

Colombia: Assessing the Roles of the European Union in Conflict Resolution and Peacebuilding

Furqan Adil JABBA
Hussein Mezher KHALAF

Abstract: Colombia's internal armed conflict, dating back to the 1960s, has garnered international attention and become a priority for many donor countries. The resurgence of violence in the 1990s, combined with the influx of drug trafficking funds and the emergence of new illegal actors, resulted in fresh humanitarian crises and human rights violations. Concurrently, the internationalization of the armed conflict, spearheaded by the government of Andrés Pastrana (1998-2002) through the policy of diplomacy for peace, brought the shared responsibility approach to drug control onto the global stage. The European Union has played a significant role in Colombia, particularly in conflict resolution, peacebuilding, and supporting the country's development process. In contrast to US cooperation, European engagement has been characterized by a less militaristic approach to addressing the ongoing armed conflict in Colombia. This approach is evident in intervention strategies more directly linked to civil society. These strategies encompass cooperation in peacebuilding and the promotion of human rights. This research aims to elucidate and analyze the strategies employed by the European Union in resolving the conflict and fostering peace in Colombia, while also assessing their effectiveness.

Furqan Adil JABBA
Postgraduate student (MA)
College of Political Science, University of Baghdad

Hussein Mezher KHALAF
Assistant Professor
College of Political Science, University of Baghdad
E-mail: hussin.misher@copolicy.uobaghdad.edu.iq

Keywords: European Union, Colombia, strategies, peacebuilding, conflict resolution.

Introduction

The European Union formalized its policy of international cooperation for peace with the enactment of the 1992 Treaty on the European Union (TEU). The Lisbon Treaty of 2009 stands out as a crucial milestone in

Conflict Studies Quarterly
Issue 47, April 2024, pp. 3-19

DOI: 10.24193/csq.47.1
Published First Online: April 05 / 2024

bolstering the EU's international cooperation, serving as one of its key agreements and primary instruments for foreign policy. In the late 1990s, the European Union adopted five objectives for international cooperation: (1) Promoting regional cooperation and integration; (2) Promoting human rights; (3) Promoting democracy; (4) Preventing armed conflicts; and (5) Combating organized crime. These goals have evolved over time to align with other global cooperation agendas, such as the United Nations Millennium Development Goals (2000–2015) and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development Goals. Alongside these priorities, the European Union maintained a paramount objective: to uphold and champion human rights. Even in other areas of action, including trade, aid, and cooperation, political dialogue was anchored in the requirement of human rights respect as a precondition for legitimizing the opposing party. As for Colombia, the European Union considered meeting this condition one of its necessary demands. The Union called on successive Colombian governments to pay attention to issues related to respect for human rights defenders, movements, and non-governmental organizations.

The European Union had a clear strategy for cooperation with Colombia, which was part of its Regional Strategy for Latin America. This strategy materialized in the mid-1990s. As global dynamics shifted and the European Union emerged as a significant actor in a world increasingly dominated by the United States, fostering closer ties with Latin America became imperative. It presented a new avenue for trade opportunities for the European Union and offered a fresh area of interest through which strategic gains could be achieved within the framework of cooperation. Additionally, in the 1990s, the European Union began integrating a conflict prevention and peacebuilding dimension into its foreign policy. This move can be viewed as a commitment to the aid-for-peace strategy.

In this new global context, the European Union saw opportunities in Colombia in three areas to achieve peace by strengthening cooperation policies: (1) Peacebuilding; (2) drug control; and (3) environment, with respect for human rights as a cross-cutting area. The European Union prioritized its strategy by starting to support the Pastrana government in peacebuilding and then prioritizing drug control in its development programs. Regarding EU policies on environmental protection, the European Union saw Colombia – a country with one of the highest levels of biodiversity in the world – as an opportunity to integrate environmental protection components into the other two agendas and at the same time create specific programs for this line of action. The European Union has also adopted and implemented various cooperation mechanisms in Colombia for more than 20 years, including institutional strengthening and governance, and sustainable social and economic development in the areas most affected by armed conflict.

We will explain in more detail the development of the European Union's strategies in Colombia to resolve the conflict and bring peace through its main initiatives, since the

end of the last century, until the signing of the Peace Agreement (Havana) in 2016. An accurate assessment of the strategies that have been pursued by the European Union, will explain the effectiveness of these strategies in resolving conflict and peacebuilding in Colombia.

EU Strategies Towards the Colombian Conflict

International cooperation between the EU and Colombia began with some fruitless approaches to resolving the Colombian conflict in 1996, in the context of the fall of the Berlin Wall, the end of the Cold War, the opening of international markets, and the European Union's efforts to define its foreign policy and its position in unipolar international relations. It was not until 1998, with the government of Andrés Pastrana, that these efforts were formalized into a clear cooperation strategy and roadmap, especially after the failure of peace talks in Caguan with the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) in 2002 (Aguilar, 2006; Sharqi, 2023). This moment coincided with the European Union's interest in playing a more prominent role in resolving conflict and peacebuilding in Latin America and Colombia. Therefore, the end of the peace talks did not prevent the European Union from continuing its cooperation with Colombia. The European Union has adapted to a new discourse and declared its commitment to peacebuilding in armed conflicts by launching its program called Peace Laboratories (Baribbi & Arboleda, 2013).

From Peace Labs to the establishment of the European Peace Fund to support the implementation of the Havana Peace Agreement between the government and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) (Mughamis, & Kadhim, 2023). The European Union in Colombia has become concerned with conflict resolution and peacebuilding and strengthening it by emphasizing the consolidation of democracy, support for human rights, and the active presence of civil society in development processes. Despite the change in view of the administration of former Colombian President Álvaro Uribe (2002–2010) regarding the conflict and the impossibility of holding talks with the FARC and other armed groups during that period, the European Union continued to support its program (Peace Labs), designed to peacebuilding even in times of conflict by strengthening local capacities and paving the way for future negotiations (Pastrana & Aponte, 2006). Later, during the negotiations conducted by the government of former Colombian President Juan Manuel Santos with the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia in Havana, the European Union reaffirmed its commitment to the success of the process of resolving the conflict and bringing peace to Colombia. In 2015, the European Union appointed Eamon Gilmore as its special envoy for the peace process in Colombia and established the European Peace Fund to support the implementation of the agreement (Borda, 2012; Hassan, 2017).

The most prominent strategies adopted by the European Union towards the Colombian conflict can be identified as follows.

1. Global Peacebuilding

By the end of the 1990s, the European Union was promoting what later became a policy of global peacebuilding. This was one of the main priorities of his foreign policy, defined as a counterweight to the military policies implemented by the United States. This strategy represented a cooperation framework between the European Union and Colombia during the government of Andres Pastrana (1998–2002) (Cujabante Villamin, 2016; Lederach, 2005).

The support provided by the international community allowed the Pastrana government to regain its legitimacy in the wake of diplomatic problems between the government of the former President of the Republic of Colombia, Ernesto Samper Pisano, and the United States, which gave the country a new image among the active forces in the international community. For Pastrana, the official invitation extended by the President of the United States to the White House days before his inauguration on August 7, 1998, was an opportunity to change the image of Colombia not only before the United States but also before the international community in general. Once formed, the new government improved relations with the United States, while initiating talks with Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) guerrillas, and fostering good diplomatic relations with other countries, allowing it to reach out to donor countries and collaborators that were not particularly close to it. Colombia, as is the case in the European Union (Barreto, 2016).

For their part, donors, especially the European Union, saw the possibility of cooperating with a stable country that had institutional solidity and economic capacity, allowing it to implement the new cooperation instruments that were being formulated at that time, and at a lower cost than other countries (Reliefweb Colombia, 2011). This is what brought international cooperation to Colombia, despite it being a middle-income country. This allowed the EU to test its cooperation strategies in a controlled way, the implementation of which had been problematic in regions such as Africa or Eastern Europe, which were less politically, economically, and socially stable than Colombia.

Pastrana's government had two main cooperation mechanisms during his term: diplomacy for peace and Plan Colombia. The European Union has taken opposing positions for each of these strategies. Finally, as the end of the government's term approached, with the end of the talks and the arrival of a new government, the European Union redirected its efforts to increase cooperation with civil society organizations in the regions and began to formulate what would become its main tools for international cooperation in the country: peace laboratories (Restrepo & Aponte, 2009).

2. Diplomacy for Peace & Internationalization of Conflict

Diplomacy for peace was the European Union's strategy for resolving the conflict and Peacebuilding in Colombia. Three donor roundtables were established to obtain international cooperation resources to finance peace initiatives, to invite countries and

multilateral organizations to approach talks with the rebels, support them, and thus legitimize them. Here the Pastrana government's dealings with the European Union and its member states began in October 1998, a little more than a month after it took power. In seeking initial support from the European Union, the Pastrana government requested the achievement of two main goals by the European Union: the first: internationalizing the Colombian conflict. Second: Legitimizing the government as the sole representative of the country. Both goals were interconnected and represented the highest foreign policy priority of the Pastrana government (Carlos, 2003)

It is worth noting that, since the European Union adopted this strategy, various states and multilateral organizations (such as the Organization of American States and the United Nations) have begun to show interest and engage in activities aimed at reaching a negotiated solution to the armed conflict. This process led to the so-called internationalization of the Colombian armed conflict (Wolf, 2002).

Within the framework of the Diplomacy for Peace strategy, the EU actively participated in donor round tables and encouraged the participation of its Member States (Spain and Germany, among others) in the Caguan negotiations, in the final phase of which the European Union itself participates (Hudson, 2007). As Pastrana noted, the EU viewed these talks as an opportunity to influence the Peacebuilding process, although it did not allocate its cooperation resources to the extent that the Colombian government had expected. Moreover, when the talks began to collapse at the end of 2001, the EU asked the Colombian government to make a last-ditch effort to keep the negotiations going. The government agreed to the European Union's request, but set very clear limits to the European Union's participation in the negotiations, to defend the political legitimacy it had gained (Alejo, 2002).

3. Commitment to the Caguán Talks and Rejection of Plan Colombia

At the end of 1999, the Colombian government decided to take on a second dimension to its foreign policy. The aim of this plan was to strengthen state institutions and achieve the greatest possible amount of social investment, in order to address inequality in the areas most affected by the conflict, as an attempt to prepare societies for possible peace, under the principle that without this, peace cannot be achieved. It will not be possible to implement what was agreed upon, and the initial causes of the conflict will be reactivated.

This policy was called Plan Colombia. It was initially formulated as an emulation of the Marshall Plan, modeled on the post-World War II American program to promote the development of areas most affected by violence and poverty in Colombia. Pastrana indicated that his initial formulation of the plan aimed to allocate 75% of resources to social investment and 25% to strengthen state institutions, especially security institutions. To achieve the goals of Plan Colombia, the government needed to obtain the resources necessary to implement it. Pastrana began his search for resources with the

United States. The Colombian Embassy in Washington made a tremendous effort to obtain resources from the administration of former US President Bill Clinton, which in turn was accompanied by credits and cooperation from the World Bank and the Inter-American Development Bank.

However, the biggest problem that emerged after that was that the United States did not spend the money as planned. When disbursed, the allocation was 75% to strengthen institutions, with a greater focus than originally planned on strengthening security forces, and contrary to what was initially requested, only 25% was allocated to social investment (World Bank, 2002).

In response to this situation, the Colombian government sought to maximize social investment resources by looking to other sources of financing, such as the European Union, but this did not go as expected. The results were, in Pastrana's words, "one of his biggest frustrations". Active pressure groups have been formed against Plan Colombia, both inside and outside the country, as it has been interpreted as a US military plan, to which the European Union refuses to contribute (Carroll, 2011; Assafi, & Aziz, 2022). This led the Colombian government to change its strategy with the European Union and focus its relationship with it on two aspects: regional social development projects, which would later become Peace Laboratories, and environmental protection projects, particularly focused on protecting ecosystems affected by drug trafficking.

4. Peace Laboratories Strategy (2002-2009)

Although not the first EU program in Colombia, the Peace Labs was the program that most strongly characterized the EU-Colombia cooperative relationship, as well as the program in which the EU became directly involved in the Colombian conflict. The European Union program focused on resolving conflict and Peacebuilding in Colombia by combating poverty, promoting the rule of law, sustainable economic development, promoting human rights, and strengthening civil society (Idler, Garrido & Mouly, 2015; Abdul Ridaah, 2023).

The laboratories offered the advantage that they were fully compatible with EU values. At the same time, these events coincided with a time when the European Union wanted to distance itself from Plan Colombia, after the end of the negotiation talks conducted by the Andrés Pastrana government in 2000. The European Union joined the process of social mobilization carried out by various civil society actors, within the framework of the Peace and Development Program in Magdalena Medio (PDPMM) in force since 1995. Under the structure and experience of this program, in 2002, the European Union joined and became involved in this process, in the context of peace negotiations with the Pastrana government and the possibility of creating areas for disarmament and reintegration in the region (Betancur, 2007).

5. Cooperation with Civil Society Organizations (2002–2010)

The cooperation strategy adopted by the European Union during this period was based on development interventions and humanitarian aid to rehabilitate lands damaged by illicit crops, and to reduce conflicts that could have direct and indirect consequences for Europe (Sánchez, 2010). This was consistent with the European vision of combating and preventing conflicts and attacking the structural causes that generate and activate them.

With the end of the Caguan peace talks in 2002 and the imminent change of government, the European Union was forced to adjust its political strategies and formulate other projects to achieve its goals. The main change, that would affect its activities in Colombia from that moment on, was its distance from the national government and the prioritization of projects implemented with civil society organizations.

6. Regional Development, Peace and Stability Strategy (RDPS)

Once the laboratory strategy was completed in 2008, and especially after the EU's conditional support for the implementation of the Justice and Peace Act (which led to the disarmament of paramilitary forces), the Uribe government agreed to formalize EU projects and increase their convergence with institutions of the Colombian state (European Commission, 2014). This led to a milestone in EU cooperation with Colombia, embodied in the signing in 2009 of a formal strategy for cooperation to end the conflict and bring peace, which included a focus on lessons learned from laboratories, and formalized EU Peacebuilding strategies in addition to joint financing support from Colombian state (Castaneda, 2012).

The primary objective of the Regional Development, Peace and Stability Strategy (RDPS) was to support some of the most outstanding, strategic, and successful initiatives and projects of the Peace Labs in the second phase of funding, to ensure their continuity and stability. This new landscape has allowed EU cooperation to grow in Colombia, ensuring the continuity of its interventions (De Armiño, 2023).

7. Regional Development, Peace and Stability Programs (RDPS)

After the end of the Peace Labs in 2010, the European Union launched two new strategies: the Regional Development, Peace and Stability Programs (RDPS) between 2009 and 2016, and the New Zones of Peace (NTP) from 2011 to 2016. The RDPS has supported many initiatives that it began at Al Salam Laboratories and sought to ensure its continuity and sustainability. With the “New Territories of Peace” initiative, a new phase in EU cooperation began in Colombia, expressed with the state and civil society organizations, which would later become the EU's main ally (European Commission, 2015a). The focus of these programs was to support local processes of conflict resolution and Peacebuilding, with civil society organizations playing a leadership role, as priority was given to regional specificities of Peacebuilding. Through these programs, the European Union has expanded its areas of intervention in Colombia, while maintaining the main axes of its cooperation in the country, including strengthening institutions, promoting

human rights, and supporting local participatory processes (The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2017).

To strengthen its vision for cooperation and gather lessons learned from the Peace Labs, in 2016 the European Union chose to work with the German Agency for International Cooperation (GIZ) in delegated cooperation. The European Union entrusted GIZ to carry out its work. This mechanism was embodied in a new project, FORPAZ, which became the fourth component of Peacebuilding Support in Colombia, the leading German cooperation program for Peacebuilding with a regional approach, transitional justice, historical memory, and reparations for victims. This program also aimed to clarify the efforts of Germany and the European Union in implementing the peace agreement (GIZ, 2016).

8. Expanding the Scope of Implementation of Transitional Justice in Colombia (2012–2016)

When the Peace Labs strategy was completed, and based on the experiences and lessons learned from these initiatives, other Peacebuilding projects were implemented in Colombia funded by the European Union, during the change of government from the Álvaro Uribe administration to the Juan Manuel Santos administration, reflecting the difference in approach, given that there has been a change from a government that emphasized a military response to the continuity of guerrilla organizations to a government that prioritized negotiating the armed conflict and realizing the rights of victims (Eva, 2015). This last goal was to be achieved through the creation and implementation of Law No. 1448 (Victims and Land Restitution Law) and the peace process with the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) (Development Researchers Network *et al.*, 2012).

The “New Territories of Peace” programs, implemented by the European Union and the Colombian Government, had a comprehensive approach and included issues of human rights and innovation for peace (European Commission, 2018a). Since 2011, they have managed Peacebuilding initiatives in four regions of the country severely affected by armed conflict: Canal del Dique, Zona Costera, Bajo Magdalena, Caqueta, and Guaviare. In order to implement this initiative, the European Union cooperated with 16 implementing partners, achieving a number of 22,336 beneficiaries (Dominguez, 2015).

9. European Union Support for Peacebuilding (2010–2018)

After coming to power in 2010, former Colombian President Juan Manuel Santos began talks with the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), first in a secret phase in Oslo and then in a public phase in Havana in 2012. In this context, the European Union affirmed its commitment to resolving the conflict and bringing about peace. In 2013, the European Union announced its support for the peace process in Havana (Landesberg, 2013). The former European Union Ambassador to Colombia, Maria Antonia Van Gool,

the European Commission, and the European Council publicly announced their support on January 28 of the same year, within the framework of the EU-CLAS summit. At the same time, this political support was ratified at the highest level, and the European Union continued to support cooperation programs through the Regional Development for Peace and Stability Project (Hameed, 2022). EU also led a coordination process among the country's donors, seeking to prepare their international cooperation for the future post-agreement phase and implement the Havana Accords (European Commission, 2015b).

In 2014, the European Commission submitted a positive report that exempted Colombian citizens from visas, linking it in part to the achievements of the peace process. In the same year, the European Union examined the possibility of establishing a peace trust fund. In August 2016, Irish diplomat Eamon Gilmore was appointed as EU Special Representative to support the peace process, representing an important political endorsement of the process (European Commission, 2017).

In 2016, the European Commission announced approval to establish the European Trust Fund for Peace in March of the same year, with an initial amount of 70 million euros, from contributions from 9 member states (Germany, Ireland, Italy, Sweden, Netherlands, Portugal, Slovakia, Spain and the United Kingdom), which will enter into force after the signing of the official agreement between the government and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (European Commission, 2018b).

The Effectiveness of the European Union's Strategies Towards the Colombian Conflict

The EU's strategies were in sync with the US's move towards Colombia and its "war on drugs", which explicitly targeted far-left gangs, and later "terrorists", as threats to be eliminated or at least reduced. The more interventionist approach adopted by the United States appears to have been based on successive American security models, not Peacebuilding in Colombia per se and did not help prevent the erosion of trust in public institutions (Maher, 2018). Despite the dynamic relationship, which has had its ups and downs, the EU has also generally been a more reliable and stable partner for Colombia than its immediate neighbors. There is no doubt that neighboring countries were inevitably more directly affected by the effects of the conflict, which required the European Union to adopt different strategies to contain the conflict there, and it later became an active player in peacebuilding.

Despite the European Union's clear intentions and commitment to Peacebuilding, the impact of EU strategies in resolving the Colombian conflict has been limited (Gómez, 2007). The European Union dealt with the Colombian crisis as an issue for resolving the conflict and Peacebuilding at a time when most of the Colombian political elites were not convinced of this view. Instead, the Colombian political class has long viewed

violence in Colombia as a problem of internal security and territorial control. From this perspective, the EU strategies served as a precursor to the Peacebuilding approach adopted in Colombia since the signing, in 2016, of a peace agreement between the Colombian government and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC-EP).

This discrepancy between the EU and the Colombian government in their understanding of the dynamics of violence and conflict meant that the EU was initially unable to measure its influence in confronting challenges on the ground. While Peace Labs have led to successes in several projects and other EU development assistance, some institutional changes at the local and, to some extent, the national level, have been met with inevitable security constraints, because much of the EU's actions have taken place in areas where there was violence and were not under government control. The political dialogue that took place at the regional and bilateral levels served as a pressure point to keep Colombia engaged at the international level and to raise its concerns related to human rights and sustainable development. However, some experts argued that the European Union could have done more than just declarative gestures and should have pressed the Colombian government more forcefully at high-level summits to address human rights violations.

The impact of trade cooperation and the Free Trade Agreement (FTA) that Colombia signed with the European Union in 2012 has also had mixed results. Although diversifying Colombia's exports to include agricultural products helped create job opportunities, civil society organizations criticized the European institutions' monitoring of the agreement. They pointed out that the European Commission did not focus enough on sustainable development. Moreover, although the European Parliament played an active role in defending human rights networks and vulnerable groups, civil society organizations hoped for a stronger demand from the Parliament on respect for human rights.

In contrast, despite their small size and unexplored impact on the overall resolution of the conflict in Colombia, Peace Labs have contributed to institutional changes at the local, national, and international levels. As the European Commission's Strategic Evaluation emphasized, "The main achievements of the European Commission's contribution have been in creating platforms for dialogue between different actors present in the region, in strengthening networks and civil society organizations, in encouraging the creation of alliances between public and private actors, and in supporting activities Productivity to achieve social and economic stability in the region. However, the initiative also highlights the difficulties of establishing an international presence in conflict environments.

One of the biggest challenges faced in implementing Peace Labs is that they were developed as a mechanism to support the peace process at a time and in areas where there is no peace and negotiations are not progressing. This means that the activities of the European Union were affected by factors that were beyond its control, namely

armed confrontations, tense relations with neighboring countries, the access of local organizations to armed actors and drug trafficking, and the insufficient capacity of local organizations, among other issues. The EU has been criticized for its “heavy, slow, inflexible and highly bureaucratic” procedures, which underestimate its positive impact.

However, it cannot be overlooked that these laboratories led to strengthening state institutions (administrative and judicial reform) and helping victims of the conflict. With the start of the laboratories, an estimated €35 million was allocated to co-finance non-governmental organizations, improve the conditions of internally displaced persons, promote human rights, and the fields of science and technology. Since 2010, the Emergency Fund has allocated 13 direct grants to human rights defenders from Colombia and their families (the maximum grant is €10,000 per case).

The European Commission’s strategic assessment for this period also speaks of key contributions to protecting internally displaced persons’ territories, strengthening the capacity of victims and human rights organizations to participate in the transitional justice process, and maintaining a high level of activity in favor of defending and promoting human rights (Hameed, 2020). The report believes that European Union development cooperation also contributed to strengthening local actors as active parties in the process of conflict resolution and Peacebuilding. It has helped subnational bodies to strengthen participatory budgeting and focus public service delivery according to social and regional needs, partly helped by building technical capacity and fighting corruption.

Communicating and supporting with human rights organizations and human rights defenders has been one of the European Union’s primary concerns. Since 2014, the European Union has provided funds amounting to an average of €1 million per year through the EIDHR to civil society organizations, to strengthen the defense of human rights in Colombia. Between 2013 and 2015, the European Union funded a project (worth €553,000) on women’s empowerment in the Colombian province of Guajira, to provide legal advisory services and inform international partners of the challenges facing this community. In 2015, the European Union provided financial support to several NGO-run projects aimed at improving the human rights situation, focusing on the situation of human rights defenders and other activists at risk, victims of conflict and gender-based violence, and children in Armed conflicts.

Regarding labor issues, the European Union, through its various strategies, was able to provide financial support to the National Trade Union School, which is one of the main bodies active in workers’ rights and protecting union leaders. In addition, since its establishment in 2015, the EU Mechanism for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders (administered by a consortium of 12 specialized NGOs) has allocated 30 direct grants and organized 32 training activities for human rights defenders at risk (individuals and organizations). Legal and psychological support, medical assistance, improved security, and emergency transportation were also provided to human rights defenders. Many

EIDHR-funded projects have addressed the critical needs of indigenous communities, who have been directly and indirectly affected by internal conflict, through anti-discrimination support and capacity building to enable them to engage in dialogues with public institutions and authorities about their rights and issues (Lazarou, & Perchoc, 2019).

Also, the European Union has worked on the issue of gender equality and in combating discrimination and organized crime (Ali, & Tatar, 2018). The EU has also worked to strengthen social cohesion through EUROsociAL and citizen security through El PacCTO (Assistance Program against Transnational Organized Crime).

In tandem, the European Union, through its strategies and tools employed in Colombia, was able to assist in building the administrative capacities of Colombian institutions. In this context, for example, the European Union delegation in Colombia supported prior consultations on respect for human rights and followed up on several issues related to violations of human rights defenders and the rights of indigenous communities, and discussed this issue periodically with the National Indigenous Organization. In addition, the European Union and several of its Member States assisted the Colombian government in formulating and implementing its National Action Plan, on business and human rights. Further support was allocated to the implementation of a regional project on business and human rights covering issues related to prior consultation (Mucke, 2017). The European Union has also funded projects to empower indigenous people in their relationship with companies, for example, promoting human rights and social and corporate advocacy through local Wayuu women's initiatives. In addition, the project called "Transnational corporations and guiding principles: Towards effective mechanisms for the protection of human rights in Latin America" funded actions related to consultation among actors in Colombia, as well as its contribution to improving the implementation of the International Labor Organization Convention No. (169) on non-discrimination (Abofarha & Nasreldein, 2022).

As part of its vision for conflict resolution and peacemaking in Colombia, the European Union has provided humanitarian aid for more than two decades. The Union provided €202 million worth of humanitarian aid between 1994 and 2014, and Colombia became the second largest beneficiary of humanitarian aid provided by the European Commission in the Latin American and Caribbean region, after Haiti. This aid covered the needs of internally displaced persons, assisted Colombian refugees in neighboring countries, primarily Ecuador and Venezuela (€184.4 million), responded to natural disasters (€11.4 million), and funded projects to better prepare local, national and regional communities and institutions, to confront risks and reduce vulnerability (5.6 million euros) (Ali, 2023). Part of the peace laboratories was funded through this budget item. In this context, the ECHO Office of the European Commission has been actively coordinating with the Victims Unit (UARIV), the Presidential Agency for Refugees, the International Cooperation Office (APCI), and the National Unit for Disaster Risk

Management (UNGRD), to address humanitarian needs in remote areas of the country, where armed actors obstruct public services and response (OECD, 2017).

Concerning the areas of economics and development, here we should point out a very important issue, which is that before the establishment of the European Free Trade Association (EFTA), in 1992, and the signing of the trade agreement between the European Union, Peru, Colombia and Ecuador EU–Colombia–Peru–Ecuador Trade Agreement On June 26, 2012, Colombia faced significant economic insecurity, making it difficult for the Colombian economy to thrive due to a lack of trust in government institutions, extreme income inequality, and many other problems resulting from fear of violence from rebel groups. However, signing the above-mentioned agreement changed Colombia's economic path.

Conclusions

The European Union in particular is a major donor to Colombia and has focused its international cooperation on addressing the causes and consequences of armed conflict in the country. For more than two decades, EU cooperation has focused on Peacebuilding, even in the midst of armed conflict, leading it to implement actions with multiple actors and perspectives. Hence, it worked alongside civil society organizations, and local authorities to implement a regional vision and different bodies of the national government. At the same time, and perhaps due to the particularities of the Colombian case, the country served as a favorable environment in which the EU was able to apply many different strategies. In this sense, the Peace Labs gave the European Union the first opportunity to learn about the regions and their characteristics and to start a learning process to search for and apply new tools.

To maintain its position regarding Peacebuilding, the European Union has also been able to adapt to the different visions of successive Colombian governments, some of which, such as those of (Pastrana) or (Santos), were committed to dialogue to overcome the armed conflict, and others were opposed, such as (Uribe), like this dialogue, supports direct confrontation with the rebels. This continued support allowed the European Union to work in particular with civil society, which was already implementing local Peacebuilding processes. Supporting the social processes underway in different regions has been one of the major contributions of European intervention in Colombia. The regional and differential approach has allowed the EU to adapt its peacebuilding efforts, taking into account that the conflict has developed differently in the country and has particularly affected fragile areas that lack a state presence or are environmentally vulnerable.

The search for new intervention strategies, such as a cooperation mandate, budgetary support, and a trust fund, reflects the lessons that the European Union has learned in its work to resolve conflict and Peacebuilding in Colombia. This included seeking to

make future interventions more flexible and, at the same time, more sustainable by engaging the state as a key actor in the processes it supports. While the EU was initially particularly active in working with civil society, it later played an important role as a mediator between different actors in the region.

It can be said that the European Union was able, through its various strategies, to achieve important achievements - but limited impact - in transforming the paths of the Colombian conflict, paving the way for its resolution, and enhancing the opportunities for Peacebuilding there). The European Union and its member states have emphasized the importance of Colombia to them, through their formulation and employment of several strategies (economic, political, security, social, humanitarian, etc. Relief, rehabilitation, and development activities have been linked for a more focused and joint response to Colombia's post-conflict needs and Peacebuilding efforts. The European Union, through the Trust Fund, was also able to rebuild the social and economic fabric of the country, especially at the local level, focusing on the most affected rural areas, which are the areas that suffered most from illegal activities and violence. However, the challenges facing the work of the European Union hindered the process of resolving the conflict and Peacebuilding as required.

Reference

1. Abdul Ridaah, A. T. (2023). Nation-building in the fragile states: Iraq after 2003 as a model. *Political Sciences Journal*, 66, 55–76.
2. Abofarha, E. A., & Nasreldein, R. I. (2022). Explaining presidential instability in Latin America: Evidence from Brazil, Argentina and Ecuador. *Review of Economics and Political Science*, 7(1), 56–70.
3. Aguilar, J. (2006). *Construcción de paz en el espacio humanitario de Micoahumado: Una mirada desde la cooperación europea*. Pontificia Universidad Javeriana.
4. Alejo, V. V. (2002). *Las Fuerzas Armadas en el conflicto colombiano*. Intermedio Editores.
5. Ali, I. A. (2023). Feminist theorizing in the international relations discipline. *Journal of International Women's Studies*, 25(2), 1–8.
6. Ali, I. A., & Tatar, M. A. (2018). The patterns of strategic environment and its role in determining strategies for dealing with conflict and peace situations. *Political Science Journal*, 2(56), 111–135.
7. Assafi, T. F. S., & Aziz, A. H. (2022). Concept of conflict and identifying a form CR SIPPABIO (Conceptual and Theoretical Framework). *Res Militaris*, 12(4), 2510–2524.
8. Baribbi, A., & Arboleda, J. (2013). *Laboratorios de Paz y Programas Regionales de Desarrollo Paz y Estabilidad Unión Europea*. Social Prosterity.
9. Barreto, M. (2016). *Laboratorios de paz en territorios de violencia(s): ¿Abriendo caminos para la paz positiva en Colombia?* Universidad de Bogotá Jorge Tadeo Lozano.
10. Betancur, J. (2007). Approaches to the regularization of informal settlements: The case of Primed in Medellín, Colombia. *Global Urban Development*, 3, 1–15.

11. Borda, S. (2012). *La internacionalización de la paz y de la guerra en Colombia durante los Gobiernos de Andrés Pastrana y Álvaro Uribe*. Universidad de Los Andes.
12. Carlos, L. (2003). Conflict and peace in Colombia: Consequences and perspectives for the future. Kellogg Institute/Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars/Ideas para la Paz.
13. Carroll, L. A. (2011). *Violent democratization, social movements, elites, and politics in Colombia's rural war zones, 1984–2008*. University of Notre Dame Press.
14. Castaneda, D. (2012). *The European Union in Colombia: Learning how to be a peace actor*, Paris Papers No 3. Institute de Recherche Stratégique de l'Ecole Militaire.
15. Cujabante Villamin, X. A. (2016). La comunidad internacional y su participación en los procesos de paz en Colombia. *Equidad y Desarrollo*, 1(26), 207–222. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.19052/ed.3479>.
16. De Armiño, K. P. (2023). *European Union support for Colombia's peace process, rethinking peace & conflict studies*. Dublin City University.
17. Development Researchers Network. (2012). *Evaluation of the Commission of the European Union's cooperation with Colombia*. Development Research Network
18. Dominguez, R. (2015). *EU foreign policy towards Latin America*. Palgrave Macmillan.
19. European Commission. (2014). Report from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council on the fulfillment by Colombia of the relevant criteria in view of the negotiation of a visa waiver agreement between the European Union and Colombia {SWD(2014) 329 final}, COM(2014) 665 final. The European Commission.
20. European Commission. (2015a). Answer given by Vice-President Mogherini on behalf of the Commission, Monitoring the human rights roadmap following the implementation of the EU-Colombia Trade Agreement, Question from Jude Kirton-Darling (S&D) to the European Commission for written answer E-003448-15. The European Commission.
21. European Commission. (2015b). Follow-up to the European Parliament's non-legislative resolution on the implementation of the Trade Agreement between the European Union and Colombia and Peru (A8-0446/2018). The European Commission.
22. European Commission. (2017). Joint answer given by Vice-President Mogherini on behalf of the Commission, Union action in respect of a coal exporting company allegedly involved in human rights violations in a third country, Question to the European Commission from Ignazio Corrao (EFDD) for written answer E-004676-17. The European Commission.
23. European Commission. (2018a). Answer given by Mr. Mimica on behalf of the European Commission, Colombia, Question to the European Commission from Hans-Olaf Henkel (ECR) for written answer E-003409-18. The European Commission.
24. European Commission. (2018b). Answer given by Vice-President Mogherini on behalf of the Commission, VP/HR — Duty of prior consultation to ensure respect of human rights in Colombia, Question to the European Commission from Javi López (S&D) for written answer E-007689-17. The European Commission.

25. Eva, M., L. van Schaik, & R. Kamphof (2015). *The EU and Colombia. Climate Partnership Beyond Aid and Trade*. Netherlands Institute of International Relations.
26. German Agency for International Cooperation. (2016). *Fortalecimiento y consolidación de capacidades locales y regionales para la planificación, el ordenamiento territorial y la construcción de la paz*. GIZ.
27. Gómez, Q. (2007). La cooperación internacional en Colombia: El papel de la Unión Europea en el contexto del conflicto armado. *Revista Virtual Universidad Católica del Norte*, 22, 1–16.
28. Hassan, M. S. (2017). Democracy and the reconstruction of citizenship. *Political Science Journal*, 5(53), 51–72.
29. Hudson, R. (2007). Country profile: Colombia. A Report prepared by the Federal Research Division, Library of Congress under an Interagency Agreement with the Department of Defense.
30. Hameed, M. M. (2020). Political structure and the administration of political system in Iraq (post-ISIS). *Cuestiones Políticas*, 37(65), 345–361.
31. Hameed, M. M. (2022). State-building and ethnic pluralism in Iraq after 2003. *Politeia*, 104(1), 110–129.
32. Idler, A., Garrido, M. B., & Mouly, C. (2015). Peace territories in Colombia: Comparing civil resistance in two war-torn communities. *Journal of Peacebuilding & Development*, 10(3), 1–15.
33. Landesberg, C. (2013). *A bright future for Colombia? Geopolitics*.
34. Lazarou, E., & Perchoc, P. (2019). *Mapping threats to peace and democracy worldwide: Introduction to the Normandy Index*. The European Parliament.
35. Lederach, J. P. (2005). *The moral imagination: The art and soul of building peace*. Oxford University Press.
36. Maher, D. (2018). *Civil war and uncivil development economic globalization and political violence in Colombia and beyond*. Palgrave Macmillan.
37. Mucke, U. (2017). Political modernity in Latin America: The Nineteenth Century. *Latin American Research Review*, 52(4), 697–702.
38. Mughamis, S. K., & Kadhim, H. A. (2023). Liberal peacebuilding in Iraq after 2003 according to the Conservative Model: An evaluation study. *Journal of Higher Education Theory and Practice*, 23(1), 123–130.
39. OECD. (2017). *OECD Integrity Review of Colombia: Investing in Integrity for Peace and Prosperity*. OECD Publishing.
40. Pastrana, B., & Aponte, C. (2006). La Unión Europea como potencia civil: La estrategia de los Laboratorios de Paz en Colombia. *Diálogo De Saberes: Investigaciones y Ciencias Sociales*, 25, 241–270.
41. Reliefweb Colombia. (2011, November 3). Primer apoyo de la Unión Europea a ley de víctimas y restitución de tierras. *Reliefweb*. Retrieved from <https://reliefweb.int/report/colombia/primer-apoyo-de-la-uni%C3%B3n-europea-ley-de-v%C3%ADctimas-y-restituci%C3%B3n-de-tierras>.

42. Restrepo, J., & Aponte, D. (2009). *Guerra y violencias en Colombia: Herramientas e interpretaciones*. Pontificia Universidad Javeriana.
43. Sánchez, C. (2010). Autonomía, estados pluriétnicos y plurinacionales. In R. Z. Yrigoyen (Ed.), *Pueblos indígenas constitucionales y reformas políticas en América Latina* (pp. 81–109). Instituto Latino Americano de Servicios Legales Alternativos.
44. Sharqi, N, J. (2023). The role of the European Union in resolving conflicts in the Eastern neighborhood: Selected models. *Political Science Journal*, 66, 77–98.
45. Wolf, A. N. (2002). *El Plan Colombia: Implicaciones para el proceso de paz*. CEIICH-UNAM.
46. World Bank. (2002). *Colombia: Development and peace in the Magdalena Medio Region*. World Bank.