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Brussels, 29 May 2017: As EU Political and Security Committee (PSC) ambassadors travel to New York later this month for a session with the UN Security Council, UNRIC caught up with Rory Keane, the Head of the United Nations Liaison Office for Peace and Security in Brussels, to talk about how the United Nations and UN peace operations can benefit from the EU’s efforts worldwide.

UNRIC: Could you elaborate a bit about the role of your liaison office and why it was established?

Rory Keane: The United Nations Liaison Office for Peace and Security in Brussels was created to ensure that the UN and the EU work in partnership across the globe to prevent conflict, to keep peace and to sustain peace. □ We do this through the formal, institutionalized channels such as the PSC ambassadors meeting with the Security Council next month, but our office also engages directly with the EU and particularly the European External Action Service (EEAS) on these issues on a daily basis.

You see that in today's world, conflicts are increasingly complex and regionalized. We need to stand together and work together to help solve them. So ultimately, building partnerships as set out in Chapter VIII of the UN Charter makes the UN stronger and more effective. Building that partnership with the EU is our job here in Brussels. But being in Brussels means that we also work with the other big international player in town, NATO, to benefit from their know-how and technical expertise on a range of issues, such as NATO's demining technology and their expertise in medical support.

UNRIC: Why is a partnership with EU on peace and security so important for the UN?

Rory Keane: We always say in the UN that for us the EU is a 'natural partner' in the area of peace and security. At the same time, the UN and EU have different toolboxes at their disposal that can be mutually reinforcing.

Let me give you an example. In 2013, the Central African Republic got trapped in an increasingly sectarian conflict. The result: widespread violence and instability, civilians fleeing their homes. This situation required urgent action. The UN authorized the EU to deploy □ soldiers to prevent violence □ in the capital and allow humanitarian access for 9 months. This presence enabled the UN to build-up its large-scale peacekeeping mission, MINUSCA. This is where the UN-EU strategic partnership proved to be very valuable: with a fast deployable "bridging

mission”, the EU could contribute greatly to the work of the UN. Our liaison office played an important role in linking the key actors to make this happen.

But the EU is also an important UN-partner on the financial side. For instance, the EU organized a donor conference in Brussels last November where over USD 2.2 billion was pledged to finance the Central African Republic’s National Plan for Recovery and Peacebuilding. Such conferences are vital for the country’s reconstruction.

UNRIC: How can the EU help to improve UN peacekeeping?

Rory Keane: The EU complements the work of the UN by deploying their missions often in the same countries as where UN peacekeeping operations are deployed. EU staff are usually trained and equipped to do very specific jobs, for example to train high-level military officials in a country, or to support the work of customs officials and police.

The EU also funds the African Union to undertake important peace operations, a case in point being Somalia.

The reality is that the proliferation of conflicts worldwide means that we need UN peace operations as much as ever and EU support to this end is of great value. Peace operations are a global good – let me explain. Peace operations reduce the level of violence, decrease conflict duration and prevent conflicts from spreading. With less than 0.5% of global military expenditure, you can say that UN peacekeeping is actually good value for money.

Also here, the EU and EU member states can play a crucial role. Our liaison office has been engaged in supporting UN headquarters in calling for more systematic contributions by the EU and its member states to UN peacekeeping. Europeans can contribute with troops but also with what we call “critical enablers”, such as helicopters and field hospitals. Today, we are seeing an important increase in European contributions to UN missions, such as to MINUSMA in Mali.

UNRIC: The UN's new Secretary-General Antonio Guterres has said that the prevention of conflicts is his main focus. What does that mean for the UN-EU partnership in peace and security?

Rory Keane: Conflict prevention is extremely important. It can save lives and prevent the vicious cycle that has destructive effects on entire societies and economies. However, conflict prevention often does not receive the attention and funding it deserves. There is not so much news value in conflicts that were prevented; after all you rarely hear about a war that did not happen.

The Secretary-General is personally committed to redouble diplomatic efforts to maintain peace and to prevent conflicts from escalating. The EU in particular is a very important partner for this. The EU has shown its diplomatic value on numerous occasions, for instance in facilitating the talks between Belgrade and Pristina, or during its work on the Iran nuclear talks. But also through development aid and human rights policies, the EU helps to prevent violent conflict from breaking out.

As the UN leads the efforts in trying to make peace in countries such as Syria and Libya, while preventing violence in numerous countries across the globe, our liaison office helps the EU and the UN to coordinate and complement their work. We need to ensure that that our mutual efforts in conflict prevention are something more than just the sum of their parts.