context. Of course, this is different from non-European contexts, and to some extent also from Eastern and Central European contexts. It does not mean, however, that non-Western and non-European actors are not involved in peacemaking and peacebuilding efforts.⁹ On the contrary, according to Call and de Coning, rising powers such as India, Indonesia, South Africa, and Turkey have emphasised their comparative advantages over traditional Western powers when it comes to peacebuilding issues.¹⁰ Consequently, this analysis does not propose a ready-made blueprint for promoting peace in foreign policy. It does, however, propose a number of ideas and tools that may be useful in developing foreign policy frameworks aimed at preventing war and (re)building peace. It is hoped that they will inspire and inform policy practice and open up a conversation with those looking for ways to bring more peace into their policies.

Peace nations

In Europe, several countries have made extra efforts to promote peace internationally. These countries are often considered to be “peace nations”. According to the literature there are several of these peace nations in Europe, but some stand out, namely Norway, Sweden and Switzerland. All three countries have built strong national identities as peace nations.

Historically speaking, the Nordics have built a strong sense of being great powers of peace. Some even speak of a true “Nordic Peace brand”. Not only have the Nordic countries coexisted peacefully for over 200 years but they are also known to promote peace and conflict prevention internationally.¹¹ Despite these countries paying increasing attention to territorial security since the full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, the Scandinavian image of “messengers of peace” still lives on, as suggested by the platform of the 2023 Icelandic presidency of the Nordic Council of Ministers: “The Nordic Region – A Force for Peace”.¹² According to the literature, it is mostly Norway and Sweden that have cultivated this image as peace nations in their foreign policies, thanks to their focus on conflict prevention, mediation and peacebuilding.¹³

Rooted in its long-standing tradition of neutrality, Switzerland also pursues an active peace policy. While neutrality has ensured Swiss internal and external security, it has also given Switzerland credibility and legitimacy around the promotion of certain norms aimed at fostering conflict prevention and peace at the international level.¹⁴ Over the years, conflict prevention has become one of the central pillars of Swiss foreign policy, with the promotion of peace being inscribed in the Swiss constitution as one of five foreign policy objectives.

As peace nations, these countries promote values such as social justice, peace, conflict resolution, human rights and multilateralism at the international level. Moreover, their “ordinary” foreign policy often overlaps with and reinforces these more normative motivations to promote peace. As they are all relatively small countries, it is in their national interest to promote a peaceful and stable international environment. From a more prag-

matic perspective, their peace policies enable them to pursue more strategic objectives – such as ones relating to international stability, security, the economy, trade and diplomatic status. It also gives them the opportunity to punch above their weight internationally.¹⁵

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Despite commonalities, there are also important differences to be observed between these peace nations. These are mainly related to their memberships of international organisations, which influence their respective foreign

policies. As a member of the European Union (EU), for example, Sweden’s primary arena for coordinating foreign policy is the EU.¹⁶ It thereby promotes certain norms and values from within.¹⁷ The recent Swedish NATO membership fundamentally changed its status as militarily non-aligned, thereby also affecting its foreign and security policies. Norway, on the other hand, is an active and founding NATO member without being a member of the European Union. Despite being part of a military alliance, it has managed to develop its own peace policy.¹⁸ Lastly, Switzerland, while being a member of the United Nations, continues to be neutral to this day and does not pursue membership of the European Union or NATO. Neutrality remains a central element of its peace policy.

Regions and peace “paradiplomacy”

Although states have more formal foreign policy powers, other actors – such as cities, regions and parliaments – also conduct their own foreign policy. These sub-states’ diplomatic activities and diplomatic relations are labelled “paradiplomacy”. Even though this form of foreign policy remains parallel and somewhat subordinate to the policy of

the umbrella state, paradiplomacy has attracted considerable attention in recent decades and helped sub-state actors to gain importance on the international stage.¹⁹ It is therefore also interesting to examine the ways in which sub-state regions develop policies promoting peace at the international level.

For this analysis, six European regions were studied: Catalonia, Emilia-Romagna, Flanders, Hessen, North Rhine-Westphalia and Wales. They were selected based on the presence in each of a regional peace institute or peace school suggesting a specific attention for peace.

In the case of sub-state regions, the national institutional context will have an important impact on the region's ability to develop a strong peace policy. Whether a region is able to formulate its own foreign policy depends on the competencies that are allocated to it and the amount of autonomy it enjoys within the limits of the constitutional framework of the central state. Moreover, the level of competition or cooperation between the central government and the regional government plays a role.²⁰ At the international level, the institutional context also influences the impact regions can have. Membership of international organisations and institutions is limited to nation-states. This means that regions are often dependent on third countries' willingness to give them legitimacy in the international sphere, which not every state will do.²¹

In this respect, important differences can be observed between the six case studies. Flanders, for instance, has quite extended formal foreign policy competencies that are unique in the world. Nonetheless, in its pursuit of more autonomy, the Flemish region is often in competition with the central government, resulting in complex decision-making processes when it comes to foreign policy. Catalonia and Wales also strongly desire self-determination and use their respective foreign policies to create legitimacy and raise their international profiles. The other regions consid-

ered here (Emilia-Romagna, Hessen and North Rhine-Westphalia) have less contentious relationships with their respective central governments and consequently pursue less pronounced international policies of their own.

Peace policy in Europe

This section examines the policy tools that have been developed by the studied peace nations and regions and what impact the war in Ukraine and geopolitical shifts have on those policies. The Nordic peace model is construed as a combination of active contributions to peaceful conflict resolution, high levels of development aid and a commitment to strengthen the multilateral rules-based order.²² Regions, however, often develop a different set of tools focusing more on development cooperation and on educational and cultural activities, due to constraints in their competencies, budget and capacity.

Looking at our case studies, we observe five common policy tools that are used to promote peace and conflict prevention at the international level: international peace mediation, development cooperation, multilateralism and the rules-based international order, arms export controls, and cultural and educational activities. The following sections examine each instrument separately, providing concrete examples from the case studies.

International peace mediation

In the aftermath of the Cold War, the number of intrastate conflicts increased considerably. It is no surprise, then, that mediation efforts gained traction with the intention of resolving conflicts as peacefully as possible. Negotiated settlements became more common and sometimes even more important than military victories.²³ Today, the most common way to attempt to resolve violent conflict remains the signing of an agreement although the success of these measures varies. In the past 35 years, 1,500 agreements spread over 150 peace processes have been signed, aiming at ceasefires, establishing talks, resolving the conflict or implementing previous agreements.²⁴ Half of these formal peace agreements involved an

international third-party mediator.²⁵

Peace mediation is typically focused on resolving an ongoing conflict, ending violence, and preventing the reoccurrence of violence through dialogue and negotiations. It is a relatively cheap instrument compared to peacekeeping, humanitarian assistance or sanctions enforcement.²⁶ Usually, mediation requires an autonomous third party to facilitate talks. This third-party role can be taken up by another state, but it is not exclusive to states as high-level mediators are increasingly being replaced by multi-track mediation efforts involving multiple actors (state and non-state).²⁷ Even though ultimately it is the responsibility of the conflicting parties to come to an agreement, mediators can play an important role in shaping possible outcomes as “gatekeepers”.²⁸

Norway, Sweden and Switzerland have each adopted peace mediation as a key dimension of their peace diplomacy. All three have highly professionalised and specialised departments in their respective foreign ministries developed to support mediation efforts.²⁹ As a neutral and non-aligned state, Sweden was an active mediator in conflicts during the Cold War, such as the Suez Crisis, the Vietnam War, the conflict in Western Sahara and the Iran–Iraq War.³⁰ At the end of the Cold War, Sweden adopted a less assertive international role while Norway took on a more activist foreign policy. While Sweden became a member of the European Union and continued its mediation activities under the auspices of that body and the United Nations, Norway (as a non-EU member) had more freedom to take on an active role as mediator on the international level, supporting peace talks in Guatemala, between Israel and Palestine, and in Sri Lanka (among other contexts).³¹ Since 2003, the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs has co-hosted the Oslo Forum, which brings together “world leaders, peace process actors and influential thinkers”, providing space to advance preventive diplomacy and peace mediation practice.³²

These mediation efforts might have put Norway and Sweden on the map and increased their diplomatic status, but their efforts did not always prove to be very successful.³³ Criticism has been raised about the long-term effectiveness of their peace processes. In many cases, post-conflict relapse could not be prevented and a sustainable peace was never constructed.³⁴ The terror attack by Hamas against Israel on 7 October 2023 (the deadliest single attack in its history, with an estimated 1,200 Israelis killed) and Israel's response in Gaza (resulting in an untenable humanitarian crisis with a death toll reaching 30,000 by the end of February 2024) make for a painful reminder of this, coming 30 years after Norway helped to broker the Oslo Accords.

While Norway and Sweden are not or no longer neutral, Switzerland's neutrality remains central to its efforts to promote peace. As a neutral country, Switzerland enjoys an image of impartiality, which is important for a mediator. The Swiss believe that as their country is neutral, it has the responsibility and credibility to be a bridge-builder.³⁵ With neutrality comes solidarity. Switzerland practices solidarity by exercising protective power mandates, thereby acting as a diplomatic go-between in order to maintain low-level relations between conflicting states. Currently, Switzerland holds six such mandates.³⁶ In addition to protective power mandates, the country provides mediation support in peace processes.

For sub-state regions, peace mediation is often not an accessible tool due to capacity and budget restraints, and the sub-states' more limited access to the international stage. Still, the Spanish region of Catalonia has invested in projects on transitional justice, mainly in Colombia. The International Catalan Institute for Peace actively

supported the Colombian peace process as the Technical Secretariat of the Colombian Truth Commission in Europe between 2019 and 2022.³⁷

New conflicts and changing conflict dynamics have had a significant impact on the case studies' capacity as mediators. Conflicts increasingly engage multiple actors (state and non-state) with competing priorities, making them more complex and multi-layered.³⁸ These "new wars" tend to persist and spread instead of finding a solution to end the violence, either through victory and defeat or through a negotiated settlement.³⁹ In addition, the interwovenness of regional and international dynamics has a spill-over effect, accelerating conflicts worldwide.

The war in Ukraine and the increasingly complex conflict environment have, for example, had a clear impact on Switzerland's capacity to function as a neutral and impartial mediation partner. In reaction to the full-scale invasion of Ukraine, Switzerland condemned the invasion as a breach of international law and decided to support EU sanctions against Russia. Despite public support for the sanctions package, this decision caused heavy debate about the meaning of Swiss neutrality.⁴⁰ The Federal Council reported in April 2022 that "neutrality does not mean indifference to serious violations of international law".⁴¹ The effect of this decision became clear when Ukraine and Switzerland agreed on a protective power mandate for Ukraine in Russia in August 2022. Russia did not accept the proposal, arguing that Switzerland had lost its status as a neutral state because it implemented "illegal Western sanctions against Russia".⁴² Around the same time, peace negotiations in Geneva between the Syrian government and opposition parties were cancelled by the Assad regime with a similar claim: that Switzerland had lost its impartiality after imple-

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menting EU sanctions against Russia.⁴³ Only a year earlier, Switzerland had been able to host an in-person meeting between presidents Biden and Putin in Geneva.

Swedish efforts have not been spared either. As the country started increasingly focusing on the European Union and the United Nations to promote norms of peace and conflict prevention, the visibility of the Swedish peace brand itself faded over time.⁴⁴ Today, the new centre-right minority government of Ulf Kristersson has called for a “paradigm shift” to overhaul security, defence and foreign policy.⁴⁵ Tobias Billström, the minister of foreign affairs, called this “the biggest reappraisal of our foreign policy since we became a member of the European Union”, making clear that Swedish foreign policy would henceforth focus more narrowly on Swedish and European values and interests.⁴⁶ The geographical reorientation of solidarity has also cast doubts on the continuation of funding for Swedish agencies specialised in mediation support for peace processes.⁴⁷ The new political reality in Sweden signals a shift away from its long tradition as an international peace actor.

This also means that there is space for new states and actors to participate in mediation activities. Scholars observe a growing number of countries (e.g. China, Qatar, South Africa and Turkey), Western as well as non-Western, participating in mediation efforts and introducing a variety of new approaches to conflict management and peace-building.⁴⁸ Some warn about the instrumental use of peace mediation in service of larger strategic aims,⁴⁹ and others worry that an increased number of players and diverse sets of approaches may cause confusion and fracturing of peace processes.⁵⁰ Simultaneously, Lundgren and Svensson observe a

surprising decline in international mediation of conflicts despite the increased preparedness of international mediators. According to their study, two-thirds of all conflicts do not receive any international mediation whatsoever in a given year. This suggests there is still plenty of room for engagement.⁵¹

Development cooperation

The link between peace and development is not new. As early as 1994, the United Nations’ *Human Development Report* linked up development and peace: “Without peace, there may be no development. But without development, peace is threatened.”⁵² In the following years, growing consensus was established on the so-called humanitarian-development-peace nexus. On the one hand, preventing conflict promotes a safe environment in which humanitarian harm is reduced and sustainable development can be implemented. On the other hand, working on alleviating humanitarian risks and supporting development in itself builds peace by taking away some of the root causes of conflict.⁵³ A recent SIPRI study confirms the positive link between development funding and conflict prevention. The study found that post-conflict countries that avoid relapse receive significantly higher levels of official development assistance (ODA) than post-conflict countries that do relapse into violence.⁵⁴

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It is no surprise, then, that a second policy instrument often used to promote peace internationally is development cooperation. Not only do Norway and Sweden have a long tradition of providing more ODA than

most other donors – respectively, 0.86% and 0.9% of their gross national income (GNI) in 2022 – but they also explicitly link it to peacemaking

and conflict prevention.⁵⁵ In 2016, the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, in a report for the country's parliament, stressed the importance of coordinating development assistance with efforts promoting peace and security.⁵⁶ In Sweden, peace promotion and conflict prevention have been explicit objectives of development policy and are part of the mandate of the Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA). By promoting peaceful and inclusive societies, Sweden has supported mine clearance efforts, peaceful dialogue, mediation and activities around the protection of children in conflicts. Furthermore, about 9% of SIDA's budget allocation in 2022 had peace and security as its primary objective.⁵⁷ A recent report evaluating the peace-related activities of the agency observed that SIDA has impacted peace and conflict prevention positively at the individual level but has not succeeded in addressing the root causes of conflict.⁵⁸ Switzerland, on the other hand, has never reached the internationally agreed-upon target of spending 0.7% of its GNI on ODA. In 2022, the Swiss level of ODA spending stood at 0.56% of its GNI.⁵⁹

Sub-state regions also invest in development cooperation as this is often among their competencies and is a domain in which regions can develop activities autonomously from central government.⁶⁰ Catalonia aims to promote peace with conflict prevention and peacebuilding being one of the thematic priorities for the Catalan development strategy 2023–2026. Other priorities are human rights, gender equality and women's rights, climate, health, refugee aid, democracy, and developing economies.⁶¹ The Catalan government promotes an explicitly feminist perspective as a distinctive feature of its development policy. It offers long-term funding as well as immediate humanitarian funding. For instance, in reaction to the conflict in Gaza beginning in 2023, the Catalan government made a pledge of over €1 million to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees in the Near East.⁶² Wales, in turn, uses its Well-being of Future Generations Act (2015) as its guide. The act aims to improve

the economic, social, environmental and cultural well-being of Wales by focusing on seven well-being goals. One of the goals is to build a “globally responsible” Wales with a positive contribution to global well-being.⁶³ According to Sophie Howe, Future Generations Commissioner for Wales, sustainable development and peace are inherently linked.⁶⁴ That is also why Wales finances projects to fight climate change and food insecurity through its ODA.⁶⁵ Meanwhile, the Italian region of Emilia-Romagna links development and peace in its ODA tagline “Development cooperation – International relations between peoples – Promotion of a culture of peace”.⁶⁶ Finally, the region of Hessen mainly focuses on educational exchange opportunities for students from developing countries at universities in the region. While it draws a link with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), it does not make direct reference to peace in its policy.

The war in Ukraine and geopolitical tensions have had a considerable impact on ODA spending and priorities. In 2022, Ukraine received the second-largest amount of aid ever given to a single country in a single year since Iraq in 2005 and more than double what Afghanistan, Syria and Yemen had received together in any year.⁶⁷ ODA budgets thereby increasingly focus on humanitarian emergency relief as the demand for humanitarian assistance is increasing.⁶⁸ This means less budget is available for long-term development needs in vulnerable countries, while compounded crises (such as the COVID-19 pandemic and global warming) are actually increasing the need for long-term support.⁶⁹ Worryingly, a recent report from the OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) looking into the share of ODA budgets directed at sustaining peace and conflict prevention confirmed a decrease in funding with 2021 observing a 15-year record low.⁷⁰ Peacebuilding activities are vulnerable to political volatility, changes in policy priorities, and budgets. 60% of OECD Development Assistance Committee members' total peace ODA depends on only three main donors, which also

reflects the distribution of spending on ODA overall: the United States, Germany, and the European Union.⁷¹

Additionally, global military spending stood at a record high in 2022, with Russia's invasion of Ukraine as a major driver. Most European countries have boosted their military budgets since the invasion, with pledges made for multiple years, while simultaneously fighting a cost-of-living crisis.⁷² Research suggests that increases in military spending often coincide with relative drops in social spending (e.g. on education and ODA).⁷³ Underinvestment in social spending is related to growing inequalities and a heightened risk of violent conflict, especially in fragile countries. In short, increasing humanitarian and military spending, however necessary, creates pressure to reallocate development budgets making it harder to address underlying drivers of violent conflict.⁷⁴

This evolution can also be observed in some of the case studies' development policies. Despite Sweden traditionally being one of the leading ODA donors worldwide, the government of Ulf Kristersson has announced a significant drop in the country's ODA funding over the coming years. Development activities have shifted geographically towards Ukraine and neighbouring areas. Today, Ukraine is the largest recipient of Swedish bilateral ODA.⁷⁵ Thematically, more funding goes to emergency relief than to long-term development or peacebuilding activities.⁷⁶ Moreover, part of Sweden's bilateral aid has been made conditional on partner countries' willingness to help curb illegal migration to Sweden.⁷⁷ And, while the country's ODA budget has been cut, the government has announced an increase in defence spending, with the goal of reaching NATO's 2%

norm in 2024.⁷⁸ Increasingly, there is a sense that development cooperation should reflect strategic interests.⁷⁹ The mix of decreased ODA spending, a refocus on emergency relief, a more transactional understanding of development cooperation and increased defence spending will most likely have negative consequences for long-term development goals in fragile and developing countries. This will no doubt counteract Swedish conflict prevention and peace-building efforts.

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While Switzerland does not spend as much on ODA as Sweden does, it has similarly refocused its development budget towards emergency relief and the

reception of refugees in reaction to the war in Ukraine.⁸⁰ Excluding these refugee costs, the Swiss ODA budget decreased in 2022.⁸¹ This suggests, as in the case of Sweden, that long-term support for development efforts aimed at conflict prevention will be negatively affected.

Norway, in contrast, is observing quite an interesting budgetary shift. While most European countries have been struggling with a cost-of-living crisis due to gas prices in the context of the war in Ukraine, Norway has been able to increase its gas revenues.⁸² This gives the country more financial leeway and responsibility to invest in international solidarity. Norway ranks first in terms of its share of gross domestic product (GDP) (approximately 1.7%) committed in support to Ukraine, before the United States and the United Kingdom.⁸³ It has also agreed to a multi-annual (2023–2027) aid package for Ukraine of NOK 75 billion which equals approximately €6.4 billion^a combining civilian, humanitarian and military support.⁸⁴ But, while its support for Ukraine has increased, Norway has not changed its outlook on global solidarity. It has supported other countries that have been severely affected by the global

a At NOK to Euro exchange rate on 1 January 2024.

ramifications of the war in Ukraine by providing an additional budget of approximately €426 million to alleviate the situation.⁸⁵ Despite increased defence spending, the government states its wish to continue to pursue its target of spending 1% of its GNI on ODA in 2023. Nonetheless, while its ODA increased in real terms its share of GNI fell to 0.86% in 2022.⁸⁶ A group of experts investigating a new framework for development policy suggested an increase in development financing from 1% to 2% of GNI. This would, according to the group's report, reflect growing needs worldwide as well as Norway's improved capacity to contribute.⁸⁷

Multilateralism and the rules-based international order

Small countries have a vested interest in a strong multilateral order based on international law. Respect for international law and a strong multilateral system are the best guarantors of national security and of global peace and security. It prevents smaller countries from being engaged in power struggles and conflicts between major powers.⁸⁸ Furthermore, it supports small countries in tackling global problems that it would be impossible for them to deal with on their own (e.g. global health and the climate). The European peace nations and regions therefore support and actively promote international cooperation and a rules-based multilateral system. Norway and Sweden helped to build the rules-based multilateral order as we know it today. In contrast, Switzerland has a more strained relationship with the UN system in view of its neutral status and it only became an official UN member state in 2002. Nonetheless, Switzerland has always been a staunch defender of international law and hosts several multilateral institutions, such as the International Labour Organization (ILO), the International Organization for Migration (IOM),

the World Health Organization (WHO), the World Trade Organization (WTO), the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the UN Institute for Disarmament Research (UNIDIR).

The support of multilateralism, however, is beneficial not only for global peace and security but also for the international economy and trade. For open and relatively small economies – such as those of Norway, Sweden and Switzerland – this matters.⁸⁹ Working on international stability through the promotion of multilateralism is therefore also vital to safeguarding national interests, such as around trade, the economy and prosperity. Such reasoning can also be found in some sub-state regions, many of which are dependent on a stable international environment for their economy and prosperity. The German state of North Rhine-Westphalia, for example, makes the link with economic opportunities when implementing development cooperation activities in its partner country Ghana.⁹⁰ The Belgian region of Flanders also links international stability with the economic prosperity of the region.⁹¹

The peace nations have developed various strategies to promote and support multilateralism. A first way peace nations support multilateralism is by offering budgets and personnel to the UN system. Every UN member is required to contribute to the organisation's budget, which funds administrative costs and several of its agencies and peacekeeping operations. Additionally, member states can voluntarily support specific UN programmes that mainly rely on discretionary funding, such as UNHCR, the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) and the World Food Programme (WFP).⁹² The Nordic countries are typically among the biggest funders of UN activities.⁹³ Norway is one of the leading voluntary donors to UN agencies. Most of its development budget is spent through UN activities and other multilateral efforts. Similar is true for Sweden. For instance, in December 2023, the country announced a non-military support package for Ukraine worth SEK 1.4 billion (+/-

€125 million)^a funded by the Swedish development budget. The support will be channelled through multilateral institutions such as the World Bank, the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the WFP, and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development.⁹⁴ Nevertheless, members of the current centre-right government in Sweden are of the opinion that multilateral institutions, and especially the United Nations, are too inefficient and prone to corruption. They also believe China has too much influence over the United Nations.⁹⁵ As a consequence, the government has announced a cutback in funding for UN agencies, with funding being reoriented towards civil society organisations.⁹⁶ This is a reappraisal of national interest in Sweden's foreign policy. Whereas international solidarity, multilateralism and peace policy were previously seen as being in Sweden's national interest, today this does not seem to be the case.

In the past, Norway and Sweden also contributed significant numbers of troops to UN peacekeeping missions, but this decreased in the 1990s. Nowadays, the leading troop contributors are mostly countries from the Global South. Norway and Sweden, however, still contribute financially and with civilian experts.⁹⁷

The peace nations also play an important role as “norm entrepreneurs” in multilateral forums. A norm entrepreneur is “an actor strongly committed to a certain norm, and ready to actively promote this norm to shape the behaviour of others”.⁹⁸ The peace nations have always been strong promoters of the

Whereas international solidarity, multilateralism and peace policy were previously seen as being in Sweden's national interest, today this does not seem to be the case.

Recently, a real crisis in arms control and disarmament has arisen. Russia voiced nuclear threats after its invasion of Ukraine.

values of peace and conflict prevention within the United Nations.⁹⁹ Norway, for example, actively promotes the Women, Peace and Security agenda.¹⁰⁰ As an elected member of the UN Security Council in 2021–2022, Norway announced that it would make use of its experience of peace diplomacy to strengthen conflict prevention and resolution efforts. It further advocated for norms around climate security and the protection of civilians, including children.¹⁰¹ Sweden pioneered a feminist foreign policy (FFP) in 2014 and started promoting norms on women and gender equality more explicitly in various multilateral forums, such as the United Nations and

the European Union. Several countries followed the Swedish example, announcing a FFP and organising international conferences on the subject in the following years. As the Nordic model for peace and security started to show cracks in recent years, Wivel argued that the Swedish FFP could be an “original reformulation of a Nordic approach based on values that the Nordics view both as valuable in their own right and as useful for creating a more just and secure world”.¹⁰² The current Swedish government, however, revoked the FFP when it came into office in 2022, arguing that the label had become more important than the policy's content.¹⁰³ Even though the government stated it would remain committed to gender equality as a core value, by revoking the label of FFP, it signalled a clear step back from its normative ambitions at the international level.

Sweden has also practised norm entrepreneurship at the international level, through its advocacy of (nuclear) disarmament and non-proliferation, although its activity in this area has

^a At SEK to Euro exchange rate on 1 January 2024.

decreased since the end of the Cold War.¹⁰⁴ Recently, however, a real crisis in arms control and disarmament has arisen. Russia voiced nuclear threats after its invasion of Ukraine. On top of that, most if not all arms control efforts have been struggling to make progress in recent years. The Swedish minister of foreign affairs, therefore, addressed the opening of the UN General Assembly in September 2023 as follows: “Multilateralism is our best chance to address these challenges and realise the objectives enshrined in the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty.”¹⁰⁵ Nevertheless, in light of the war in Ukraine, Sweden has applied for NATO membership. NATO being a nuclear alliance, this will inevitably affect Sweden’s future positions on arms control and (nuclear) disarmament, making it harder for the country to continue to be a norm entrepreneur on these topics. Norway, in contrast, is a founding NATO member and was able to take on a leading role in past disarmament efforts (e.g. the Convention on Cluster Munitions). This could suggest it remains possible for Sweden to become a norm entrepreneur inside NATO, promoting norms of peace and conflict prevention as it did after it became an EU member state.¹⁰⁶ The question of whether this is a realistic role for Sweden to take up will depend on political will inside the Swedish political establishment.

Another way of supporting multilateralism is by hosting international institutions and agencies, and political meetings and conferences on peace efforts worldwide. Switzerland hosts several UN institutions and agencies, international organisations, and international non-governmental organisations. It also organises political meetings in an effort to support the promotion of multilateral cooperation and peace.¹⁰⁷ By taking over protective power mandates representing countries vis-à-vis others with whom diplomatic relations have ruptured, Switzerland also promotes

cooperation and dialogue as much as possible.¹⁰⁸ Norway has hosted several international meetings on issues surrounding peace and conflict. In 2008, for instance, it sponsored the Oslo Process, which led to the Convention on Cluster Munitions. As the sponsor of the convention, Norway expressed concern over the United States’ decision to send cluster munitions to Ukraine in July 2023.¹⁰⁹

When sub-state regions and multilateralism are examined, the tension between cooperation and competition with the central state becomes clear. It is often more difficult for sub-state regions to be heard with a clear voice on the international stage due to membership restrictions and hesitation on the part of third countries that do not want to give too much legitimacy to sub-state actors, even if the topics at hand are a responsibility of the region and not the central government. Nevertheless, some regions have been able to develop policies supporting multilateral cooperation. Flanders, for instance, is one of UNESCO’s top donors as the organisation focuses on topics related to Flemish competencies (i.e. education, heritage and science).¹¹⁰ Flanders also contributes financially to other multilateral bodies, such as ILO, WHO, the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and the Council of Europe. Moreover, Flanders has developed a policy framework on multilateral cooperation in which it underlines the importance of multilateralism and international

It is noteworthy that regions with a wish for autonomy vis-à-vis their central state have been observed to develop a more outspoken foreign policy as a strategy to strengthen their legitimacy.

law.¹¹¹ Catalonia often uses international forums to highlight the importance of peace – for example, within the European Union, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), and conferences around the SDGs.¹¹² It is noteworthy that regions with a wish for autonomy

vis-à-vis their central state have been observed to develop a more outspoken foreign policy as a strategy to strengthen their legitimacy.¹¹³

Overall, multilateralism and the international rules-based order are under serious threat. While finding new agreements has become more difficult due to growing power politics and the perception that the current global order does not reflect reality, existing agreements are being violated or revoked. The basic principles of the UN Charter are under attack in Ukraine. At the same time, many are calling out double standards, comparing the (rightful) international condemnation of the illegal invasion of Ukraine with the more disparate reactions over the violence in Gaza. In both cases, the UN Security Council has been paralysed by veto powers. The perception that a few

powerful states enjoy more privileges than others has led to a breakdown of trust and legitimacy in the international rules-based order. The challenge for the international community will be to restructure and strengthen the multilateral system and its institutions in an inclusive and equitable manner to ensure that it applies to all states without exception.¹¹⁴ It will be important for states calling for multilateralism and international law to also actively support such a process. Furthermore, it will be of great significance to implement orders by the International Court of Justice and the International Criminal Court in cases brought in light of the conflicts in Gaza and Ukraine; this will ensure the consistent application of international law, and thus its value for peaceful conflict resolution in the future. Norway, Sweden and Switzerland all recognise the jurisdiction of these international justice institutions and will therefore be responsible, together with international partners, for ensuring their legal orders are enforced.

The perception that a few powerful states enjoy more privileges than others has led to a breakdown of trust and legitimacy in the international rules-based order.

Arms export controls

In addition to mediation, development cooperation and the promotion of multilateralism, governments have another concrete policy tool at their disposal: the control of arms exports. By their nature, weapons carry the potential to inflame tensions, foster insecurity and exacerbate conflict. Gallea, for instance, found that arms transfers in Africa increased the risk of internal conflict, resulting in higher civilian casualties and more people displaced.¹¹⁵ In addition, Meulewaeter observes a link between arms transfers, military spending and a country's willingness to participate in

armed conflict.¹¹⁶ Moreover, a recent report on the illegal arms trade in relation to the war in Ukraine warns about the toxic legacy of weapons after conflicts end as weapons flood illegal markets and most attempts at preventing proliferation in the past have failed.¹¹⁷ This is especially worrying as most of these firearms are military grade. The impact of Western Balkan weapons appearing in violent incidents in Europe (e.g. the 2015 terrorist attacks in Paris and the escalating gang wars in Sweden in 2023) demonstrates how past conflicts can be linked with future insecurity and criminality.¹¹⁸ In addition, the increased presence of firearms in post-conflict societies has been linked to increased instances of domestic and gender-based violence, with more lethal outcomes affecting both women and men.¹¹⁹

It is therefore important that states wanting to promote conflict prevention and peace try to limit and reduce the harm and negative effects of arms exports. However, this proves to be a complex balancing act as states do not only take into account ethical considerations when exporting arms. "Hard" interests such as security and the economy also play a crucial role and are weighed against "soft" values such as conflict prevention and peace.¹²⁰

The balancing act becomes very apparent in our case studies. While being strong promoters of conflict prevention and peace, Norway, Sweden and Switzerland are also among the top 25 largest arms exporters worldwide, with Sweden being the fifth

largest exporter in the European Union.¹²¹ To reduce the harmful impact of their arms exports, however, these countries each have arms export policies to ensure their transfers do not contribute to the exacerbation of conflict, human rights abuses or breaches of international law, and do not counteract national interests. Principles such as democracy, human rights, sustainable development, international law, international peace and security, and conflict prevention therefore guide decisions on transfer licences. Norway and Sweden both have their own national legislation and carry out the European Union's Common Position 2008/944/CFSP, which obliges states to consider several criteria when delivering licences for arms exports to avoid short- and longer-term conflict risks.¹²² The Swiss War Materiel Act sets out similar guiding principles for arms exports.¹²³ All three countries are also member of the Arms Trade Treaty, which regulates the international trade in conventional arms in order to “prevent and eradicate the illicit trade in conventional arms and prevent their diversion”.¹²⁴

Most sub-state regions do not have competencies in delivering export licences for military equipment. Regions in Belgium – for example, Flanders – are an exception in that regard. Since 2003, the competence of arms export controls has been regionalised in Belgium. The Flemish region then became responsible for export licences for military equipment from its territory. In 2012, the Flemish policy was consolidated in Flemish legislation. The Flemish region puts emphasis on the need to protect human rights and peace, and the need to prevent conflicts. Unlike in Sweden or Switzer-

While being strong promoters of conflict prevention and peace, Norway, Sweden and Switzerland are also among the top 25 largest arms exporters worldwide, with Sweden being the fifth largest exporter in the European Union.

land, Flemish industry does not produce finished systems for military use. The main exports are (technological) components to be integrated into bigger systems.¹²⁵ It is therefore complex to make sure the end users of such integrated systems fulfil the Flemish

guiding principles. In 2021, for instance, a coalition of civil society organisations sued the Flemish government for providing components for A400M military transport aircrafts that were used by Turkey in Libya contrary to a UN embargo.¹²⁶ In another case, Flemish-produced screens were detected in Russian Pantsir-S1 air defence systems that had likely been used in the war in Ukraine.¹²⁷

But it is not only Flemish components that end up in the wrong hands. Norway, Sweden and Switzerland each have been confronted with similar scandals in the past. In 2019, Swedish television reported on arms and/or components that were used by the Saudi-led coalition against the Houthis in the war in Yemen to commit war crimes.¹²⁸ Norway was faced with similar allegations in 2021, when a report in *Aftenposten* suggested that Norwegian weapons had ended up in the Yemeni conflict via exports to the United Arab Emirates.¹²⁹ And in Switzerland, *Terre des Hommes* reported that Swiss weapons had been used in police operations in Brazilian favelas, resulting in serious human rights violations against children and young people.¹³⁰ Many, therefore, criticise their governments for the inconsistency of promoting peace while at the same time producing and exporting arms.

These worries and the balance between security considerations and conflict prevention have become even more urgent in the context of the war in Ukraine. While there is a legal basis to offer lethal support to Ukraine in its legitimate defence against the Russian invasion, the long-term conflict risks related to the unprecedented flow of

weapons to Ukraine are not to be underestimated (e.g. arms proliferation, regional instability, exacerbation of conflict, diversion, violations of international law, difficulty in end-use monitoring and environmental destruction).¹³¹ To support Ukraine, Norway and Sweden have delivered defensive as well as offensive military equipment. For Sweden this was the first time since 1939, with the Soviet invasion of Finland, to send arms to a country at war.¹³² While Norway initially supported Ukraine through donations and training, since 1 January 2024, the Norwegian arms export policy has also allowed for direct sales of weapons and other defence-related products to Ukraine. Norwegian companies can now apply for export licences for direct arms sales to Ukraine. Foreign Minister Barth Eide explained the decision based on the extraordinary security situation but immediately clarified that this “does not mean that we will allow direct sales of weapons to countries at war on a general basis”, adding that “Norway has benefited from maintaining a strict export control policy.”¹³³

While a legal and political basis exists for providing military support to Ukraine, scholars still call for careful reflection on normative values contained in arms control laws, as the case of Ukraine could set a precedent for future transfers.¹³⁴

Switzerland, in contrast, is holding on to its neutral status, which dictates that it cannot get involved in a war between two states by providing them with direct or indirect military support. Switzerland therefore does not allow any arms exports to Ukraine, nor does it allow any re-exports of its war material to Ukraine, as has been requested by several of its European allies (i.e. Denmark, Germany and Spain).¹³⁵ Recently, a draft bill has been taken into consideration by the Swiss parliament about a possible relaxation of the conditions for re-exportation of Swiss arms.¹³⁶ At

the time of writing, no decision had been made. However, recent research pointed out that Russia continues to rely on foreign components for its arms production. In fact, 6% of parts found in Russian weapons on the battlefield were Swiss.¹³⁷ This example underlines the crucial importance of arms export controls.

Cultural and educational activities

According to UNICEF’s definition of peace education, it is important to learn about war, conflict and peace because doing so allows countries and their populations to develop and promote peace-oriented knowledge, skills, values and attitudes.¹³⁸ Indeed, these are important prerequisites for building sustainable and peaceful relationships, not only on a personal level but also within society and between states.¹³⁹ Exchange between cultures can promote

friendly and peaceful relations between peoples. Many countries and sub-state regions therefore focus on peace in educational and cultural activities. Especially for sub-state regions, culture and education offer good opportunities to focus on peace.

In Catalonia, for example, education is seen as an important tool to promote a culture of peace. This happens through higher education programmes and peace schools. Furthermore, the Catalanian Ministry of Culture supports the promotion of peace in El Salvador through sports, art and cultural activities for youth. Inside Catalonia, several cities carry the label “Mayors for Peace”, which helps them promote a culture of peace. Wales, in contrast, focuses more on exchange programmes to Lesotho, Namibia and Uganda so

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that students as well as teachers can learn from one another. At the national level, Wales supports schools to develop peace as a cross-curricular theme.¹⁴⁰ In 2020, the Academi Heddwch Cymru (Welsh Peace Institute) was founded to unite several universities to promote peace research and Welsh peace heritage. The Scuola di Pace di Monte Sole (Monte Sole Peace School), in the Italian region of Emilia-Romagna, also focuses on exchange between students with a specific focus on peace education. The German region of North Rhine-Westphalia, too, invests in educational and scientific exchange programmes in support of cultural exchange. It additionally offers opportunities to gain work experience in Germany through a programme on scientific and educational cooperation with Northern Macedonia.

The peace nations also invest heavily in education and peace research. Norway, Sweden and Switzerland each have internationally renowned peace research institutes, respectively the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), the Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO) and Swisspeace that get funding from government. These institutes support policy with scientific knowledge and research to obtain a better understanding of the root causes of conflict, and how to prevent and remove them. The Catalan city of Barcelona has established the Barcelona International Peace Centre to promote a culture of dialogue and to provide training in crisis management and conflict resolution. Moreover, both German regions considered in this analysis – Hessen and North Rhine-Westphalia – fund renowned research institutes that focus on the study of peace and conflict: the Bonn International Centre for Conflict Studies and the Leibniz-Institut für Friedens- und Konfliktforschung (Peace Research Institute Frankfurt). Together these institutes publish a yearly peace report analysing the international

context and giving advice to policy-makers on what actions to take.

Another example of peace promotion through culture and education is seen in the various peace prizes that exist. The Nobel Peace Prize, which is awarded every year in Oslo, is probably the most well-known and renowned peace prize. On a more local level, however, regions and cities award many other peace prizes. Good examples are the Hessischer Friedenspreis (Hessen's Peace Prize), awarded by the German region Hessen since 1993, and the Ypres Peace Prize, which is awarded every two years by Ypres, itself known as the City of Peace. Since 1983, North Rhine-Westphalia has awarded a peace prize for authors of children's books related to peace and conflict.

In the context of the war in Ukraine, not all cultural and educational exchange programmes have been able to continue. Many universities stopped their exchange programmes with Russia in reaction to the illegal invasion.

In the context of the war in Ukraine, not all cultural and educational exchange programmes have been able to continue. Many universities stopped their exchange programmes with Russia in reaction to the illegal invasion. Norway and Russia share a border

and history. After the invasion of Ukraine, however, Norway's relationship with Russia changed fundamentally. Seven in ten Norwegians believe the relationship will be damaged for generations to come. Still, while there is broad public support for arms transfers to Ukraine and sanctions against Russia, a large majority of Norwegians (84–85%) believe it remains important to have a good relationship with Russia, with 70% saying that Norway should maintain people-to-people cooperation with Russia.¹⁴¹ This shows that Norwegians have a pragmatic understanding of their own geography and culture, and this could have an impact on post-conflict cultural and educational activities.

Ways forward for peace in foreign policy

As this analysis has observed, peace nations and regions have developed their own sets of policy tools to work on peace at the international level. Starting from a historical national identity as “great powers of peace”, Norway, Sweden and Switzerland have mainly focused on mediation, development cooperation, and the promotion of multilateralism and international law to create and sustain peaceful societies.

Being arms producers, they have also developed national laws to prevent arms exports from ending up in the wrong hands and inflaming conflict. Sub-state regions often have a different set of policy tools at their disposal, depending on their competencies, the relationship with the central state and how much autonomy their constitutional framework allows them. Regions looking for more self-governance, such as Catalonia, Flanders and Wales, have developed more explicit peace policies with a focus on development cooperation, multilateralism, and educational and cultural activities as a way to gain credibility and legitimacy. The other regions, which have less contested relationships with their respective overarching states, have not developed the same peace orientation at the international level.

Peace policy is, however, subject to change depending on the international and political context it is shaped in. Today, the world is faced with multiple crises. The war in Ukraine is testing European states’ security and foreign policies. Increasing international tensions between the superpowers and new violence in the Middle East are only adding more insecurity. The Covid-19 pandemic showed how difficult it was for the international community to come together in

solidarity. All the while, climate deterioration is costing lives and livelihoods while states find it difficult to take appropriate and urgent action to prevent worse. In this context, the peace policies studied for this analysis face three important challenges:

1. Small nations and regions depend on an effective multilateral rules-based world order for their own security, economy and prosperity. But the world is faced with an increasingly **volatile international system** in which the fundamentals of multilateralism and international law are challenged by war, geopolitical competition and mistrust.

An increasingly insecure world with a less-than-effective multilateral system will therefore affect small nations’ and regions’ peace policies. Inherent tensions between national security considerations and countries’ contributions to international peace and security will become more apparent. The war in Ukraine had a profound impact on Europe’s strategic environment. As a result, a country like Sweden, which previously defined itself as a leader of international peace and solidarity, is now prioritising Swedish interests and refocusing towards a more security-oriented foreign policy. The peace nations’ attention is shifting elsewhere, and this has important strategic and budgetary implications for peace policy.

2. At the national level, **political trends** in some countries are making international cooperation and solidarity an increasingly contested subject. Foreign policy is becoming more instrumentalised in the name of a perceived national interest. This is no less true for the peace nations studied

An increasingly insecure world with a less-than-effective multilateral system will affect small nations’ and regions’ peace policies.

for this analysis. In Sweden, the current minority government receives backing from the far-right party Sweden Democrats to be able to govern. In Norway, the right-wing Progress Party has previously participated in government in 2013 and 2017. And in Switzerland the Swiss People's Party – far right, Eurosceptic and in favour of a conservative interpretation of the country's neutrality policy – has been in government for many years and won the national elections in 2023. With most of these parties being anti-immigration, Eurosceptic and wary of multilateralism, the very norms and values that have historically underpinned the peace nations' international efforts for peace and conflict prevention are contested. These parties' vision of foreign policy is increasingly at odds with a worldview based on equality and the peaceful resolution of conflict. The question therefore arises of whether the "peace brand" still fits the product.¹⁴²

3. The **liberal peace** model, which has historically been propagated by the peace nations, has become a topic of debate in recent decades. As foreign peacebuilding interventions have not had the desired effect and in some cases even produced destabilising effects, liberal peace as a concept has come under scrutiny.¹⁴³ While overt fighting might have stopped, many peacebuilding efforts have not given enough attention to the long-term need to build a sustainable, lasting and positive peace.¹⁴⁴ Critical scholarship has questioned the means and methods used, as well as the desirability of international interventionism.¹⁴⁵ New and emerging

powers are increasingly participating in peacebuilding activities, thereby introducing new understandings and methods of the practice.¹⁴⁶ Criticism related to the liberal peace model, as well as the addition of new players to the peacebuilding field, will affect how peace policy will evolve in the coming years. There is a need to discuss the very nature of peace and how it should be realised.¹⁴⁷

Consequently, the peace nations and regions are standing at a crossroads. Given the tense international and national political contexts, how can peace policy evolve to withstand or become better adapted to concurring crises? It is important to rethink how countries and regions can work towards peace at the international level, and many are already attempting the exercise. In what follows, this analysis offers five explorations in support of rethinking peace policy to make it fit for the future. Each section additionally reflects on what these explorations mean, providing some concrete examples.

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National identity can be a strong basis to develop a credible peace policy

National identity is a construct often used for political, economic and cultural purposes. This is no different with the peace brand. The peace nations, for instance, also use their peace policies as a way to create security and prosperity at the national level, or as instruments to gain diplomatic status at the international level. As Nissen says, "peacemaking is not only a good deed, but also a smart foreign policy".¹⁴⁸ At the regional level, Catalonia, Flanders and Wales use their

respective peace brands as a way to increase their profiles internationally and to build legitimacy so as to grow their autonomy and self-government internally.

Nevertheless, the examples of the case studies demonstrate that when national identity is rooted in historical experience, it is more than just a brand. Rather, it can also function as an inspiration for policies promoting norms of peace and conflict resolution. It provides these countries and regions with credibility around their peace policies at the international level. Leira suggests that such an identity-based rather than interest-driven peace policy might prove more resilient than other peace policies because “it confirms us as being who we are”.¹⁴⁹

Norway, Sweden and Switzerland built strong national identities as peace nations through historical experience. Norway and Sweden constructed images as natural-born peaceful countries through a history of peaceful coexistence free from “Europe’s historical burden as conquistador, colonialist, and exploiter of the rest of the world”.¹⁵⁰ Given Sweden’s role in Central Europe and Norway’s polar exploration, this is just one interpretation of history. Nonetheless, the peaceful interpretation of Norwegian and Swedish history makes for a good basis on which to build these countries’ identities as peacebuilders. Switzerland, in turn, has built a sense of solidarity and legitimacy as a bridge-builder through its historical positioning as a neutral state. The principle of neutrality, which was a necessity at first to protect Switzerland against the surrounding larger powers, has grown into a strength and asset for its foreign policy.

In terms of the studied regions, Catalonia, Emilia-Romagna, Flanders, Hessen and Wales explicitly reference their historical experiences and

heritage when it comes to peace and conflict. Emilia-Romagna, for instance, was inspired to develop a policy promoting dialogue and sustainable peace in memory of the massacre of Monte Sole by the Nazis in 1944, which sets it apart from the rest of Italy.¹⁵¹ Flanders roots its motivation to promote peace policy in its own experience with war and conflict, especially during the First World War. The German region of Hessen was able to develop its peace orientation mainly due to the work of Albert Osswald, Hessischer minister president from 1969 to 1976. He became an active peace promoter motivated by his own experience as a soldier for the Wehrmacht and a prisoner of war during the Second World War, and was able to influence and inspire the establishment of a peace research institute.¹⁵² The German experience of being a perpetrator in both world wars is often seen as a motivator and responsibility to prevent violent conflict and build peace.

From a more active perspective, such an identity does not have to be rooted in historical experience but can also be constructed by practices or cultures of peaceful conflict resolution within the country’s or region’s own society. For example, Norway was able to peacefully gain independence from Sweden. At the regional level, Flanders has a strong and well-rooted culture of dialogue and peaceful conflict resolution.¹⁵³ Furthermore, the Belgian state structure is the institutional outcome of democratic pacification between two main communities: Flemish and Walloon. These structures

Peace policies are not just about who we are, but also about the conflict resolution practices we were able to build.

and practices co-construct the Flemish peace orientation. Switzerland also developed internal mechanisms for peaceful conflict resolution through its federal state structures, which are aimed at keeping together a heterogenous society and shielding against surrounding big powers. Over time, this practice of conflict prevention developed into a central aspect of Swiss national identity, internally as well as externally, leading

to the Swiss peace-oriented foreign policy.¹⁵⁴ These examples show that peace policies are not just about who we are, but also about the conflict resolution practices we were able to build. A strong national identity rooted in historical experience as well as in a culture and practice of peaceful conflict resolution forms a fertile foundation on which to develop a credible peace policy.

Peace needs an adjective to become manageable

It is interesting to observe that none of the case studies define the concept of “peace” explicitly in their policy documents. Their interpretations of the concept can be derived from the policy tools they use to promote peace and conflict prevention. However, it can be difficult for policy to have the desired outcomes if it is not known what exactly should be achieved. How, then, can we try to conceptualise peace as a concrete and relevant concept for foreign policy?

A classic distinction that appeared early on in peace and conflict scholarship, and remains influential to this day, is between negative peace (the absence of war) and positive peace (the presence of social justice and human rights).¹⁵⁵ The absence of war then becomes a minimum requirement for peace. However, to create a sustainable peace, policy-makers should focus on more than preventing and stopping violence. While the war–peace dichotomy can be very helpful in some cases, some scholars denounce it. For instance, feminist scholars point at forms of violence that continue to exist in so-called peaceful settings (e.g. domestic violence) and, vice versa, forms of peace that exist in violent contexts (e.g. everyday peace between cultural groups in a context of

structural conflict). They define peace and violence as a spectrum or a continuum rather than a dichotomy.¹⁵⁶

Nevertheless, the war–peace dichotomy can in some cases be helpful from a policy perspective. Preventing war and ending violence is of existential importance to many and a very concrete way to work on peace policy. For example, it is important for states to continuously stress the need for negative peace by condemning aggression and violence in the international arena. This becomes the red line, so to speak. It is not surprising, then, that the studied peace policies focus heavily on instruments such as peace mediation, multilateralism, and international law aiming at conflict prevention and the (re)building of (negative) peace.

Simultaneously, while violence and war are a red line, the case studies also invest in development cooperation and in cultural and educational activities as a way to build peace. This suggests an understanding that peace is more than the absence of war and hints towards positive peace. The various elements that need to be present for a positive peace are vast and often difficult for policy-makers to grasp. It may therefore be an interesting exercise to look at the various aspects of peace in the literature. This could provide valuable insights and help to define certain elements of a positive peace. Some examples:

Environmental peace

While climate change is rarely the primary cause of conflict and links between climate and insecurity are often indirect, scientific evidence demonstrates that climate change constitutes a new challenge for international peace and security. Not only does climate change increase conflict risk but also conflict in turn is a major driver of climate vulnerability. These

Not only does climate change increase conflict risk but also conflict in turn is a major driver of climate vulnerability. These interactions will only become more complex and risky with further warming.

interactions will only become more complex and risky with further warming.¹⁵⁷ Investing in climate change mitigation and adaptation measures, increasing the ambition of climate policies, or working on a just and peaceful transition are all

Environmental challenges in Ukraine

There is wide international consensus on the environmental damage caused by war. While Ukraine was already battling the effects of climate change in the years before the Russian invasion of February 2022, the war is causing unprecedented and long-lasting challenges for the environment. Ukraine is home to 35% of Europe's biodiversity, and the war is directly affecting its species and habitats. The war is also having indirect effects on the pollution of air, water and land, and is causing the diversion of resources from policy aimed at countering climate change.¹⁵⁸ The use of landmines, cluster munitions and depleted uranium weapons, for example, poses grave humanitarian risks not only for civilians but also for nature, with remnants polluting land and water. Moreover, the war halted necessary action and investments to mitigate and adapt to climate change, while rebuilding the country's infrastructure will produce high amounts of greenhouse gases and other pollutants. The nature conservation organisation World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) therefore advises international partners to invest in sustainable recovery efforts through a "building back better" strategy.¹⁵⁹ The Norwegian pledge of NOK 200 million (+/- €17.8 million)^a for mine-clearing activities in Ukraine is a good example of a contribution to environmental peace in Ukraine as it will make it possible for agricultural land to be restored.¹⁶⁰

a At the NOK to Euro exchange rate of 1 January 2024.

policy priorities that ultimately support the prevention of violent conflict and preserve international peace and security.

Multilateral peace

Collaboration within the frameworks of multilateral institutions such as the United Nations allows countries to build peaceful relations with one another by providing the necessary mechanisms to handle conflict in non-violent ways. The United Nations was founded to "maintain international peace and security, develop friendly relations among nations ... and to achieve international co-operation in solving economic, social, cultural, or humanitarian challenges".¹⁶¹ Other multilateral organisations outside the United Nations – such as the African Union (AU), the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), the EU and the OSCE – also work towards peace by encouraging states to cooperate on various topics.

Local peace

MacGinty and Richmond observe a "local turn" in the study and practice of peace. They argue in favour of breaking away from top-down understandings and practices of peace. Instead, local knowledge, practice and experience are redefining the meanings of peace, power and legitimacy.¹⁶² By taking into account a fragmented and complex world order where conflicts are interrelated, "any idea of 'the' peace process" is replaced with "multi-level interconnected peace processes".¹⁶³ A peace-oriented foreign policy requires an active engagement with, instead of through or against, local actors even when they seem to contradict the liberal peace view at times.¹⁶⁴ SIDA, for example, has in the past engaged with gangs in El Salvador and Haiti to reduce violence.¹⁶⁵ However, Lundgren and Svensson observe that this type of initiative has become harder over time as governments have increasingly terror-listed local actors as a result of the War on Terror. Subsequently, an increasing number of conflicts are beyond the reach of peace mediation efforts.¹⁶⁶

Agonistic peace

Instead of looking for the end of conflict, the agonistic idea of peace looks at the transformation of antagonistic relations into agonistic ones. The conflicting parties thereby become legitimate adversaries in the continuation of conflict via other, non-violent means. From this perspective, peace agreements neither can nor should end conflict. Instead, antagonistically violent enemy relations should be transformed into respect between adversaries, always in a non-violent and pluralistic way.¹⁶⁷ If peace agreements really aim to transform conflicts, Strömbom et al. suggest a focus on three impor-

Gender-sensitive policy should not only focus on women as men also have a gendered experience of war.

tant elements: the relational inclusion of a pluralistic set of actors, the provision of agonistic spaces to continue conflict by means of dialogue and contestation, and a more open-ended agonistic framing than what is normally pursued in a peace agreement, namely an end to conflict.¹⁶⁸

Feminist peace

Feminist perspectives on peace address all forms of structural violence and oppression, aiming to remedy injustices and create alternative worlds that foster peace with justice.¹⁷¹ According to the Centre for Feminist Foreign Policy, a feminist peace “advances demilitarisation, equality, justice, and the dismantling of discriminatory structures”.¹⁷² Traditionally, the topics at the forefront of a feminist understanding of peace have encompassed gender equality, inclusion and representation of women and other marginalised groups, and humanitarian disarmament.

Societal conflict management in Ukraine

Almost 50% of interstate conflicts end in a negotiated settlement, such as a ceasefire or a peace agreement.¹⁶⁹ While the frontlines have become increasingly frozen, the war in Ukraine risks becoming a long war of attrition. Still, from local and agonistic perspectives on peace, negotiations on the way Ukrainians want to rebuild their society and make peace will be necessary. Such negotiations will not only have to focus on the reconstruction of infrastructure but also on the values and principles that organise Ukrainian life. To prevent ethno-political divides from becoming entrenched, it would be best to combine bottom-up and top-down talks to guide the process of reconstruction. It will be important not only that elites and politicians participate in these discussions but also that civil society, women and other grassroots perspectives are included.¹⁷⁰ International partners with experience in societal conflict management, such as social dialogue, could offer support and means of exchange on such processes of negotiation.

Gendered impacts of war in Ukraine.

From the feminist perspective, particular attention is paid to the gendered impacts of war, and gender equality policies are taken into account during reconstruction efforts. Two examples are supporting preventive measures against sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), as incidents of SGBV often increase during and after conflict, and rebuilding social infrastructure to avoid backsliding on traditional gender roles.¹⁷³ Gender-sensitive policy, however, should not only focus on women as men also have a gendered experience of war. For instance, Ukrainian men of “fighting age” (18–60 years) are not allowed to leave the country (although it is believed that an estimated 20,000 men have fled Ukraine and another

21,000 have been arrested while trying to flee).¹⁷⁴ Moreover, it has become clear that Russian forces have used SGBV not only against women but also against men. Those men will also need the necessary care.

Considering different forms of peace

Environmental, multilateral, local, agonistic and feminist peace all give possible entry points for where policy could support the creation of a sustainable and positive peace. What policy-makers should and could take into account when designing a peace-oriented foreign policy is an important subject of debate between policy-makers, civil society, scholars and stakeholders. The perspectives from the literature offer valuable starting points for discussion and make peace more concrete and achievable in a policy setting.

Different policy areas and levels can be used as building blocks for peace

The perceived coherence and legitimacy of any policy usually depends on the resources and tools that are allocated to effectively implement it. The same goes for peace-oriented foreign policy. Otherwise, policy-makers risk having their policy's credibility undermined or being accused of using the peace brand for strategic gains. Here, it is important to note the differences between states and sub-state regions in terms of competencies, budgets, capacity and so on. Nevertheless, both states and sub-state regions have various policy areas at their disposal to support a peace-oriented policy.

The different understandings of peace explained above offer some ideas about issues that need to

be addressed to (re)build peace. For example, the environmental approach to peace suggests that a combination of climate, agriculture, foreign and development policy can form building blocks for peace. Concrete policy measures for peace could then be meeting international funding obligations on climate change, biodiversity and other environmental issues; reducing subsidies exacerbating the environmental crisis (e.g. subsidies on fossil fuel extraction, overfishing or deforestation); or reducing food insecurity linked to climate-induced droughts and floods.¹⁷⁵ When these measures are taken within the framework of a multilateral organisation such as the WFP or the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), these instruments also strengthen multilateral peace. Additionally, policies can strengthen local and agonistic understandings of peace by making room for contestation through the continuous and active inclusion of marginalised communities, civil society perspectives, grassroots demands, and indigenous communities.

This example shows that by combining different perspectives on peace, it is possible to activate different policy domains. The various policy areas then become building blocks of an integrated and holistic approach to peace. When all policy areas are included as possible building blocks for peace policy, all policy domains (trade, health, education, development etc.) and decision-making levels (local, regional, national and international) become co-responsible for creating and sustaining peace – not only the usual suspects of foreign, security and defence policy. As sub-state regions often lack competencies in foreign or defence policy, this makes it easier for them to focus on other policy areas they do have control over. In that way, they can complement their central state's peace policy by focusing on elements of positive peace in their own policy domains.

Similarly to gender mainstreaming, which has become common today, peace mainstreaming would encourage peace to be considered at all

times and in all policy areas, even the ones that at first sight do not seem to be directly connected to issues of peace and conflict. Humanitarian, development and peacebuilding communities are already acquainted with the “do no harm” principle, which demands their programming to prevent unintended harm by understanding its impact on conflict dynamics.¹⁷⁶ A peace mainstreaming approach would mean all other policy areas integrated a peace perspective and conflict sensitivity in their programming as well. Even better, each policy area would be motivated to actively reflect on how its strategies, priorities and tools contribute (or not) to peace. Learning from gender mainstreaming practices and criticisms, however, it would be important for peace mainstreaming to take a truly integrated and holistic approach to avoid superficial acts of “peacewashing” or nation-branding.

A good example of all levels of government being able to offer building blocks for peace is the European Alliance of Cities and Regions for the Reconstruction of Ukraine, founded in June 2022.¹⁷⁷ Many cities and villages in Ukraine have been destroyed by the war. However, reconstruction efforts in alliance with European regional and municipal authorities can help in exchanging know-how, rebuilding local democracy, rebuilding schools and other infrastructure and services, and other projects. Moreover, when alliances are forged between Ukrainian and European regional and municipal authorities, rebuilding a sustainable peace also becomes the responsibility of local government.

Peace is a relationship

As the case studies demonstrated, it can be important to promote peace as a value through policy interventions, narratives and dialogues. For instance, it is important to condemn all forms of war and aggression at the international level. This way, certain norms and values are defended, namely non-violence and peaceful conflict resolution. At the same time, tension exists between promoting values on the one hand, and reciprocity in the relationship with international partners that have different cultural and normative frameworks on the other hand.

While defending certain norms and values is important, dialogue and reciprocity are also essential factors in building peaceful relations between people and countries. Peacefulness and reciprocity are characteristic of the kinds of *relationships* and the quality of the relationships a country develops within the frame of peace-oriented foreign policy. Peace, then, is not only a value to be promoted; it is also a relationship. In that sense, states actively practice peace by developing peaceful relations with partners, be they like-minded or not. When peace is approached as a relationship, it becomes possible to be more open to different perspectives on a peace-oriented foreign policy, thereby also leaving space for “non-Western” or “non-liberal” approaches.¹⁷⁸

Relationships can take various forms. To concretise what peace as a relationship looks like, it can be helpful to apply understandings of positive and negative peace. From a negative peace perspective, peaceful international relations are characterised by the absence of:

- physical violence, except in cases of self-defence and/or with a UN mandate;

Similarly to gender mainstreaming, peace mainstreaming would encourage peace to be considered at all times and in all policy areas, even the ones that at first sight do not seem to be directly connected to issues of peace and conflict.

- dominance or coercion;
- arms races for offensive purposes, or armament that is not in line with international law;
- explicit hostility.

From a positive peace perspective, peaceful international relations are characterised by the presence of:

- constructive conflict management and/or transformation;
- non-violent coexistence;
- dialogue and cooperation;
- connection and common ground.

A relational approach to peace in foreign policy is made up of three aspects that interact with one another. Firstly, it is important to invest in cooperation and dialogue where possible. Secondly, security considerations (e.g. protection of strategic sectors such as energy and technology) are also important.

And lastly, the ultimate and most important objective always remains the prevention of violent escalations of conflict alongside the promotion of peaceful conflict resolution.

Implementing peace as a relationship in foreign policy allows for states to differentiate their policies for each context and partner. Between like-minded partner countries, such as EU member states, a good basis exists to find common ground. Disagreements will continue to exist, but conflicts are managed or resolved in a constructive and peaceful manner through the existing institutions. Despite recent crises (e.g. the European debt crisis, increased migration and breakdowns in the rule of law), the main focus of the EU relationship remains cooperation based on a shared set of values, even if some partner countries challenge certain values (e.g. protection of LGBTQIA+

rights in Hungary and Poland).

In contrast, in relation to partner countries with different sets of values or cultural frameworks, a different approach can be implemented. Take Europe's relationship with China, which is increasingly characterised by strategic competition as European countries define China as a systemic rival. While tensions and competition with China do exist, it remains important to prevent violent conflict at all times, paying specific attention to Taiwan. Approaching peace as a relationship makes it possible to see the relationship with China as a balancing act where countries

pursue cooperation and common ground where possible (e.g. the green transition, trade and development) while at the same time not losing sight of their own security interests (e.g. knowledge security and economic dependencies in strategic sectors) or norm differences (e.g. relating to human rights and democracy). Such a

balanced approach continues to look, whenever possible, for cooperation and dialogue as a means towards peace. At the same time, it does not mean that values such as human rights lose their importance. Instead, allowing different communication lines to exist encourages exchange, reciprocity and a willingness to listen, which in turn make it possible to address more contentious issues.

While peaceful relations, cooperation and dialogue are central in this framework, it does not exclude a strong and appropriate response towards grave violations of the principles of negative and positive peace laid out above. For instance, a country that uses disproportionate violence (e.g. torture, SGBV or killings) against a civilian population would be a threat to peaceful relations as it would erode the norm of non-violence. In such cases, it is therefore important that the aggressor is not

Approaching peace as a relationship makes it possible to see the relationship with China as a balancing act where countries pursue cooperation and common ground where possible, while at the same time not losing sight of their own security interests or norm differences.

allowed to act with impunity.

Let us look at the illegal Russian invasion of Ukraine and the violence used against the Ukrainian civilian population from this perspective. The principles of negative peace above are clearly violated. In acting in this way, Russia not only violates international law but also threatens international stability, peace and security. The country's actions should therefore be addressed appropriately by the international community. After all, Nobel Peace Prize laureate Oleksandra Matviichuk, from the Ukrainian Centre for Civil Liberties, argues that Russia was emboldened to think it would get away with invading Ukraine by a lack of international reaction to previous Russian war crimes committed in Chechnya, Georgia, Libya and Syria, and the mild international reaction to the annexation of Crimea in 2014.¹⁷⁹ Clear condemnation of Russia's aggression is necessary as a signal that the principle of non-violence has been breached. However, it remains difficult to enforce respect of international law. That is why it can be argued that providing Ukraine with (temporary) military assistance to defend itself against Russian aggression is necessary as a clear signal that territorial integrity and non-violence are important international norms to be upheld.

Still, while it is important to support Ukraine in its defence and survival, worries about militarism driving conflict have rightly been voiced. Military spending has seen record highs since the end of the Cold War and nuclear threats have been made. A new arms race will only increase the risk of violent confrontation. That is why a peace-oriented foreign policy should also adopt the crucial focus point of dialogue through multilateral arms control and disarmament, in an effort to re-establish non-violent coexistence where open hostility and coercion are absent. Simultaneously, the cases brought before the Interna-

tional Court of (ICJ) and the International Criminal Court (ICC) should be supported in so far as they may ensure the consistent application and strengthening of international law.

The new cycle of violence in Israel and Palestine also confronts us with novel dilemmas for which the frame of peace as a relationship might be helpful. The Russian invasion of Ukraine profoundly challenged the multilateral rules-based international order, and this new and horrific episode of bloodshed is dividing the international community further. The protection of civilian life is the first and most important condition to end the cycle of mutual victimisation and to rebuild security and peace for both Israeli and Palestinian communities.¹⁸⁰ From the understanding of peace as a relationship, peace will be promoted by any action that ends the current fighting (negative peace) or the dominance, coercion and hostility in Israeli-Palestinian society (positive peace). This can be done by facilitating mediation efforts (as Egypt and Qatar are doing), by calling and pressuring for a permanent ceasefire (as many governments and the United Nations are doing), by continuing and intensifying humanitarian support to Gaza through international organisations, and by bringing a case before the ICJ to decide on measures to protect civilian life (as South Africa has done).

South Africa's case in the International Court of Justice will prove to be significant for the future legitimacy of the international justice system.

South Africa's case at the ICJ will prove to be significant for the future legitimacy of the international justice system. While breaches of international law were already widespread on both sides of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict,

it is important that governments continue to call and push for all parties to respect international law. By engaging the ICJ, a multilateral institution designed to protect the laws and principles of the international order, South Africa deliberately reiterates and brings into practice these exact princi-

ples. The consistent application of international law in the case of Israel and Palestine, as well as in Ukraine, will prove important for the survival and strength of the multilateral rules-based order. This is vital for peace not only in Ukraine and in Israel and Palestine, but also in the international community as a whole.

The protection of civilians and respect for international law therefore remain the cornerstones of any peace-oriented policy. These should also be the guiding principles when approaching the turmoil that is spreading throughout the Middle East region. The immediate goal remains to prevent a further escalation of violence across the region, while the ultimate goal is a sustainable positive peace.

Tensions are inevitable

Scholarship suggests that the relationship between norms and practice cannot be underestimated. Norms shape and guide interests, identities and behaviour. Practices that deviate from the norm will erode that same norm.¹⁸¹ If governments wish to be considered advocates for the norms of peace and conflict prevention, it is important for them to comply with the norms they propagate.¹⁸² Nonetheless, when propagating norms and values, governments may come into conflict with certain interests. Exporting arms might serve an economic interest while it endangers peace elsewhere. Tensions between values and interests are inherent to peace-oriented foreign policy.

Many European countries – the peace nations Norway and Sweden included – have sent military support to Ukraine in an effort to help the country defend itself. In doing so, they are sending a

strong signal that an illegal invasion of another country is unacceptable. At the same time, sending weapons could contradict the promotion of peaceful conflict resolution. Moreover, the delivery of contested arms such as cluster munitions, which are internationally banned by the Convention on Cluster Munitions, and depleted uranium weapons to Ukraine has led to discussions about respect for humanitarian principles and international law.¹⁸³ The war in Ukraine raises important and sometimes seemingly contradictory questions. On the one hand, what should be done in the short term to help Ukraine defend itself and protect innocent civilian lives (negative peace)? On the other hand, how is it possible to stop the violence and prevent relapse over the long term by rebuilding a sustainable peace post-conflict (positive peace)?

Another tension that arises when developing peace-oriented foreign policy lies at the institutional level. As sub-state regions often have competencies related to peace, the relationship between the central government and the regional government plays an important role. The amount of tension and conflict will depend on the constitutional framework regulating the relations between the different government levels. In regions wanting more self-governance, such as Catalonia and Flanders, these tensions will be more outspoken. In other regions that have a less contested relationship with their central government, such as the German states of Hessen and North Rhine-Westphalia, those tensions play a less prominent role.

How best to deal with tensions in foreign policy is ultimately a political question. To prevent loss of moral authority, credibility and legitimacy, it is important that countries not only practice what they preach but also openly and transparently discuss such dilemmas and possible tensions

If governments wish to be considered advocates for the norms of peace and conflict prevention, it is important for them to comply with the norms they propagate.

when positioning themselves. This way, the underlying values, interests and approaches to peace can be clarified. Government, parliament and other societal stakeholders play an important role in these discussions.

Conclusion

The world is becoming more volatile. The number of conflicts, conflict-related deaths and displaced people have grown steadily over recent years. At the same time, the international community is faced with multiple crises (climate, global health, inequality etc.) that pose grave challenges for international peace and security. While these challenges are best dealt with through collective action, increasing geopolitical tensions are making it more difficult to cooperate at the international level. In this context, how can governments prevent further conflict escalation and start rebuilding peace in a sustainable way?

To answer this question, this analysis has looked at how different states (Norway, Sweden and Switzerland) and sub-state regions (Catalonia, Emilia-Romagna, Flanders, Hessen, North Rhine-Westphalia and Wales) in Europe have developed a peace orientation in their foreign policy. In studying these peace nations and regions, it became clear that they have implemented common policy instruments: international peace mediation, development cooperation, the promotion of multilateralism and the rules-based international order, strict arms export control policies, and the funding of cultural and educational activities. With these instruments, the studied cases promote values around peace and conflict prevention.

However, these states and sub-state regions are facing new choices due to emerging challenges such as the war in Ukraine, multilateral institutions' loss of trust and legitimacy, questioning of the states' and sub-states' preferred peace model, and political trends at home. Certain policy changes made in light of national and international developments have led to questions being raised about the concept of peace nations and regions. In that context, this analysis has tried to offer some thoughts on how peace policy could adapt to changing circumstances and continue to work towards building peace. These explorations are not

intended to form a blueprint, but rather food for thought for those willing to work for peace.

The five explorations touched upon in this analysis are as follows:

1. A strong historical **national identity** can function as inspiration and a basis for a credible peace policy. Historical experience and practices for peaceful conflict resolution can provide governments with inspiration to work towards peace. It also strengthens the international credibility they need to do so.
2. Peace remains an elusive concept for policy practice. Approaching peace from different perspectives, adding an **adjective** to the concept, may offer some concrete ideas and guidance on how to understand peace. Offering insights from the literature, this analysis looked at environmental, multi-lateral, local, agonistic and feminist perspectives on peace.
3. It is important that governments do not only pay lip service to peace but that they also invest in concrete policy instruments to build peace. Building on the different adjectives for peace, **various policy areas and levels** contributing to peace can be identified. That way, peace becomes a shared responsibility of all policy fields, not only of foreign, security and defence policy.
4. Peace is not only a value to promote but also a **relationship** to practice. By looking for cooperation and reciprocity wherever possible, peaceful relationships are strengthened and promoted.
5. As in any policy domain, **tensions** are inevitable when promoting peace in foreign policy. To prevent a loss of legitimacy and trust, transparency about dilemmas, tensions and choices made is important.

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The Flemish Peace Institute was established in 2004 as a para-parliamentary institution within the Flemish Parliament. It provides thorough analyses, informs and organizes the debate and promotes peace and the prevention of violence.

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