

PREFACE

In July 2007, this study was presented in Brussels as the Portuguese Presidency's first public session in the area of development cooperation². We considered it an appropriate way to kick start our Presidency that runs under the motto: "A stronger Europe for a better world". The practical reflections we proposed to the authors resulted in this document on an EU response to situations of fragility. This issue has been one of the priorities of the Portuguese Presidency of the EU. The current document was a basis for in-depth discussions and exchange of ideas in the months that followed its public presentation. It also informed our search for practical solutions in collaboration with other Member States and the community institutions.

We believe it is important in the current international context to strengthen EU coherence in an area where it can and should be a prominent actor. That is why we chose this issue as a priority for our Presidency and therefore commissioned this study. We believe that the efficiency of EU interventions in the promotion of stability and development depends on our capacity to be more coherent in the variety of our approaches. It must be our ambition to be not just the major international donor, but also the best one, in qualitative terms, and we therefore need to promote integrated approaches and interventions in situations of fragility. This is the fundamental step that will allow us to better respond to the challenges of today's complex and multidimensional world.

Various EU documents, EC Communications and other documents have referred to this issue. In October 2006, the Council identified the need improved EU responses to difficult partners and fragile States. It also signaled the need to approach the prevention of State fragility in coherent, coordinated and harmonized ways, adapted to each country situation and building on experiences and lessons learned.

Available data indicate that Official Development Assistance (ODA) for countries in situations of fragility is more volatile, and thus less predictable than for other countries. In such circumstances, we know that ODA tends to be used more for humanitarian activities, more immediate or short-term, and hence less for the promotion of medium or long-term development. We also know that ODA tends to be more directed towards countries where geopolitical concerns are more evident. These are challenges that require an adequate response from our side.

On the other hand, it is important that we plan our interventions in close dialogue with regional organisations and with other international actors, like the United Nations or the World Bank. All these institutions have engaged in a more or less advanced process of reflection on these matters, which only underlines the urgency of our debate if we want to be valid interlocutors.

I would particularly like to emphasize the emergence of the term "*situations of fragility*" that this study has helped to clarify and promote as a consensual concept. It avoids the unnecessary stigma of 'countries in crisis' and underlines the point that institutional fragility must not be considered a permanent and unavoidable characteristic. It remains critical, however, to distinguish between States that are unable to or face great difficulties in meeting their minimum obligations in the provision of security and justice, or in granting access to health or education; and other States that are unwilling to shoulder their responsibilities according to good governance

² The current publication is a revised and updated version of the study "An Adequate EU Response Strategy to address situations of fragility and difficult environments" presented on July 9, 2007, in Brussels.

principles – the so-called “difficult partners”. In both situations, the study provides much ‘food for thought’ on how to improve our interventions.

This study was a fundamental contribution to the work developed during the period of the Portuguese Presidency of the EU, including for the European Commission Communication and the Conclusions of the General Affairs and External Relations Council in November 2007. I wish to publicly thank the authors for their work in interpreting (and for the way they have done it) the contemporary challenges we are confronted with. I am convinced it will remain an important reference in a debate whose time has come.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "João Gomes Cravinho". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

João Gomes Cravinho

Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs and Cooperation, Government of Portugal

November 2007