



ENC SUMMARY

The Role of Youth and Education in Conflict Resolution: What lessons for the European Union?

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This publication is a summary of the “YouTopic Fest – the first festival on the topic of conflict” organized by **Rondine Cittadella della Pace**. It took place in the city of Rondine (Italy) from June 8 to 11, 2017.

The information in this publication includes information from the event as well as input from European Neighbourhood Council’s (ENC) Head Researcher for Eastern Europe and Central Asia, Andreas Marazis.

ABOUT THE EVENT

Rondine Cittadella della Pace organized in its small medieval Tuscan village a festival focused on conflicts: “**YouTopic Fest – The first festival on the topic of conflict**”, from June 8 to 11, 2017, led by President Franco Vaccari.

After a day dedicated to conflict prevention and resolution workshops and inter-religious dialogue, the highpoint of the festival took place during the second day with a high level conference focusing on “Russia and the West: what future”, with Felix Stanevskiy, former Russian Ambassador in Italy and Georgia and member of the European Council, and Riccardo Migliori, former President of the OCSE Parliamentary Assembly. It was then followed by a workshop on the European Neighbourhood Policy and the so-called frozen conflicts presented by ENC Head Researcher for Eastern Europe and Central Asia **Andreas Marazis**. This year’s festival was marked by the official establishment of the **Rondine International Peace Lab**, a new association formed by ex-Rondine students, who will work as new ambassadors of peace, highlighting **the essential role of the younger generation in conflict resolution**.

CONTEXT

Regarding its neighbourhood, the European Union (EU) is facing several frozen conflicts in its vicinity, notably Nagorno Karabakh between Armenia and Azerbaijan, Abkhazia and South Ossetia in Georgia, Transnistria in Moldova and the ongoing conflict in Eastern Ukraine, in Donbas which constitute threats to stability in wider Europe.

The **European Neighbourhood Policy** (ENP), which was launched in 2004 to help the EU support and foster stability, security and prosperity in the

countries closest to its borders had moved from a one-size-fits-all approach initially to a more tailored agreements in order to take into consideration the particularities of each partner to the South (Union for the Mediterranean) and to the East (Eastern Partnership).

The ENP still faces the same challenges as before, as highlighted by ENC Head Researcher Andreas Marazis during his presentation “to **project stability in the EU Neighbourhood** and to **strengthen its partners' resilience** by promoting democratic, accountable and good governance, as well as to promote justice reform, where there is a shared commitment to the rule of law, and fundamental rights.”

WHERE DO WE STAND?

In order to support the transformation of the society in its neighbourhood, the EU must retain the channels of communication with its partners at all level, **from the political authorities to the civil society actors**, since the latter are the ones that hold their governments accountable. Hence, initiatives such as the EaP Civil Society Forum, the national civil society platforms and the Brussels Civil Society Forum South for instance should remain high on the EU's agenda in terms of financial support, as Andreas Marazis noted.

Regarding the frozen – and ongoing – conflicts, the EU is a soft power actor that focuses on conflict prevention, early warning, and Confidence Building Measures (CBMs); for this reason, the EU's approach “aims at opening a political and legal space in which **the EU can interact with the separatist regions without compromising its adherence to [...] territorial integrity.**”

Therefore, as it was underlined by Andreas Marazis, the EU cannot ignore the *de facto* entities, even if interaction with these territories by various international organisations is often hindered by the national authorities. This approach has limited impact on effectively resolving the conflicts and certainly does not entail recognition but at least enhances the EU's engagement and leverage while keeping channels of communication and interaction with the entities open.

WHAT DOES THE FUTURE HOLD?

In line with the 2009 **Non-Recognition and Engagement Policy**, the EU keeps a low-profile about its relations with the separatist regions. Choosing the right kind of interaction with the *de facto* officials is difficult for international actors but essential to resolve the protracted conflicts.

The Rondine project, as it was presented during the YouTopic Fest, is a success story of how education can facilitate alternative channels of communication among young individuals from conflict-affected areas and create bonds and transnational identities based on the fundamental right of access to education. In the small medieval city of Rondine, the young people from different cultures and traditions (sometimes identified by history as “enemies”) study together and change their perception of the “other.”

CONCLUSIONS

By capitalising on this initiative, including strategic communication with governments, civil society and academia, the EU could revitalise its Non-Recognition and Engagement policy towards unresolved conflicts in its neighbourhood and might contribute to loosen the local tensions of its partners and defuse the ongoing crisis.

Rondine Cittadella della Pace is a key project that contributes on breaking the deadlock on these conflicts by involving and investing on youth. Continuous financial support from various EU instruments and cooperation with Brussels-based NGOs will boost this and similar initiatives in order to continue their work and reach out to more people in conflict-affected regions.