

Jibecke Jönsson, Head of Brussels Office, CMI
Sylvia Thompson, Senior Manager, CMI

INCLUSIVE PEACE AND THE EU IN YEMEN: A call to rethink actions and approaches

A longstanding partner in supporting the UN-led peace process in Yemen, the EU needs to be open to consider what it can do differently to create a conducive environment for peace in Yemen. Innovative approaches need to be explored to ensure equal participation of all groups, including those who have been largely excluded such as political parties and tribal leaders as well as women and youth.

Despite substantial and longstanding international engagement in support of peace in Yemen, the recent military escalation and lack of progress in restarting political talks shows a need to rethink the approach through which the UN-led peace process is supported, including by the EU.

On 7 December, the European External Action Service (EEAS) condemned the border attacks by Houthi forces on Saudi Arabia and urged all parties to support the UN-led peace process.

The UN Special Envoy Hans Grundberg has called for willingness to question efforts made so far and to find new ways to end the political deadlock and reinvigorate the peace process.

This will require both addressing short-term needs mainly related to the worsening humanitarian crisis, and building a comprehensive and sustainable solution that encompasses political, economic and security aspects. This cannot be done by the UN Special Envoy alone.

The EU plays a central role in advancing the peace process in Yemen. The EU has a long track record of actively supporting Yemen and the UN-led peace process. But it is crucial that the EU and its member states continue to try and do more. The EU has to be open to thinking about what it can do differently to create an environment conducive to peace – including through proxy-mediation.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- There is a need to rethink how the UN-led peace process in Yemen is supported, to find new ways to end the political deadlock.
- It is essential that the EU and its member states try to do more to advance the peace process in Yemen, relentlessly engaging with all parties.
- Peace in Yemen requires that all parties are heard and that the narrative shifts to considering both political parties and tribal leaders as enablers for peace.
- The interlinkages between the conflict in Yemen and humanitarian aid must be taken into account, as must the protection of human rights.

This will require creativity, broader engagement and improved coordination with all parties in the region.

The EU is considered a real partner for peace in Yemen, and could play a more influential role as an impartial mediator in the peace process (as well as in reconstruction). But the EU and its member states have to be clear and coherent in their position concerning Yemen to avoid confusion, especially concerning cooperation with and support to the actors involved in the conflict. There has also been a call for a clearer EU position on the status and role of women in the Yemeni peace process.

The 2019 Riyadh agreement to establish a unity government remains

key in ensuring that the differences between the Internationally Recognised Government (IRG) of Yemen and the Southern Transitional Council do not turn into major conflict. The EU should create a clear roadmap on how it can support the implementation of both the Riyadh agreement and the 2018 Stockholm agreement between the IRG and Ansar Allah, on ceasefire in Hodeidah governorate, de-escalation in Taiz and various confidence-building measures such as prisoner exchanges.

The EU needs to relentlessly engage with the parties, persist in efforts to go beyond discussing broad matters to identify and address underlying and diverging interests and positions.

It is equally important that the EU ensures that voices that are not normally heard are listened to while also being cautious about how equal participation and representation is conducted. A bottom-up approach is essential to ensure both ownership and inclusivity through a resolution of conflict that reflects local needs.

Only a participatory process with the active and meaningful participation of all actors will lead to sustainable peace in Yemen. Tribal leaders and influential women in tribal communities have traditionally, and still are, playing an important role in local de-escalation and peacemaking. In particular, they have been active in conducting prisoner exchanges and mediating local ceasefires.

Political parties and tribal leaders are key constituencies for peace and central actors in the peace process. While cooperation with political parties has increased in recent years, cooperation with tribal leaders has been limited in the national peace process. This is explained both by the complexity, and fragmentation due to conflict, of the tribal, and by the perception of tribal leaders as mere local actors that cannot be capitalised on at national level.

There is a need to shift the narrative to consider both political and tribal leaders as potential enablers for peace, and to explore approaches within which their convening powers are used for advancing the peace process. This could help bring about a change in the conflict dynamics and counter the perception that the conflict can still be won by military means, which would incentivise parties to de-escalate and engage in political talks.

Both political parties and tribal leaders have a stake in peace and the EU can play a key role in bringing this to the fore, as well as in supporting the process, paying particular attention to ensuring a central role of both women and youth in the process.

The EU-funded project Supporting broader inclusion and participation in the Yemeni peace process, implemented by CMI – Martti Ahtisaari Peace Foundation and Sana'a Center for Strategic Studies (SC), has shown the potential of political par-

ties and tribes as constituencies for peace. Going forward, it will be crucial to continue these efforts, recognising all stakeholders and actors and connecting the different levels and processes.

Throughout this process, the humanitarian emergency in Yemen has to be addressed. Until now, the crisis has not been sufficiently included in the political agreements, nor in the mandate of the UN Special Envoy. There is a need to consider the interlinkages between the conflict and humanitarian aid dependencies and policies, as access to aid has become another reason for fighting and disagreement within the country. It is important to comprehensively assess both the impact and the beneficiaries of the EU's efforts and support, from development cooperation to humanitarian assistance and political engagement.

Another key element that needs to be addressed is the need to uphold and enforce the rule of law and constitutional order, including protect-

ing human rights. Without accountability people will continue turning to alternative structures for protection, which end up reinforcing the conflict dynamics.

This article is based on discussions at an informal roundtable on an inclusive peace process in Yemen and the role of the EU organised by CMI – Martti Ahtisaari Peace Foundation and Sana'a Center for Strategic Studies within the context of an EU-supported project, and hosted by the Swedish Permanent Representation to the EU, on 8 December 2021 in Brussels. The discussions brought together key EU stakeholders with EU member states, PSC Ambassadors and Yemeni stakeholders to consider what the EU could do more and differently in support of an inclusive peace process in Yemen. The UN Special Envoy for Yemen Hans Grundberg also participated. The recommendations build on a document shared in preparation for this informal roundtable, drafted by Tyne Karjalainen, researcher at the Finnish Institute of International Affairs (FIIA), and the Insight on notes taken of the discussions by Alice Griffon.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. To define new and innovative approaches, critically evaluate EU efforts in Yemen to date in a comprehensive assessment.
2. To enhance inclusivity, empower and build trust between all stakeholders, including political and tribal leaders, through transparent, predictable and equally distributed funding and capacity-building.
3. To encourage peace deals, create political support for conflict resolution using a combination of EU diplomatic, economic and humanitarian instruments, and leveraging better European peacemakers.
4. Use the EU's normative approach and innovations to engage social groups, with particular focus on women and youth, and explore digital tools with European investors and business.
5. Build on the EU's coordination role to enhance the complementarity of international, regional and local actors – from humanitarian aid, and development cooperation to peace support.