

EU Non-Proliferation and Disarmament Consortium

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

The Eleventh European Union
Non-Proliferation and Disarmament Conference,
14-15 November 2022
Brief Conference Report
By
Manuel Herrera¹

The eleventh EU Non-Proliferation and Disarmament Conference (EUNPDC) was held on 14 and 15 November 2022 in a hybrid format at the SQUARE - Brussels Convention Centre in Brussels (Belgium). The Conference was organised by the Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI) on behalf of the [EU Network of Independent Non-Proliferation and Disarmament Think Tanks](#), gathering experts on non-proliferation, disarmament, arms control and conventional weapons from public institutions, governments, international organisations, independent think tanks and civil society. Over 250 experts from more than 50 countries – EU members, associated states and third countries – attended the conference in person.

The EU Non-Proliferation and Disarmament Conference is one of the flagship events of the European Network of Independent Non-Proliferation and Disarmament Think Tanks. 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 also focuses on the implementation of the [EU Strategy Against Illicit Firearms, Small Arms & Light Weapons & Their Ammunition](#), brings together more than 100 research entities and is coordinated by a Consortium of six institutes: La 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

¹ Dr. Manuel Herrera is Researcher in the Multilateralism and Global Governance Programme at the Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI)

accumulation of small arms and light weapons (SALW) and their ammunition. The 2022 edition addressed numerous topics of central importance for the work of the EU, notably the [European External Action Service \(EEAS\)](#), as well as several pressing arms control, non-proliferation and disarmament issues.

The participants were welcomed by Ettore Greco, Executive Vice President of the Istituto Affari Internazionali, who started his speech by explaining the overall mission of the Consortium and the progress it has made in consolidating a broad network of European think tanks working on non-proliferation and disarmament. He then stressed that the Consortium had made a constant effort to improve its activities, such as expanding and diversifying educational activities, involving new areas of expertise, developing its outreach and communication strategy, and undertaking new initiatives to promote the active involvement of the younger generation, in particular young women. He then noted that the 2022 Conference would focus on the war in Ukraine, with a plenary session specifically dedicated to the implications and perspectives of the war. He stated that there would also be two plenary sessions on the main priorities of the international non-proliferation and disarmament agenda. Finally, he also announced two sets of parallel sessions covering topics such as cyber-attacks, the militarisation of outer space, biotechnology, missile proliferation and lethal autonomous weapons.

The Conference was opened by the Managing Director for Common Security and Defence Policy and Crisis Response of the EEAS, Benedikta Von Seherr-Thoss. She emphasised that European security had dramatically changed in one year and there had been, more broadly, a considerable deterioration of the international security environment. Nevertheless, the biggest reason for concern by far is, she said, Russia. The Russian war of aggression against Ukraine, she noted, hampered the EU's work in most multilateral cooperation forums such as at the NPT Review Conference. She added that the EU will continue to work on pressing issues related to WMD, not only nuclear but also chemical and biological weapons, and mentioned the need to face the deteriorating situation in various regional and security environments such as the Middle East and North East Asia. Finally, she mentioned the challenges associated with the proliferation of conventional weapons in the context of Russia's war against Ukraine. She ended her intervention by emphasising that the EU's role and commitment are crucial to tackle all these challenges.

The remainder of the conference was articulated into four plenary sessions and six parallel sessions which discussed a variety of issues such as the future of arms control and international security; the challenges to the NPT regime; the evolving threats of biological weapons; WMD threats in the Middle East; lethal autonomous weapons; cyber-security; responsible behaviour in outer space; missile technology proliferation; the Ukrainian war and weapons proliferation; and the implementation of the EU's non-proliferation and disarmament agenda.

The Special Envoy for Disarmament and Non-Proliferation at the EEAS, Marjolijn van Deelen, stressed the radical change in the global and European security architecture. The current non-proliferation and disarmament regimes served very well in the past as they were instrumental in preventing destabilising arms races and reducing WMD threats over the past decades. Entire categories of WMD were outlawed and robust control mechanisms were set up, and as imperfect as they were, they gave a sense of stability. However, the present reality is different: we are witnessing a paradigm shift, not only in the WMD domain but also beyond. Practically, all major agreements have been challenged or violated. In the diplomatic jargon, this is attributable to "*growing tensions between major powers and worsening of international security*", but this is just a way of saying that

some States appear to be willing to deconstruct the global security order in the hope of gaining a relative advantage.

The UN Under-Secretary-General and High Representative for Disarmament Affairs, Izumi Nakamitsu, concurred that there was a visible shift towards a more turbulent and unstable future. The world is increasingly divided, she noted, distrust is replacing dialogue and the relations between nuclear armed States are deteriorating. She mentioned five objectives that need to be pursued in this context as a matter of priority: first, consolidate global norms against the use and possession of WMD; second, further work towards the elimination of chemical weapons; third, activate new instruments to cope with the dramatically worsening biological threats; fourth, advance the analysis of cyber and outer space as potential domains of conflict; and finally, work towards a positive outcome at the RevCon of the programme of action on small and light weapons. She closed her remarks by stating that in order to tackle the current challenges, there is the need to work with a multiplicity of actors, and added that the complementarity between the EU and the UNODA is grounded in a mutual conviction and commitment to a multilateral approach to disarmament and non-proliferation.

The 2022 EUNPD Conference also featured key interventions from high-ranking officials such as Wendin D. Smith, Director of NATO's Arms Control, Disarmament, and Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) Non-proliferation Centre (ACDC); Deepti Choubey, Director of Knowledge Management and HR, Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty Organization (CTBTO); Gustavo Zlauvinen, President-designate of the Tenth Review Conference for the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT); Jacek Bylica, Chief of Cabinet at the Director General's Office, International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA); Daniel Feakes, Chief of the Implementation Support Unit (ISU) of the Biological Weapons Convention within the United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs (UNODA); Leonardo Bencini, President-designate of the Ninth Review Conference of the Biological Weapons Convention (BWC); Stephan Klement, Head of Delegation to the International Organisations in Vienna and EU Permanent Representative to the UN Organisations in Vienna, IAEA and CTBTO; Beyza Unal, Head of Science, Technology and International Security Unit at the United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs (UNODA); Seraina Frost, Deputy Head of Export Control Policy at SECO and Chair of MTCR Technical Expert Meeting; Heike Gerstbrein, Head of the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) Operations & Election Observation Unit; Stefan Tressing, Deputy Head of Division, Disarmament, Non-Proliferation and Arms Export Control, European External Action Service (EEAS); along with renowned academics, researchers and government officials from around the world.

The final session featured interventions by two young scholars: Emily Faux, mentee at the 2021 edition of the Young Women in Non-Proliferation and Disarmament Mentorship Programme (YWNGI), and Tim Thies, researcher in the Arms Control and Emerging Technologies Project at the Institute for Peace Research and Security Policy at the University of Hamburg (IFSH) and speaker at the 2021 Next Generation Workshop. Both emphasised the need to raise public awareness about the potentially destructive effects of nuclear weapons and to include young people in order to promote new expertise on arms control, in fields such as cybersecurity and AI, and to foster greater generational diversity.

In her concluding remarks, Sibylle Bauer, Chair of the EU Non-Proliferation and Disarmament Consortium and Director of Studies, Armament and Disarmament at the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) emphasised the need to be open to new ideas and unorthodox

solutions, and to think outside of the box. She noted that in the last five years the Conference had ensured a gender balance in terms of chairs, speakers and participants. She added that a greater dose of optimism was required in evaluating developments in the non-proliferation, arms control and disarmament field. In view of this, there is a need to switch to a problem-solving mode and think more deeply about concrete solutions to the new challenges. She then spoke about the need, in this age of disinformation and misinformation, to build trust between people in the sharing and dissemination of data and other sources of information and analysis. In this regard, she stressed the importance of independent research and the work done by the network of independent non-proliferation and disarmament think tanks. She concluded by calling for intensified efforts to bring a greater diversity of disciplines and approaches into the non-proliferation and disarmament field.

The EU Non-Proliferation and Disarmament Conference proved to be, once again, a central event for the international discussion on the future of arms control, non-proliferation and disarmament. It also contributed to reaffirming the strong EU commitment towards a rules-based global order and showed the increased awareness of EU non-proliferation and disarmament policies among government officials, academics and civil society representatives 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 stemming from SALW, WMD and their means of delivery. Finally, as every year, the Conference served as a venue to highlight the role played by European think tanks specialised in non-proliferation and disarmament and the efforts undertaken by the EU Consortium to promote and coordinate their work.

For more information and to watch the videos of the Conference, please visit the Consortium's website: www.nonproliferation.eu