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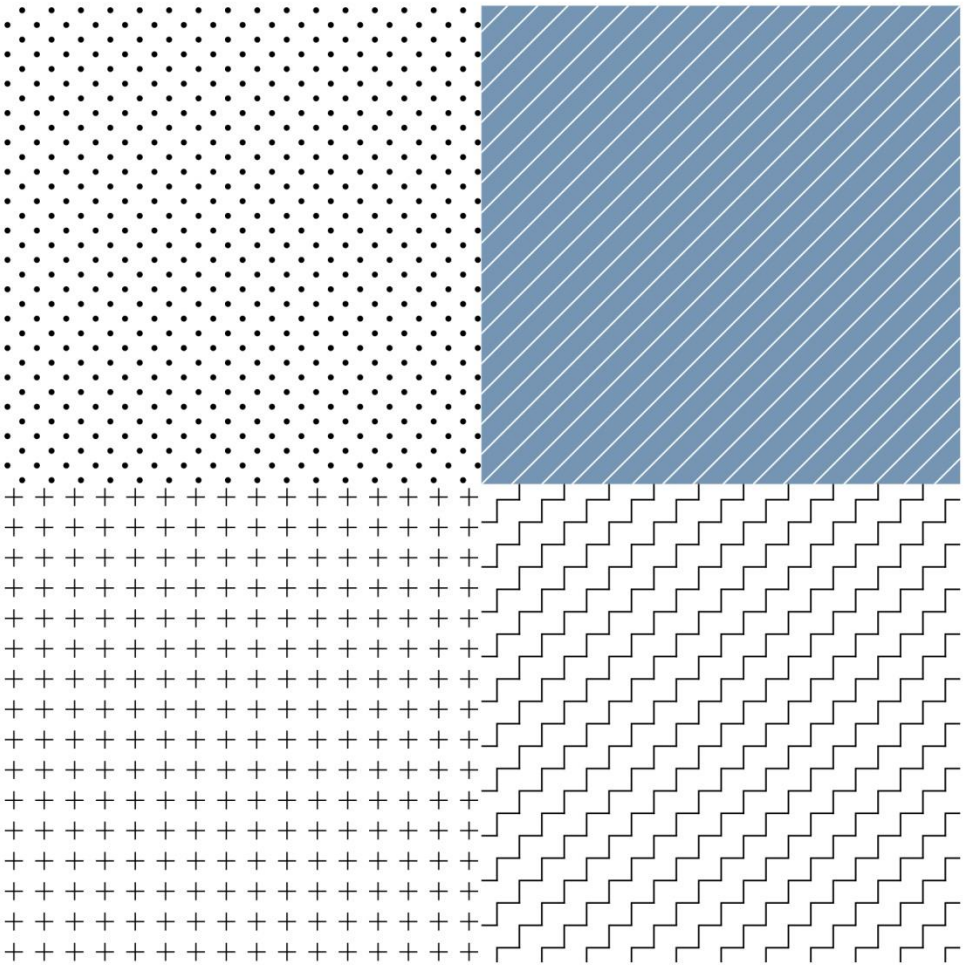

Build Peace Salon: A Roundtable on Uses of ICTs for EU Conflict Prevention & Peacebuilding

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Colophon

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31 August 2016
Deliverable 4.2: Community of Practice Event on ICTs
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Whole of Society Conflict Prevention and Peacebuilding

The main goal of the Community of Practice Event on ICTs was to introduce the cross-cutting theme of information and communication technologies and how they meld with peacebuilding practice to create the complex and growing field of peacetech, and to expose the potential capability ICTs provide for the EU in peacebuilding processes, given a well understood policy for design and deployment. The event began with a global review of peacetech, followed by a panel focusing on peacetech intersections with EU policy. There was an open discussion about centering around two main questions: what should be the EU's capabilities in peacetech, and what policies or initiatives are required to support these capabilities in Brussels and in the field?

This project is funded by the EU's Horizon 2020
Research and Innovation Programme
Grant agreement no. 653866.

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Introduction

On June 23, 2016, Build Up organised a roundtable on uses of ICTs for EU conflict prevention and peacebuilding in Brussels. This event was part of the *Whole-of-Society Conflict Prevention and Peacebuilding* (WOSCAP) consortium research project, which is undertaking an assessment of EU capabilities for civilian peacebuilding. As part of its submission, the consortium has identified the appropriate use of ICTs as a critical measure of EU capabilities for conflict prevention and peacebuilding. Build Up and the LSE are researching the features of particular technologies and the opportunities, operational barriers and ethical dilemmas of their actual uses. The roundtable aimed to present research to date on uses of ICTs, and begin a discussion with practitioners and policy makers around two key questions: What should be the EU's capabilities in peacetech? And what policies or initiatives are required to support these capabilities in Brussels and in the field?

Event Summary

The event took place at Quaker House in Brussels. In order to both reduce logistical costs (outreach, catering & venue hire) and increase synergies across WOSCAP themes, Build Up and ESSEC-IRENE agreed to organise their roundtables consecutively on the same day at Quaker House. ESSEC-IRENE managed catering and venue hire. Build Up designed publicity materials and ran a social media campaign to attract participants. Both Build Up and ESSEC-IRENE shared the event with their contacts in Brussels.

The roundtable on use of ICTs had four speakers. Helena Puig Larrauri (Build Up) presented research done on use of ICTs in the WOSCAP project to date. Responses to this research were provided by three experts: Peter Brorsen (External Relations and Europe Director, European Institute of Peace), Miguel Varela (Coordinator of Dialogue Support Platform in Ukraine, mediatEUr), and Nicolas Rougy (Chair, European Peacebuilding Liaison Office Steering Committee). Around 35 people registered for the roundtable on use of ICTs, and 15 people showed up on the day (see Annex A for details). Most participants were from NGOs, and only a handful from EU institutions.

Discussion Summary

Were there any 'practices' or 'examples' (good or bad) mentioned that are relevant for the best practices database? What if any examples were there of how the cross-cutting themes impacted on our clusters (Governance reform, Multi-track diplomacy and SSR)?

The over-arching theme that emerged during the discussion is that technology never replaces the critical trust building that face-to-face interaction and dialogue creates. Technology is always complementary to such face-to-face activities. Concretely, one participant suggested broadening the definition of 'peacetech' beyond civil society projects (which has been the focus of the WOSCAP research to date), stating that government organisations that work to counter extremism on the web are also engaging in peacetech. It was pointed out that technology is threatening to many people. Thus, technology use has to be tailored and not appropriate for all solutions, which requires that policy (and donor organizations) should be dynamic. The participant further reflected that peacetech needs to turn knowledge into action. A panellist built on this point, suggesting that technology can be key to track 6 initiatives precisely if it makes this link from action to knowledge. He further said there are a plethora of similar ideas in the field of peacetech, and it can be cluttered at times. Rather than pushing organizations to constantly innovate, it might be best to improve the capacity of local actors and systems by establishing meaningful, long-term partnerships and support to ICT initiatives.

What did participants think of the W-O-S approach?

The W-O-S approach was not directly discussed during the roundtable, but comments on it came up indirectly. A participant suggested we should always question whether technology is needed for a particular intervention, but also reflected that this may be a generational issue: for younger target audiences / beneficiaries, technology may be a more obvious 'hook' for peacebuilding activities. One of participants said it is important to be careful that uses of ICTs don't jeopardize security or relationships between civil society and government.

What, if any, reflections were made about EU capabilities? Were there any reflections on sharing of information / practices between different organisations? Is this difficult, routine, rare?

A general point repeated by expert respondents and audience members was that it would be helpful to identify the EU's pathways to technology for peacebuilding. Building on a conversation from the previous roundtable (on coherence and the private sector) that discussed whether for-profit companies should be included in definitions of civil society, Varela reflected that the EU needs to develop capabilities to help understand ICTs available from small companies as well as big companies – and that this requires being more present in the tech community. An audience member reflected that an entry point for EU tech policy may be looking at how tech can enhance and complement existing projects.

Organise comments & Analysis

The discussion during the roundtable will help to shape entry points to more one-on-one discussions with policy makers and practitioners about what the EU capabilities for uses of ICTs could and should be. Key areas for further exploration that emerged:

- It is critical to develop capabilities on how technology is introduced to peacebuilding and conflict prevention work. The timing and process of introducing technology determines whether it contributes to trust or not. Technology often brings with it greater transparency and more accessible analysis – how this is managed in fragile contexts interacts in complex ways with processes of trust building and social change.
- EU capabilities in the use of ICTs should cover a wide array of initiatives, specifically along two axes. First, initiatives that range from grassroots civil society initiatives to structural government-led initiatives. Second, from initiatives that target few (key) people to initiatives that target an entire population.
- Finally, four concrete policy areas were mentioned as possible entry points or pathways that could be used to develop EU policy on uses of ICTs for peacebuilding and conflict prevention: SDG 16 on peace, justice and strong institutions, UNSC2215 on youth, peace and security, various policies on public-private partnerships, and the Digital Agenda for Europe.

ANNEX C: Agenda

The roundtable on uses of ICTs for EU conflict prevention and peacebuilding was co-organised with ESSEC-IRENE alongside two roundtables on issues of coherence of the EU in external action on conflict prevention and peacebuilding. The joint agenda can be found here, and the more detailed agenda only on ICTs here.

ANNEX D: Presentation of research findings

The Build Up team prepared a summary of research findings to date, building on the Scoping Paper. The presentation was used to kick-start the roundtable and can be downloaded here.