Building Crisis Management Capacity in Civil Society in South East Europe: Lessons Taken from Early Warning

Tony Verheijen and Lisa Smirl

INTRODUCTION

Since the dissolution of the former Yugoslavia, the world's attention has been periodically focused on a relatively small corner of South East Europe (SEE) and the localized clashes and widespread conflict potential embodied therein. While these conflicts were not unpredictable, the inability of the countries involved to mount adequate preventive or even crisis management strategies has led to several situations—most recently in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (hereafter, 'Macedonia')—where existing domestic institutions proved incapable of dealing with a crisis for which there had been significant warning.

The inability of both internal and domestic actors and institutions to deal effectively with these threats is due in large part to their inability to understand their nature. The United Nations Development Program (UNDP), like most international actors, follows an international model built on the supremacy of the nation-state as a sovereign unit. Contemporary conflicts,[1] particularly in areas like the former Soviet Union and its client countries, do not tend to adhere to this model. Observation of these conflicts as they unfolded has made it apparent that many of their contributing and precipitating elements are not defined by or confined to contemporary national boundaries. Without such constraints, transnational actors are not only not bound by national loyalties, laws, or jurisdiction, they have learned to exploit the deficiencies of nation-states or coordination problems between national actors, and to work—quite literally in some cases—in the zones 'between borders.'

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The nature of these 'extra-national' threats is such that they are not only supranational, but also less than national—existing as a self-contained territory or zone—so that, while lying within the borders of a nation-state, they eschew all association with it.

These macro- and micro-trends and dynamics vis-à-vis the nation-state are potentially destabilizing to a range of activities and services belonging to it: the creation and development of stable democratic institutions, provision and guarantee of personal security, and the credibility of monetary and financial regimes. As the development of national institutions is predicated upon a circumscribed group of citizens who broadly adhere to national borders, the presence of actors who do not recognize these borders may in some transition countries impede the development of such institutions, while in others it may threaten their sustainability. Without a clear analysis of the situation, development objectives—both at the international and national level—cannot be accurately formulated. In regions where borders are porous and transnational dynamics are prevalent, a domino effect may come into play: national conflicts may lead to wider subregional or regional destabilization.

There are two reasons to examine the case of SEE more closely:

- Crises in South East Europe have had an impact far beyond the borders of the subregion, due to the strategic location of the region, and the vested interests and historical connections of the European powers. Effective reduction in the crisis and conflict potential in this part of Europe would have a fundamental stabilizing effect on Europe as a whole.
- The development of crisis management capacities in the region is all the more important in view of the European Union (EU) membership ambitions of the majority of the countries concerned. The development of effective capacities to cope with crises is crucial in view of the interdependence of the EU system, which means that crisis in one country can easily have fundamental repercussions for other countries in the system.

This article will look at the experience of the development of a network of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), think tanks in particular, in South Eastern Europe to provide early warning to policy makers in a systematic and structured way, and analyze the methodological problems that have been experienced in the creation of these systems. As a second point, the problem of building capacities within centers of government to respond to these warnings with early response and to prevent crises through the creation of strategic thinking capacities will be considered.

The criticism of early warning activity in the Balkans, as in the majority of conflict zones, has been that it was predicting the obvious. This raises the question of the inability or unwillingness on the part of both the international community and national governments to engage in preventive action. While it is easy to say that greed and self-interest on the part of national actors—including

national governments—drove the conflict, it is important to understand the context that allowed actors to so 'successfully' pursue their goals. While there is an entire school of literature that examines the institutional conditions[2] that led to this situation, this article examines the institutional capacity that is needed to ensure that such situations do not reoccur.

Theories of conflict generally divide the subject into various stages, which together comprise a cycle. According to David Carment, these stages can be described as follows.[3] Unstable relations between actors and latent conflict characterize conflict formation, the first stage. Conflict escalation, the second stage, is characterized by 'sporadic violence and high tensions' and, unless diffused by crisis management or intervention to reduce tensions and facilitate de-escalation, it will be followed by the third stage—conflict endurance. This is a state of intense armed violence, which will endure either until one party wins, a mutually injurious stalemate ensues, or the conflict is resolved through mediation. The final stage, conflict termination, is characterized by ceasefire and reduced tensions.

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It is important to note that the above cycle is not linear; at any point, a new trigger may re-ignite the cycle of violence. This is particularly true if the resolution is the result of international leverage or peacekeeping activities, which do not tackle the underlying or structural causes of the deeply rooted conflicts. In this way, early warning activity becomes important at all stages of the conflict. According to the Forum for Early Warning and Early Response (FEWER), early warning can be defined as "The systematic collection and analysis of information coming from areas of crises for the purpose of: 1) anticipating the escalation of violent conflict; 2) the development of strategic responses to these crises; and 3) the presentation of options to critical actors for the purposes of decision making."[4]

As such, 'early' warning must be an ongoing activity, integrated into the societal mechanism to ensure that decision makers are targeting policy to address underlying causes, as well as the immediate sources of tensions, to ensure that the conflict cycle will not become a conflict spiral. It is with this aim in mind that the United Nations Development Program's work on conflict prevention and crisis management has sought to implement sustainable processes not only for the analysis of the causes and conditions of conflict, but for the digestion and

transformation of this analysis into policy prescriptions. Such a dynamic can be described as the supply and demand of policy delivery.

What has been particularly striking on the supply side is the lack of analytical, and, by extension, predictive capability of NGOs within the region. While there is a high general level of academic thinking in a variety of social science fields, there is an observed short fall when it comes to converting data and inputs into medium- to long-range predictive models. Similarly, on the demand side, the European Commission (EC) Regular Reports on EC accession countries have stressed the need to build strategic capacity in centers of government in order to reach EU standards. It is this predictive and strategic capacity that the UNDP-supported initiative on building capacities in early warning and strategic thinking has sought to address both in the third sector and within government.

THE ROLE OF THE CIVIL SOCIETY IN PROVIDING EARLY WARNING ON CONFLICTS AND CRISES

Explanatory theories for the outbreak of violent conflict can be broadly grouped into two categories: primordial and institutional. Primordial theories lay the blame on pre-existent tendencies, innate qualities of specific groups or, arguably, regions. This type of theory was often used in the Balkans where phrases such as 'historic hatreds' and 'ethnic tensions' were used to explain the outbreak of conflict, first in Bosnia, and later, its spread to Kosovo and the Tetovo Region. The implications of such theories for conflict prevention work and early warning are twofold. First, they serve as a preliminary screening device, predicting that certain groups or regions are predisposed to conflict. These areas should therefore be monitored more carefully, or should have institutional mechanisms or firewalls in place in anticipation of conflict. Second, primordial theories imply that among certain groups or regions, violent conflict is inevitable—that the cause cannot be eradicated, but merely controlled.

Institutional theories look to external causes or particular combinations of factors and events, which result in conflict. This implies that conflict may be averted if specific events are subverted, or structural factors mitigated or eliminated. Such an approach can provide a large role for early warning activities, as it requires significant information on the structural conditions, trends, and dynamics of accelerating conditions.

The two approaches are not mutually exclusive as certain actors or regions have a more conflict-prone set of factors attached to them. For example, in the case of the Balkans, the geographic conditions, low level of economic diversification, and history of imperial rule, arguably created a type of path-dependence wherein historical events or themes became a strong predictor of potential conflict in the context of the instability that followed the dissolution of the former Yugoslavia.

A rigorous conflict analysis model will include both types of factors, prioritizing according to their impact on the likelihood of conflict. The difficulty then becomes the gathering and processing of such information to allow for this type

of a prioritization to take place. In order to gather this information, different approaches and instruments are needed, the choice of which will be dependent upon the intent or purpose of the early warning activity.

If, for the purposes of our discussion, we limit our universe to the nation-state, it is possible to broadly characterize early warning activity within the following matrix.

THE EARLY WARNING ACTIVITY MATRIX

	For Internal Use	For Public Use
External to National Government	NATO, OSCE situation reports, EC Regular Reports	Economist Intelligence Report International Crisis Group, Reuters, News Wires
Internal to National Government	Government monitoring mechanisms; contracts with academic think tanks and research units; **South Eastern Europe EWS (in some countries)**	**South Eastern Europe EWS (in some countries)**

The vertical dimension classifies monitoring activity according to who is doing the warning, either government or non-governmental actors, the latter of which includes both civil society and private sector actors. The horizontal dimension classifies the activity according to the recipient of, or client for, the information. 'Private' early warning activity is undertaken for the internal purposes of the institution for strategy development and management activities. It may be commissioned by a range of actors including government, private sector or international organizations, and the provider may either be the organizations themselves (for example, a government agency gathering information to inform government strategy) or separate from 'the client' (for example, private sector banks or consultancies).

If the aim of early warning is to inform and enable early response or preventive action, there is an inherent tension in the activity of internal domestic monitoring when applied to real life situations. Since early warning is most needed in situations of existent or potential domestic instability, a common condition is the absence of stable, well-functioning domestic institutions. Where domestic institutions are lacking in principles of good governance, there is the risk that information gathered internally will not be used to the benefit of the country at large since there is no incentive for government to engage in activities and to expend resources which are not of immediate or significant benefit to it. A further institutional constraint for many international actors is that activities must be approved by their respective government counterpart, and that in some countries, governments do not view early warning activities positively.

Domestic external monitoring is similarly flawed in that in the absence of a well-developed, professional media, the broad dissemination of sensitive information may provide a tool for misinformation to potential demagogues or scaremongers, and actually contribute to the onset of the risk scenario it is warning against. For example, information which points to the pressing demographic need for participatory democratic institutions in the face of an increasingly heterogeneous population may be used by reactionary groups within the society to incite latent xenophobic sentiment among the population, as seen in Macedonia, especially before and after the signing of the Ohrid agreements in 2001. There is the further question of the utility of targeting individuals who do not have the power to affect early response. In the presence of well-established democratic institutions, the widespread dissemination of risk scenarios and information regarding the impact of specific events or policies provides leverage to citizens to make their governments act; therefore, the better these institutions are functioning, the more reason to disseminate the information. This implies a relationship between degree of democratic development, and likelihood of response or a higher threshold to civilian dissatisfaction. In other words, in order for early warning to be effective, that is, to result in early action, a balance must be achieved between creating a level of external leverage, while not contributing to potential crisis.

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Identifying the balancing point will depend upon circumstances. A wide range of countries are involved in the SEE Early Warning project (EW), from pre-accession States such as Bulgaria and Romania to international protectorates such as Kosovo. However, a precondition of the countries being involved in this project is that they have centers of government institutions, which provide the raw material for the creation of strategic policy units. One way of ensuring that this precondition is being met is by involving the third sector in the information gathering and analysis stages. This has the further benefits of being a cost-effective technique and of providing more complete information, both in terms of quality and scope of information.

David Carment and Frank Harvey identify two 'hurdles' in the activity of early warning: "The first hurdle is obtaining the necessary quantity and quality of intelligence in a reliable and accurate fashion, an informational problem. The second hurdle is avoiding misperception, an analytical problem." They posit that "[h]aving access to as many eyes and ears could, in practice, surmount the two...hurdles. The inclusion of NGOs in the information-gathering process could

potentially overcome faulty analysis of the likelihood of diffusion and/or escalation of a conflict or complex emergency."[5]

Other positive externalities of having NGOs involved in the identification and management of conflict are pointed out by Douglas E. Lute in his 1998 Report to the Carnegie Commission on Preventing Deadly Conflict.[6] He remarks that their ongoing involvement is a hedge against the project ending when international funding dries up, and that their long-term view of local conditions provides a better analytical understanding of the underlying issues, as well as ways to address them.

Environmental early warning systems, such as Global Information and Early Warning System run by the Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO), have long relied on networks of local monitors to identify potential risks.[7] However, the use of local NGOs to not only report back on factual information and observed events but to take the process one step further and include analysis of local events is only now being considered. The next section of this article will examine the benefits and drawbacks of such an approach, with reference to the establishment of the early warning system in South Eastern Europe as an example of building crisis management capacity in civil society in SEE.

ADDRESSING THE PROBLEM: A PUBLIC SECTOR SOLUTION?

For countries to effectively address the underlying causes of crises and conflicts, four distinct but interrelated forms of capacity need to be put in place:

- Governmental or non-governmental capacities to detect and define social, economic and political trends that can lead to conflicts or crises;
- Response capacity at centers of government that can effectively address issues that pose an immediate risk;
- Strategic capacity at or under centers of government capable of addressing underlying causes in long-term policy strategies; and
- The ability to effectively communicate strategies and short-term solutions to the public.

Each aspect will be examined in turn with reference to the SEE case study. In this way, the fatal flaw of some early warning systems—that the warnings do not result in a response—is circumvented, and the strengths already present in the countries are built upon. In this section, the experiences to date will be summarized.

Inputs

Unlike many other countries that have fallen victim to domestic conflict, the countries of South East Europe are not lacking civil society development. In most states and territories in the subregion, civil society is well developed, both at the level of presence of third sector organizations, and at the level of knowledge and expertise. In order to draw on this capacity and to encourage an increase in civil society input into the policy process, an early warning system

for South East Europe has been developed by national UNDP country offices and implemented as a pilot project.

Development of the Model: An NGO-Driven Approach

The project was built in a bottom-up manner. In the summer of 1997, in response to the 1996-1997 socio-economic crisis that brought Bulgaria to the edge of civil war, a Bulgarian NGO, the Department of International Relations Association (DIRA), was approached by UNDP to provide the concept for the Early Warning System, based on previous publications from the organization. DIRA was hired to coordinate the production of frequent early warning reports (the chronology of the model can be observed in Box 1). In order to inform policy makers of their strategic options and alert them to the potential of recurring economic and social disturbances. Although other NGOs were recruited to draft specific sections of the report, the primary responsibility for developing the product-methodology, new analytical tools, and conceptualization, remained with DIRA. The project received so much attention in Bulgaria that the impetus to engage in this type of activity in other South East European countries was created.[8]

While the current situation is unique and promising—a network of local NGOs doing conflict prevention activity across a diverse and highly complex subregion—further work needs to be done to improve the quality of the research and analysis, and to standardize a best practice in the process of report production. The next section will look at the problems identified with this approach, both in terms of methodology and the more general concept, as well as the unique opportunities it provides. Several serious problems emerged with the original approach (as discussed in Box 1), both on its own grounds and in terms of its roll-out to other countries.

BOX 1: CHRONOLOGY OF THE EWS MODEL

Phase 1: 1997-2000, The Bulgaria Model

The first phase of the Early Warning System grew out of the Bulgarian model and the perceived need for other SEE countries to introduce similar monitoring mechanisms in their respective territories. The analysis was indicator based: a range of indicators was chosen in the structural areas of incomes, income stratification and income expectation; performance of the social security system; employment; stability of the financial system; political stability; ethnic tensions, personal security. These same categories were then exported to other countries through the identification of appropriate NGO partners and polling agencies in Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and Romania. Through hands-on training workshops, UNDP, Department of International Relation Association (DIRA), the Bulgarian model was introduced to other identified country teams.

Phase 2: February – October 2001, Dissemination

By February 2001, when the country teams were brought together in Bratislava for the Early Warning training workshop, only 4 out of the 7 teams were producing reports and out of those only 2 with established regularity. It was ascertained during this training that a major that a major stumbling block for the teams was the massive list indicators for which information had to be collected on a (scheduled) monthly or bi-monthly basis. Furthermore, it was not clear, from the analysts' perspective, what the utility was of many indicators, nor how they should be integrated into the analysis. As the situation in Bulgaria was significantly different from that in Bosnia-Herzegovina, what was the purpose of using the same matrix of indicators? It was felt that the reports were of utility to the national governments and, if produced in a more targeted and frequent manner, they were a worthwhile project to continue producing. Accordingly, the decision was taken to allow a degree of 'decentralization' of the reports in order that each individual country team could begin producing a product that could then, as capacity increased through experience, be brought into line with the others in areas that would be useful for both the national teams' analysis and for the intended subregional analysis. What this meant, in practice, was that national teams were allowed the freedom to chose their own structural sectors and indicators from the matrix of pre-existent indicators devised by the Bulgarian team, as well as the latitude to publish according to their own publication schedules.

Phase 3: Current Approach

The decision to decentralize in the short term provided the teams with the flexibility they needed to get their individual projects off the ground, as well as allowed for the development of a more sustainable approach where national analysts felt they had a role in shaping the reports and engaging in the analysis. Reports are now being issued on a regular basis in 5 out of 7 countries, and in the other 2, the projects are in the process of being implemented. The teams have also moved away from thinking of themselves as part of an early warning network as evidenced by the use of a web site created by the UNDP Regional Program which links national projects, reports, information and resources in once centralized database.

Problems

Lack of a clear underlying model

In many ways, it was regrettable that the reports adopted the moniker of 'early warning reports' instead of some other, more neutral name. Early warning in the field of conflict prevention has a very precise meaning. Early warning is the prediction of a specific risk including the likelihood of that risk occurring. In the

original reports, there was no clear identification of the dependent variable, in other words, what was being predicted. The indicators were presented as equal to one another, and without reference to cross-cutting impacts or feedback effects; e.g., how do developments in the financial sector affect political instability? The result of this was that when the report began being implemented in other countries, the choice of indicators was based more on availability of data and the capabilities of the NGOs and experts to produce the analysis than on the need to predict the likelihood of a given event. In other words, there was no underlying risk model upon which the choice or weighting of indicators was premised. A further consequence is that there is no clear identification of the time frame for the analysis. Should the predictions be short or long term? How are these defined?

Standard of analysis

Reliable data in SEE is difficult to come by. The choice to use primary data in the reports was largely in response to the need to include reliable, quantitative data in the analysis. Primary data in the reports has been collected in the form of household survey data, and public opinion polls. However, in the absence of a clear underlying model (see previous point), it has not been clear how this information fits into predicting conflict. Particularly in the case of public opinion, it is not clear what the relationship is between people's impression that conflict is likely and the likelihood of that conflict actually occurring.

A further operational difficulty with the use of primary data collection, particularly in highly heterogeneous areas, is to ensure that the techniques used to gather the information are accurate. Concerns here include issues of gender bias, problems with polling on questions of ethnic distance, which may exaggerate existing tensions by posing leading questions, and adequate sample size. In the event that public opinion is deemed to be useful in predicting conflict, should all opinions be equally weighted? This raises a further extremely interesting question of what should be the universe of the sample? Is it accurate or even preferable to pre-select a sample and concentrate on localized 'hot spots' or groups of high-risk actors? By what process should these priority regions/groups be selected? A wide variety of risk or conflict assessment models are available and no firm consensus exists on their predictive ability.

A more mundane but equally important consideration is that if the data is to be used for purposes of comparative analysis, it requires a high degree of standardization both in terms of survey and reporting technique.

Methodology

There are a wide variety of techniques for monitoring potential risk scenarios, incorporating such dimensions as what type of data is gathered (statistics, media reports, opinion polls, expert opinions), techniques used to gather the data (research, media monitoring, focus groups, expert interviews), the process for gathering data (by a centralized program officer, by field monitors), how it is

analyzed (using computer-based modeling, through expert analysis), and how it is presented (as a series of numerical indicators, as composite risk scenarios). There are also many techniques for monitoring the use of quantitative and qualitative techniques, as well as a wide range of instruments, processes and presentations.[9] The choice of technique must be based on the needs of the client and the conditions of what is being monitored. An additional consideration for any project is also meeting the internal goals of the organization undertaking the project, be those furthering academic research, increasing profit margin, or in the case of UNDP, building civil society capacity in the identified areas.

The first two considerations become clarified as the third, civil society capacity to provide strategic inputs, is strengthened. That is, as capacity is strengthened and the product gains visibility and credibility with the client, the demands of the client will become clearer. Similarly, as civil society capacity increases, the willingness to experiment with different forms of monitoring and to adapt existing models to current conditions is observed. For example, in Bulgaria, the Department of International Relations Association began to experiment with event-based data collection systems to supplement their standard set of indicators. In Bosnia Herzegovina, local experts have been looking at ways in which computer-based modeling could be introduced to complement parts of their analysis.

While the current situation is unique and promising—a network of local NGOs doing conflict prevention activity across a diverse and highly complex subregion—further work needs to be done to improve the quality of the research and analysis, and to standardize a best practice in the process of report production.

To date, the approaches used in the SEE Early Warning Network are a combination of indicator-based and event-based approaches. Indicator-based approaches involve the monitoring of a set of pre-selected indicators. Risks are assessed by determining the speed and degree of change in the trends of these indicators, with reference to a risk threshold. Events-based approaches monitor specific events and the regularity of their occurrence in order to be able to identify aberrations or potential triggers.

While the comparative values of the specific approaches lie beyond the scope of this discussion, it is worth mentioning two important considerations. The approach should be sustainable in two ways; the knowledge and equipment needed to undertake the research should be both cost effective and transferable. This is particularly important when deciding upon a methodology that is highly specialized and heavily reliant upon technology. As such, in South East Europe—

a Delphi, or expert-based approach—is seen to be one that both capitalizes on existing resources, and provides a solid base for further development. Similarly, an indicator-based approach that includes in the process the collection of primary data is well suited to an environment where official statistics may be scarce or unreliable. This also has the positive externalities of increasing knowledge regarding conditions in these areas, and of building capacity in the collection and processing of data.

Standardization vs. applicability

A continued tension in this activity is that between standardization of the reports and ensuring that they retain enough flexibility to deal with the particular risk issues in question. The rationale for standardization remains twofold. First, there is the perceived need for subregional analysis using national analysis for composite and comparative purposes. Second, as discussed in the introduction, conflicts in this region do not necessarily occur along national lines. By restricting our analysis to merely the national level, dynamics, accelerators and potential triggers may not be picked up by the analysis. Further questions of standardization include to what degree such reports can be standardized to ensure that they remain relevant to their particular circumstances and the needs of their governments. Aspects to be considered include the following: issuance, format, style, indicators and methodology.

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Tailoring the Process

As discussed above, the use of NGOs in early warning has been primarily for external monitoring, and traditionally they have only been used in the international context. As mentioned, perhaps one of the best-known employments of NGOs in early warning activity is in the collection of early warning signals for environmental disasters or food shortages. In these cases, the assembly and analyses of data is done at a centralized level, not by those who are collecting and monitoring the micro level data.

In the case of the SEE network, the model is such that NGOs are responsible both for gathering the information—or for identifying what type of information needs to be gathered and, in conjunction with UNDP, how it will be gathered—and for its analysis. The beneficial impact on the quality of analysis brought by this approach is that there is on-the-ground input into conflict situations from individuals who understand the significance of certain events, or lack thereof. On a normative level, there is the further benefit of building capacity in conflict analysis within the third sector, providing a resource for policy makers, as will be discussed later.

The goal of capacity building has been one of the main ones for the UNDP program, and while there is an extremely high level of specific expert knowledge amongst the experts involved, there is a surprising lack of general knowledge regarding conflict prevention or predictive modeling. At the 4th Regional Training for NGO experts of National Early Warning Systems,[10] an external expert worked with existent teams to cull out of their reports a hierarchy of risk factors. While the teams showed an obvious and in-depth understanding of the current situation in their respective countries, they had difficulties prioritizing different types of risks or distinguishing between cause and effect.

Here, the most noticeable definitional blurring was in distinguishing between ethnic distance as an innate quality of the region or as the result of other factors. It should be immediately noted that such distinctions are not easy to define, and that they are the source of much debate. Additionally, analyzing conflict from within is an extremely difficult task.[11] This difficulty is compounded by the 'politicization of objectivity' within weak countries. In other words, in the presence of corrupt or dysfunctional institutions, to remain objective may be perceived as implicit support for the status quo. What this means in practice is that it has proved to be a challenge to identify 'objective analysts' to work with as partners. While there are many well-respected NGOs within SEE, several issues re-occurred in many of the pilot States:

- **Problems of bias:** In almost all the countries, there were problems with the objectivity of the reports. These took the two following forms: either the NGO in charge of producing the report supported a particular political agenda and was insistent upon using the reports as a vehicle for their viewpoints and opinions, or, just as commonly, a descriptive, narrative style of reporting undermined the presentation of a neutral perspective. There are also concerns regarding a lack of objectivity in the data collection process; however, these are generally the result of a lack of methodological rigor rather than intentionally biased research agendas. There is also the possibility that the observed bias is, at least partially, the result of poor translation.
- **Ownership of the reports:** The success and sustainability of the Bulgaria Project was due primarily, if not solely, to the initiative of the team. Over the years they developed a methodology, which they continued to improve upon and test. The team is composed of very dedicated individuals with an incentive to pursue this type of innovative research. Other NGOs which were contracted did not adopt this type of responsibility for the project, conceiving of it instead as a 'client–producer' relationship where UNDP was commissioning a product from them, and their responsibility was to deliver that product, nothing more. This lack of impetus to show initiative and to develop models or analysis resulted in a situation where team members did not feel the need to come to training sessions or to work as part of the larger network. Perhaps most worrying was the unwillingness to think critically

regarding the project or the research agenda, in effect ensuring that the project would not succeed. Where the teams moved beyond a 'client–producer' relationship and took ownership of the reports, the research was tied in some way to the research interests of the experts involved.

As was the case with methodology, some of the best arguments for a standardized approach are those that result as byproducts of the process. Specifically, through the process of standardizing the activities of the national teams—through trainings, workshops, and on-line forums—knowledge regarding the causes and conditions of conflict is shared across the very lines where past conflicts have occurred. The implication for conflict resolution and crisis management initiatives, particularly when national activities are linked to national governmental processes, is the creation of civil society networks (ideally, with direct links to government) that span geographic boundaries and could provide a further channel for preventive activities. Significant work has been done on the use of conflict analysis and assessment activities as peace building activities in and of themselves.

Who Are We Warning? Hitting the Target

UNDP's mandate within each country is to provide technical assistance to government. As described above, in early warning this relationship becomes difficult, since in many cases, the governments themselves are part of the problem. The situation in South East Europe allows for a larger degree of civil society activity than other transition economies —for example, Central Asia. Still, the relationship with government must be handled with care. For example, inopportune timing of the release of one of the reports resulted in government recrimination of the analysis. This raises two related issues regarding the model: is government the best target for this type of early warning activity, and if so, can the process be managed to ensure that the reports retain their utility and promote early response?

In SEE, government instability has been the cause of much of the conflict over the past decade. Early warning has little relevance to actors intent on pursuing their own agenda at the expense of their constituents. The current status, however, is significantly different, at least in theory.

Democratically elected governments are now in power in virtually all of the countries of South Eastern Europe. This would imply that governance systems and practices could become increasingly responsive to citizens' demands and concerns, thus increasing the potential value of early warning reports. Furthermore, all countries in the region have one common objective: to join the EU. Whereas this may be a distant aim for several of these states, it does add a further incentive to governments to support the development of open and participatory systems of governance, again adding to the potential relevance of early warning tools.

However, at the same time the increasing number of democratically elected

governments and the growing presence and importance of local think tanks and NGOs have not in fact been translated yet into a significantly higher degree of participation and openness in the policy process. In fact, in the recent European Commission Regular Reports on Progress[12], the lack of consultation in policy processes and the general lack of transparency in public administration systems were strongly criticized, particularly for the two South East European candidate countries. The 2002 Commission's Report on Candidate Countries,[13] also points out the need for the consolidation and modernization of public administration. Progress has been acknowledged in most of the countries, but the further strengthening of public administration would move the SEE countries, and Turkey as well, even closer to the EU. The link between increased formal levels of democracy and increased real openness of policy processes is by no means obvious thus far, and this has serious implications for the potential impact of early warning instruments.

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Apart from the requirement of increased levels of openness in governance, the EU in its membership criteria also emphasizes the need to develop strategic thinking capacities in core government institutions. In the case of Bulgaria this has been made one of the priority areas in the recently revised Accession Partnership. In turn, strategic thinking capacities are only as effective as the quality of inputs they use. While government may wish to develop its own system of access to information, a more desirable model in the context of SEE is to involve civil society and think tanks in the provision of strategic inputs, particularly in view of the fact that governments are often seen as part of the problem. In such situations, the government has no incentive to respond to the warnings if they are not in its own perceived immediate interest. As the primary goal of early warning is to enact early response, such a model has the further implicit assumption that government is the primary actor capable of enabling preventive response.

The difficulty then becomes producing strategic recommendations from civil society that are not dismissed or ignored by government. The solution to this is twofold:

- **Through process:** If the process of the report production is done in a way that provides a key role for government in a transparent and open context, the opportunity for government pressure or non-involvement may be less-

ened. In the short to medium term, government can be privileged in the process through the introduction of a strategic roundtable, which brings together key stakeholders within the territory and subregion to address the recommendations and provide feedback.

- **Through format:** To hit the target, the correct type of ammunition must be used. In this context, the constraints and needs of governments should affect the delivery of the product. For example, time constraints of policy makers must be considered when providing advice. Strategies, options and scenarios must be presented in a way, which is quickly read and applicable. Time may also affect the mode of delivery; e.g., is a report format necessarily the most effective one? Would electronic updates or circulars be more appropriate in some circumstances? A second dimension of time constraints relates to the natural tendency of government to prioritize short-term over long-term goals. As elected governments are bound to a three to five year term, a small window of opportunity is open for substantive long-term change. Issues tend to brew over the long term and corruption, trafficking in arms and people, and lack of reform in the police force are not sufficiently dealt with which leaves their crisis potential unaddressed. A further observed difficulty in the past year has been the failure of new democracies to successfully elect leaders by a majority voting system.

Throughput

As we have discussed throughout the paper, providing crisis warnings is a futile and potentially counter-productive activity unless the actors who are hearing the warning have the capability to provide a response. This capability can be interpreted in two ways: first, that the actors have the mandate to act, and second, that they have the capacity to formulate an effective response strategy.

Within a national context, the primary actor tasked with the charge of affecting appropriate and effective response strategies to crisis is the government. It would therefore be logical to develop both early response and strategic thinking capacities within the structures that provide direct support to the government or, in countries with a presidential or semi-presidential system, to consider either the government office or the president's administration. In those systems of government in Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) countries that include response and strategic thinking capacities, these units are places either at or under a centre of government institution.[14]

If one considers the current tasks and capacities of centre of government institutions in South Eastern and Central Europe, a very different picture emerges.[15] Government offices in most countries still mainly provide technical support to the policy co-ordination and law-making system, with only limited capacities, if any, devoted to providing substantive professional advice to government on strategic issues. President's offices, a second possible locus for strategic thinking, tend to be small, with limited capacities for larger scale strategic

thinking. The advisory capacities that are in place mainly consist of political advice to the prime minister or president, and by their very nature these often deal with political issues of immediate relevance.

Crisis management or crisis response units tend to be ad hoc in nature, often set up as a reaction to a specific problem, at the level of the government office, or, in some cases, a specific ministry. Again, in view of the turbulent political environment in the region, the absence of units that deal with emerging problems on a structural basis and possess the know-how to draw up proposals as to how to respond to warning signals may come as a surprise. The relative isolation of centre of government units from society at large makes core decision-making units even more likely to be taken by surprise by an emerging issue. The 'sudden' collapse of the Bulgarian economic system in late 1996 and the three eruptions of violence as a result of miners' protests in Romania (1990, 1991, and 1999) provide powerful examples of governments both unable to draw up strategic proposals to deal with deeply rooted structural economic and social problems, and equally incapable of responding effectively to crises that emerged as a direct consequence of the absence of political vision.

A further interesting fact is that most countries in South East Europe have a system of dual executives (president and prime minister, both directly elected, but often with different mandates), which would have been conducive to the development of a strategic role of the president's office. In most of the States concerned (with the possible exception of Romania), however, the powers of presidents are relatively limited, as presidents have limited formal means of intervention in the policy process. On the other hand, the president's office has the possibility of developing capacities in the area of strategic thinking. A president represents a nation rather than a specific political force, and therefore, has an implicit mandate to set out strategic visions for the development of the country.

The link between increased formal levels of democracy and increased real openness of policy processes is by no means obvious thus far, and this has serious implications for the potential impact of early warning instruments.

Disappointingly, presidents have generally failed to make use of their implicit mandate to define a strategic vision for their states. They have tended to get involved in the mediation of conflicts between government and other institutions, as well as in coalition conflicts, and as a consequence have often lost the opportunity to have a real impact on the development of the country. The reign of President Constantinescu in Romania, President Trajkovski in Macedonia and, to a lesser degree, President Stoyanov in Bulgaria, are all examples of missed opportunities. All three presidents came to power at a critical time

in the history of their respective countries, but all got drawn into the day-to-day vagaries of government and did not seize the opportunities that were present at the start of their periods in office. In contrast, President Iliescu appears to have learned the lessons of both his earlier period in office and that of his predecessor; Romania is the first country in the region where a large scale initiative has been developed to build up the presidents' administration as a strategic institution, supporting the president in setting out his vision for the state. While it is early yet to draw conclusions on the 'Romanian experiment,' this first attempt to consciously build up strategic capacities in a core government unit is promising in itself.

Therefore based on available analyses, little progress appears to have been made in the development of professional capacities to develop strategic thinking and to effectively respond to crises. Neither government offices, nor president's administrations have developed specialized units dealing with these two crucial and related institution-building needs. The Romanian initiative to develop strategic thinking capacities in the president's administration is the first initiative of its kind in the region. Permanent prevention and response units to deal with emerging crises and conflicts are still lacking. It has proven to be extremely difficult to convince the political leadership of Central and East European States in general that the development of professional capacities in both areas is a necessity, not a luxury, as it is often perceived.

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The limited response capacities, both of short-term response to emerging crises and conflicts, and the long-term response in terms of addressing underlying problems, poses severe limitations to the usefulness of a tool such as early warning. With core government institutions remaining relatively isolated, and access often limited to a privileged few NGOs and think tanks, the risk of developing an early warning instrument that will only serve the international community is significant, even more so if one takes into account the frequent shifts in political preferences among the electorate. Any initiative to develop indigenous early warning capacities should therefore work on the sensitization of governments, both in terms of developing their own policy-making and response capacities, and in terms of showing openness towards inputs generated by civil society organizations and think tanks from a broad range of societal forces.

Output

Developing effective communication from government to society is a final piece

of the puzzle that makes up an effective system of policy response to emerging issues in society. The development of effective systems of policy communication is a longer-term objective for all countries in the region. The Romanian president's office approach to building capacities in effective policy communications is one key example of how this issue could be addressed. However, at the same time many examples remain of government ineffectiveness in getting its message across to citizens and getting citizens interested in the affairs of government. The recent disaffection by voters, shown in two subsequent Bulgarian elections, is a striking example of this alienation. If strategic visions are to have an impact on the disillusioned societies of South East European States, they must be brought to the attention of citizens in a way that shows how they serve citizens' interests.

LESSONS LEARNED: CRITERIA FOR SUCCESS

The above section outlined the state of play of the various components of the project and described current and ongoing successes and challenges that are being experienced. From this we have been able to draw out a set of success criteria that must be used to gauge such a project, both on the side of strategic inputs and on the side of government capacity building:

- Sustainability: The methodological approach adopted must be sustainable. It should not rely on highly specialized knowledge that requires intensive and specialized training or is heavily reliant on high technology.
- Mainstreamed prevention: The approach should increase the capacity of civil society actors to process information in a predictive or anticipatory manner. By applying the lens of prevention to research activities, the mainstreaming of conflict prevention, so encouraged within the international community, may be brought down to the level where it is most needed.
- Capacity building: The approach must build capacity at the local level, and as such, should prioritize methods, which place the burden of analysis upon people—experts, local monitors—and therefore, broadly disseminate conflict prevention understanding and resources.
- Ownership: Such prioritization also encourages ownership of research and analysis, a pre-requisite for the development and sustainability of the chosen approach, and itself a criterion for success.
- Impact: The findings of civil society must have an observed impact on government, although this may vary from context to context. Where democratic institutions are strong, this may be observed as open debate over the findings, and public engagement over recommendations. In more volatile contexts, this may take the shape of strategic round tables of key stakeholders.
- Early response: The most important criterion of success in the increased ability of government, in conjunction with key actors, is to take the necessary steps to manage conflict and/or prevent crisis.

FUTURE RECOMMENDATIONS

Concerning strategic inputs, continued work will be done in the subregion on the harmonization of the various approaches and on the analysis of subregional dynamics. Think tanks and NGOs are already involved in a variety of initiatives that can be drawn upon by governments, of which EWS is just one. The development of a strategic vision for the subregion from an NGO perspective is the subject of yet a different initiative, the so-called 'Blue-Bird' project. While it is beyond the scope of this paper to discuss this initiative, it is worth highlighting as a second important 'leg' of external analysis in the subregion.

Within centers of government the development of units that combine the ability to effectively gather and analyze signals from society to prevent crises, as well as to work on the development of long-term strategic solutions to the detected underlying problems in their countries, is inter-related. While this requires two different forms of capacity, the two issues are basically two sides of the same coin and should therefore be combined. There are various models available for the development of such units, though rarely are response and strategic thinking capacities housed under the same roof, which in our view, is an option worth considering for SEE countries. The development of such capacities will take both investment and patience, as can be seen in the time frame set for the Romanian strategic capacity building initiative. For the time being, however, what is mainly needed is advocacy; convincing politicians that the development of central 'thinking capacities' is crucial for the future stability and economic development of the country. Only if both elements of the system are in place (NGO/think tank-based analytical capacities, and high-quality government units), is it likely for both crisis and conflict prevention to work, and for a more strategic long-term approach to the development of the region to emerge. The importance of this is hard to overestimate in the context of an area all too often bogged down in the problems of yesterday and today. ■

NOTES

1 For the context of this article, the terms 'conflict' and 'crisis' will be used interchangeably. This is due to the fact that while theoretically distinct most notably with regards to duration and intensity—from the perspective of government, the capacity to respond to them encompasses the same spectrum of skills and tools. Likewise, from the perspective of civil society, the two must be considered as linked and the relationship between the two understood if either is to be managed or avoided.

2 See Beverly Crawford, "Explaining Cultural Conflict in the Ex-Yugoslavia," in Beverly Crawford and R.D. Lipschutz eds., *The Myth of Ethnic Conflict,* no. 98 (Berkeley IAS: University of California Berkeley, 1998), 197-260.

3 David Carment, paper presented in Bratislava, Slovakia, October 18, 2001.

4 Alex P. Schmid, *Thesaurus and Glossary of Early Warning and Conflict Prevention Terms (Abridged Version)* (London: Forum on Early Warning and Early Response, 1997), <http://www.fewer.org/res/197.pdf> (accessed March 28, 2004).

5 David Carment and Frank Harvey, *Using Force to Prevent Ethnic Conflict: an Evaluation of Theory and Evidence* (Westport, Connecticut, London: Praeger, 2001), 20-21.

6 Douglas E. Lute, *Improving National Capacity to Respond to Complex Emergencies: the US Experience: A Report to the Carnegie Commission on Preventing Deadly Conflict* (New York: Carnegie Corporation, April 1998), 31.

7 The Global Information and Early Warning System on Food and Agriculture is a monitoring system run by the Food and Agriculture Organization, which provides early warning primarily for developments that may impact upon agricultural production. It relies mainly upon a network of field monitors to provide information on local conditions. For more information, please see http://www.fao.org/WAICENT/faoinfo/economic/giews/english/giewse.htm

8 The implementation in all countries where UNDP has a government counterpart consists of a local NGO or group of experts working together, responsible for determining the content of the reports, analyzing the data, writing the analysis and creating risk scenarios, and for presenting the report to UNDP. As the reports are based upon primary data, most reports include the subcontracting of an independent polling agency to carry out the public opinion polling and collection of socio-economic data. On the other end of the production spectrum, where the UN is the *de facto* government (Kosovo, Bosnia and Herzegovina) the reports are published by UNDP which is then also responsible for the promotion of these reports and for presenting them to policy makers and other relevant stakeholders.

9 For an overview of existing systems, please see John L. Davies and Ted Robert Gurr, eds., *Preventive Measures: Building Risk Assessment and Crisis Early Warning Systems* (Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield, 1998); and Susan Ampleford, "Methodology Review: Discussion Paper," prepared for the International Development Research Centre, July 2000, as part of the Country Indicators for Foreign Policy Project, <http://www.carleton.ca/cifp/others/methodsreview.pdf> (accessed March 28, 2004).

10 Held 17-21 October 2001 in Bratislava, Slovakia.

11 Even within the UN, the process of conflict mainstreaming is an ongoing and slow process. The United Nations Staff College runs a regular course on Early Warning and Preventive Measures to train UN staff in conflict dynamics and preventive techniques.

12 See report dating November 2001, found at EUROPA- Enlargement: Towards the Enlarged Union <http://europa.eu.int/comm/enlargement/enlargement.htm>.

13 Issued October 9, 2002

14 Profiles of Centres of Government, Central Policy Making Systems in OECD countries, OECD, 1997

15 For a detailed review, see <www.oecd.org/puma/sigmaweb/cogprofiles.html> or K. Goetz. and H.Z. Margetts, *Centres of Government in Central and Eastern Europe: Comparative Perspectives,* OECD Expert Paper, April 1998.