

# RESEARCH POLICY DIALOGUE

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## Navigating Non-State Justice and Security Actors in Fragile States

A Research Policy Dialogue co-organised by the Folke Bernadotte Academy (FBA) and the EU Institute for Security Studies (EUISS)

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9 November 2022, Brussels

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### INTRODUCTION

European Union (EU) Member States and partner countries are collectively facing an increasingly complex security environment with multifaceted challenges and threats to conflict prevention, crisis management and peacebuilding. Effective support to reform of security and justice institutions requires an understanding of the actors that *de facto* address human security needs in a specific context. Formal security and justice actors are usually the primary beneficiaries of development assistance. However, security and justice provision in fragile states and contested governance settings is much more complex and results in a wide range of security and justice actors, formal as well as informal. The role of non-state actors needs to be carefully analysed and their impact on the security sector thoroughly assessed. To this end, the FBA and the EUISS co-organised a Research Policy Dialogue (RPD) on EU support to security and justice actors and its practical implications in fragile and contested governance settings.

The aim of the RPD was to gather analyses and lessons on how to navigate non-state security and justice actors in contested governance settings that are of relevance to the planning, implementation, and evaluation of EU policies. The seminar brought together academic experts in the field of justice and security governance to present key findings from current research on non-state actors and 'hybrid governance' in geographic and thematic areas of relevance to EU priorities. In so doing, the RPD sought to provide an opportunity for EU practitioners and policymakers to engage in direct dialogue with researchers on the challenges and possible solutions in relation to EU support to security sector reform and the rule of law.

### KEY TAKEAWAYS AND EU POLICY CONSIDERATION

1. Non-state actors constitute key protagonists in the provision of security, justice, and other services to individuals and communities in settings where state actors have limited or no capabilities, including through the monopoly of legitimate use of force. It is critical that these spaces are understood not as ungoverned, but as subject to hybrid and contested governance arrangements involving a multitude of both state and non-state actors. Non-state armed groups are thereby often principal governance providers that are embedded in local networks and command local legitimacy. To be effective, efforts to support the reform of security and justice institutions must build on an acknowledgement of the primacy of politics and a reconceptualisation of non-state armed groups as both governance actors and political agents that adhere to political interests, objectives, and agendas.
2. The EU's ambition to provide sustained and effective support to security sector reform calls for the investment in rigorous, comprehensive, and adaptive conflict mapping that draws upon local expertise and a granular understanding of context-specific customs, norms, and codes. To this end, the identification of reliable in-country experts at both the national and the local level stands as a key political and operational priority. While the EU's consistency and reliability is of critical importance, the need to frame EU values and priorities in terms that are sensitive to local meanings, contexts, and incentives was identified as a key lesson for effective engagement in hybrid and contested governance settings.
3. The need to identify effective means to ensure the local ownership of security sector reform in practice and across distinct conflict dynamics was identified as an ongoing challenge and priority. While there may be an understandable and sometimes legitimate hesitation to be associated with actors that are not part of formal state structures and that may be responsible for human rights violations, the effectiveness of

international interventions will often hinge on the readiness to cede leadership and authority to local actors.

4. The operationalisation of the EU's Integrated Approach requires the choreography and synchronisation of multiple tools with a view to achieving a desired effect. Accordingly, the importance of an honest and transparent reflection on the interests underpinning international efforts to support the reform of security and justice institutions was highlighted. Similarly, the importance of devising cross-institutional strategies on the basis of a clear and unified vision of desired effects and outcomes was stressed. To this end, the constant monitoring of second- and third-order consequences of the EU's interventions in contexts of contested governance was identified as a strategic and operational priority.
5. The need to establish mechanisms that ensure that the key lessons from operational, in-country engagements are identified, analysed and shared was identified as an important avenue for programmatic improvement. Likewise, the need to ensure that the timeframes, institutional incentive structures and bureaucratic frameworks underpinning international engagements are aligned with, and conducive to, operational objectives was highlighted as a priority moving forward.