

EU Non-Proliferation and Disarmament Consortium

*Promoting the European network of independent
non-proliferation and disarmament think tanks*

The Eighth European Union Non-Proliferation and Disarmament Conference

Brussels, 13 - 14 December 2019

Brief Conference Report

By Federica Dall'Arche

The [Eighth EU Non-Proliferation and Disarmament Conference](#) (EUNPDC) was held on 13 and 14 December 2019 in Brussels, gathering experts on non-proliferation, disarmament, arms control and conventional weapons from public institutions, international organisations, independent think tanks and civil society. The Conference was organised by the Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI) on behalf of the [EU Consortium of Independent Non-Proliferation and Disarmament Think Tanks](#) and was attended by over 230 experts from over 50 countries - EU members, associated states and third countries - and 105 research centres.

The EU Non-Proliferation and Disarmament Conference is one of the flagship events of the Network of independent European think tanks and research centres. The Network was established in July 2010 by the Council of the European Union to support the implementation of [the EU Strategy Against the Proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction](#). The Network, which now also focuses on the implementation of the [EU Strategy Against Illicit Firearms, Small Arms & Light Weapons & Their Ammunition](#), brings together 90 research entities and is coordinated by a Consortium of six institutes: Fondation pour la Recherche Stratégique (FRS), International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS), Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI), Peace Research Institute Frankfurt (HSFK - PRIF), Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) and the Vienna Center for Disarmament and Non-Proliferation (VCDNP).

Since 2012, the annual Conference has been one of the key non-proliferation and disarmament meetings worldwide. It has contributed to promoting strategic discussion on measures to combat the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) and their delivery systems, as well as to address challenges related to conventional weapons, including their illicit trade and the excessive accumulation of small arms and light weapons (SALW) and their ammunition.

The welcome remarks were delivered by *Ettore Greco*, Executive Vice President of the Istituto Affari Internazionali. He highlighted the efforts of the European Union to strengthen non-proliferation and arms control regimes at a time when they are under severe pressure from a wide range of challenges that includes, inter alia, widespread violations of international norms, the stalemate in nuclear disarmament, the US withdrawal from pillar treaties and agreements, technological advances and growing great-power competition. Greco argued that multilateral cooperation remains crucial to address these challenges. He advocated, in particular, the extension of the New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (New START). With regard to the nexus between non-proliferation and disarmament, he recalled the EU support for the establishment of the Weapons of Mass Destruction Free Zone in the Middle East and emphasized the EU's diplomatic role within the context of the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) Review process. Regarding the challenges posed by emerging technologies, Greco stressed the European Union's increasingly proactive role in setting international norms to regulate cyberspace and to ensure the long-term sustainability of outer space activities.

The Conference addressed numerous topics of central importance for the work of the EU and the [European External Action Service \(EEAS\)](#), including the nuclear non-proliferation architecture, confidence and security-building measures, chemical and conventional weapons, arms control in outer space, cybersecurity as well as the [Procurement Channel process under the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action \(JCPOA\)](#). Ad-hoc sessions were also devoted to the regulation of arms trade and to regional challenges in North-East Asia and in the Middle East.

A message on behalf of the Vice-President of the European Commission and High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, *Josep Borrell*, was read by Pawel Herczynski, Acting Deputy Secretary-General of the Common Security and Defence Policy and Crisis Response. The HR/VP noted that “non-proliferation and disarmament are at a critical juncture [and] multilateralism as a

whole is under threat". This calls, according to the HR/VP, for a reinforcement of the Non-Proliferation Treaty: "a key multilateral instrument for international peace, security and stability". Borrell emphasized that "The EU strongly supports all three pillars of the NPT", adding that "our non-proliferation efforts in relation to Iran will continue to be key in this context" referring to the JCPOA. The HR/VP also mentioned the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty, stating that "its disappearance creates a dangerous security void" and that "international efforts aimed at developing confidence-building measures [... to] avoid escalation and further proliferation" are needed and supported by the EU. Borrell concluded his remarks by ensuring the EU's increasing commitment to preventing the trafficking of small arms and light weapons (SALW) and by reiterating the EU recrimination of the use of chemical weapons "anywhere, at any time, by anyone, be it a State or a non-State actor, [and] under any circumstances".

The United Nations Under-Secretary-General and High Representative for Disarmament Affairs, *Izumi Nakamitsu*, also highlighted the main developments in the disarmament realm, stressing the need for a new vision and a revitalized multilateral effort. The HR noted how international relations are being destabilised by a deterioration of dialogue, growing distrust and increasing militarisation. The emergence of new technologies and new domains of warfare also contributes to exposing international security to new vulnerabilities and could lead to the erosion of disarmament and non-proliferation commitments with catastrophic consequences. She emphasized, therefore, the adoption of a new vision based on the principles of verifiability, irreversibility, transparency, accountability and enforcement and on the norm of non-use of nuclear weapons. Also needed, according to the HR, is an honest debate on the application of international law, a common understanding of current and new risks, as well as good-faith negotiations. Nakamitsu concluded her remarks by defining the EU as an indispensable partner, welcoming its continued support in bolstering non-proliferation, arms control and disarmament and, in particular, the NPT process, defined as the cornerstone of the regime and the only de facto negotiating body on the issue.

The American perspective was presented by *Christopher Ford*, US Assistant Secretary of State. He drew a distinction between two approaches to arms control: the "*legal/regulatory approach*", which seeks to influence the behaviour of States by adopting and enforcing binding norms and regulations, and the "*normative approach*",

which aims to achieve the same result by promoting responsible behaviour through non-legal instruments such as a code of conduct. Ford spoke in favour of the latter as a way to cope with challenges in domains such as cyber-space and outer-space, where the traditional legal approach might not be the most suitable. Ford stated that US diplomats have always been “key drivers in developing and promoting effective normative approaches” intending to create “like-mindedness” and use it as a “foundation to collective action in response to reckless or destabilising behaviours”. Nonetheless, a traditional and regulatory approach to arms control is also pursued by the US, according to Ford, “when it can advance us, our allies and partners’ security and we have confidence that agreements are verifiable, enforceable and include partners who would comply responsibly with the obligations”. After expressing concern over “violation of arms control agreements by the Russian Federation” and the “destabilising expansion of the Russian and Chinese nuclear capabilities”, Ford concluded by stating that the US aims at negotiating trilateral arms control agreements.

The Russian perspective was offered by Ambassador *Mikhail Ulyanov*, who expressed reservations over the “idealistic approach” adopted by the US, noting that it “has already led to the elimination of a number of [arms control] agreements, starting from the Anti-Ballistic Missiles (ABM) Treaty to [...] the INF Treaty”. Ulyanov stressed that the demise of the INF was “extremely regrettable. [It] was like a tight jacket for the US policy [preventing] projection of force in different regions of the world [...]” and argued that “never ever the American side was able to present evidence of these quoted Russian violations”. Ulyanov also defined the JCPOA as “a masterpiece of diplomacy” and stigmatised US efforts to prevent others from implementing the agreement. He added that the dismissal of the New START Treaty would be “regrettable and counterproductive”. He also spoke in favour of an international convention to combat acts of chemical and biological terrorism as well as a multilateral nuclear disarmament agreement. He defined the trilateral US proposal as “rather strange [...] as it] forgets the French and UK’s nuclear arsenals, [...] US] allies, while singling out China”. Outer space weaponisation, the establishment of a Weapons of Mass Destruction Free Zone in the Middle East (WMDFZ-ME) and restoring dialogue with the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK) were also considered dossiers requiring particular attention.

Ma Shengkun, the Deputy Director-General of the Department of Arms Control of China, presented the Chinese viewpoint, largely focusing on China’s nuclear doctrine

and posture. Shengkun claimed that China had always exercised restraint by choosing to possess the lowest number of nuclear weapons necessary for the country's defence. Shengkun also addressed complaints over China's lack of transparency on the status of its nuclear arsenal, arguing that two aspects of transparency should be considered. On one hand, transparency revolves around policy and intention. In this vein, he stressed China's no-first-use nuclear policy. On the other hand, transparency is also about disclosing specific nuclear capabilities. He noted that it is not in China's national interest to reveal such information as this would undermine deterrence. Shengkun concluded his remarks by expressing reservations over the prospect of a trilateral nuclear disarmament dialogue with the United States and Russia.

Jacek Bylica, the Special Envoy for Disarmament and Non-Proliferation of the European External Action Service (EEAS), gave an overview of the key EU documents adopted to achieve principles and objectives related to non-proliferation, arms control and disarmament¹. He also described the EU's political, financial and institutional tools to implement such principles, emphasizing the role played by EEAS. He recalled that the EU had always supported multilateralism and universal implementation of international treaties and agreements to cope with arms control and non-proliferation challenges and underlined the EU's financial contribution to the Non-Proliferation and Disarmament Agenda, noting that it had increased significantly over the years. With regard to the next steps, he identified the following priorities: respect for international obligations and human rights, maintenance of international peace and security and, specifically for non-proliferation, the entry into force of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test Ban Treaty (CTBT), the conclusion of a fissile material cut off treaty (FMCT), the preservation of the norm against the use of biological and chemical weapons and full and equal participation of women in decision-making processes.

The 2019 EUNPD Conference also hosted a keynote speech by Norwegian Ambassador *Hans Brattskar*, President of the Fourth Review Conference of the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention (also known as the Ottawa Treaty), who assessed the current state of affairs in light of the Convention's 20th anniversary since its entry into force. Further speakers included the Head of the EU JCPOA Procurement Channel Section, *Nicolas Kasprzyk*, the Director of the United Nations Regional Centre for Peace, Disarmament

¹ Among others, [EU Global Strategy](#); [EU Strategy Against the Proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction](#); [EU Strategy Against Illicit Firearms, Small Arms & Light Weapons & Their Ammunition](#); [EU Common Position on Arms Exports](#); and the [Chemical, Biological, Radiological and Nuclear Security Action Plan](#)

and Development in Latin America and the Caribbean (UNLIREC), *Mélanie Régimbal*, Officer *Jenny Nielsen* from the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty Organization (CTBTO), along with renowned academics, researchers and officials from around the world.

The concluding remarks were delivered by *Sibylle Bauer*, Chair of the EU Non-proliferation and Disarmament Consortium and Director of Studies of the SIPRI Armament and Disarmament Programme. “One purpose of the Consortium and of this Conference is to facilitate an exchange between policymakers, experts and academics”. Bauer stressed the importance of fresh ideas and the need for innovative, creative and forward-looking thinking, inviting the audience to “think outside the box and outside the blocks” and to adopt “strategic empathy” - the ability to position oneself in other countries’ shoes and see things from their perspectives. Bauer also invited participants to look for commonalities rather than solely focus on divisive issues and to reflect upon missed opportunities in order to learn and build upon them. Bauer concluded her remarks by emphasising the need to promote non-proliferation and disarmament education and to ensure that gender balance is not only guaranteed through the participation of women in non-proliferation meetings and events, but through their participation as heads of delegations.

The EU Non-proliferation and Disarmament Conference proved to be, once again, a central event for a multilateral discussion on arms control, non-proliferation and disarmament. It also contributed to reaffirming the strong EU commitment towards the rules-based global order and showed the increased awareness of EU non-proliferation and disarmament policies among government officials, academics and civil society of third countries. Moreover, the debate explored new ways and means of improving capacities in areas of the world with limited expertise in countering the threats related to SALW, WMD and their means of delivery. Finally, the Conference served as a venue to enhance the role and cohesion of European think tanks specialised in non-proliferation and disarmament.



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