

EU Non-Proliferation and Disarmament Consortium

*Promoting the European network of independent
non-proliferation and disarmament think tanks*

The Eleventh European Union
Non-Proliferation and Disarmament Conference,
14-15 November 2022
Comprehensive Conference Report
By
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The eleventh EU Non-Proliferation and Disarmament Conference (EUNPDC) was held on 14 and 15 November 2022 in hybrid format at the SQUARE - Brussels Convention Centre in Brussels (Belgium). The Conference was organised by the Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI) on behalf of the [EU Network of Independent Non-Proliferation and Disarmament Think Tanks](#), gathering experts on non-proliferation, disarmament, arms control and conventional weapons from public institutions, governments, international organisations, independent think tanks and civil society. The hybrid format allowed the participation of over 254 experts from more than 50 countries – EU members, associated states and third countries.

The EU Non-Proliferation and Disarmament Conference is one of the flagship events of the European Network of Independent Non-Proliferation and Disarmament Think Tanks. The Network was established in July 2010 by the Council of the European Union to support the implementation of the [EU Strategy Against the Proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction](#). The Network, which also focuses on the implementation of the [EU Strategy Against Illicit Firearms, Small Arms & Light Weapons & Their Ammunition](#), brings together 100 research entities and is coordinated by a Consortium of six institutes: La Fondation pour la recherche stratégique (FRS), International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS), Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI), Peace Research Institute Frankfurt (HSFK - PRIF), Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) and the Vienna Center for Disarmament and NonProliferation (VCDNP).

Since 2012, the Annual Conference has been one of the key non-proliferation and disarmament meetings worldwide. It has contributed to promoting strategic discussion on measures to combat the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) and their delivery systems, as well as to address challenges related to conventional weapons, including their illicit trade and the excessive accumulation of small arms and light weapons (SALW) and their ammunition. The 2022 edition

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addressed numerous topics of central importance for the work of the EU, notably the [European External Action Service \(EEAS\)](#), as well as several pressing arms control, non-proliferation and disarmament issues.

Welcome Remarks

Ettore Greco, *Executive Vice-President, Istituto Affari Internazionali*

Executive Vice-President Greco welcomed the attendees and began his intervention by explaining the overall mission of the Consortium, and the progress it has made in consolidating a broad network of European think tanks working on non-proliferation and disarmament. He then stressed that the Consortium had made a constant effort to improve its activities, such as expanding and diversifying educational activities, involving new areas of expertise, developing its outreach and communication strategy, and undertaking new initiatives to promote the active involvement of the younger generation, in particular young women. He then noted that the 2022 Conference would focus on the war in Ukraine, with a plenary session specifically dedicated to the implications and perspectives of the war. He stated that there would also be two plenary sessions on the main priorities of the international non-proliferation and disarmament agenda. Finally, he also announced two sets of parallel sessions, covering topics such as cyber-attacks, the militarisation of outer space, biotechnology, missile proliferation and lethal autonomous weapons.

Opening Speech

Benedikta Von Seherr-Thoss, *Managing Director for Common Security and Defence Policy and Crisis Response of the EEAS*

Managing Director Von Seherr-Thoss emphasized that European security had dramatically changed in one year and there had been, more broadly, a considerable deterioration of the international security environment. Nevertheless, the biggest reason of concern by far is, she said, Russia. The Russian war of aggression against Ukraine, he noted, hampered the EU's work in most multilateral cooperation forums such as at the NPT Review Conference. She added that the EU will continue to work on pressing issues related to WMD, not only nuclear but also chemical and biological weapons, and mentioned the need to face the deteriorating situation in various regional and security environments such as the Middle East and North East Asia. Finally, she mentioned the challenges associated with the proliferation of conventional weapons in the context of Russia's war against Ukraine. She ended her intervention by emphasising that the EU's role and commitment are crucial to tackle all these challenges.

Marjolijn van Deelen, *Special Envoy for Disarmament and Non-Proliferation at the EEAS*

Special Envoy van Deelen stressed out the radical change in the global and European security architecture. The current non-proliferation and disarmament regimes served very well in the past as they were instrumental in preventing destabilizing arms races and reducing WMD threats over the past decades. Entire categories of WMD were outlawed, and robust control mechanisms were set up, and as imperfect as they were, they gave a sense of stability. However, the present reality is different:

we are witnessing a paradigm shift, not only in the WMD domain but also beyond. Practically, any major agreement has been challenged or violated. In the diplomatic jargon this is seen as due to “*growing tensions between major powers and worsening of international security*”, but this is just a way of saying that some States appear to be willing to deconstruct the global security order in the hope to gain a relative advantage.

Izumi Nakamitsu, *United Nations Under-Secretary-General and High Representative for Disarmament Affairs*

Under-Secretary and High Representative Nakamitsu concurred that there was a visible shift towards a more turbulent and unstable future. The world is increasingly divided, she noted, distrust is replacing dialogue, and the relations between nuclear armed States are deteriorating. She mentioned five objectives that need to be pursued in this context as a matter of priority: first, consolidate global norms against the use and possession of WMD; second, further work towards the elimination of chemical weapons; third, activate new instruments to cope with the dramatically worsening biological threats; fourth, advance the analysis of cyber and outer space as potential domains of conflict; and finally, work towards a positive outcome at the RevCon of the programme of action on small and light weapons. She closed her remarks by stating that in order to tackle the current challenges, there is the need to work with a multiplicity of actors, and added that the complementarity between the EU and the UNODA is grounded in a mutual conviction and commitment to a multilateral approach to disarmament and non-proliferation.

FIRST PLENARY SESSION

The Future of Arms Control and International Security

Speakers began their interventions by highlighting the challenges to the rules-based international order, the new areas where the rules of engagement are not well defined, and the new era in which the scope and scale of threats have fundamentally changed. Consequently, they noted that this calls for new ways to strengthen key arms control regimes. Speakers then referred to China's unwillingness to engage in confidence-building measures, the expansion of North Korea's nuclear and ballistic programmes, and the need to monitor the threats posed by Iran's nuclear advances. In addition, they noted that emerging technologies create new challenges, as the use of artificial intelligence or cyber weapons can increase the risk of conflict. On Russia, one speaker argued that Moscow has once again become the most direct strategic threat to the transatlantic alliance. However, she pointed out that, despite all this, it is possible to build lasting cooperative relations with Russia. The speakers went on to note that the future of arms control will only grow in importance and that the instruments that bring stability to the international order need to be strengthened.

SECOND PLENARY SESSION

Challenges to the NPT Regime

The panel opened with most speakers reaffirming that the failure to adopt a final document at the 10th NPT Review Conference should not be considered a failure, as most delegations showed a willingness

to discuss many critical issues. Other issues discussed included how much of the long-term work has been frustrated as a result of Iran resisting calls to address outstanding safeguards issues with the IAEA till this day; how North Korea has continued to illegally launch a large number of missiles in violation of its obligations under international law; and the need to reassess what needs to be done in terms of Treaty implementation to reconfirm the central role of the NPT as a cornerstone of the disarmament and non-proliferation architecture. It was also noted that the draft final document is a very valid framework for further cooperation among States Parties in areas such as nuclear risk reduction, transparency and accountability. The session concluded by highlighting the fact that all delegations, except one, were willing to agree on a watered-down document and that this demonstrated that all were ready to compromise and to avoid systemic failure of the non-proliferation regime.

FIRST PARALLEL SESSION

The Evolving Threats of Biological Weapons

Technological advances have increased the risks of using biological weapons and pathogens for hostile purposes. However, these advances also bring important benefits. Consequently, any dual-use research must be conducted responsibly and this requires the improvement of national biosafety and security measures and good governance. At the same time, speakers noted that it is very important that the next BTWC Review Conference reaches consensus on an outcome document to prevent the Convention from becoming irrelevant. In this sense, they said that the conference should be an opportunity to strengthen the BTWC as the main framework for long-standing codified rules against the use of diseases as weapons. On the other hand, they noted the gap between the scientific debate on biotechnology and biological weapons and the diplomatic negotiation process. They said that there is a whole other side to the implementation of the Convention that is not often reflected enough in formal diplomatic meetings, and argued that the 9th Review Conference is a great opportunity to bring these operational aspects of the BTWC together. Another thing they argued is the need to put the BTWC on a sound financial and institutional footing, since it has no implementing agency.

SECOND PARALLEL SESSION

WMD Threats in the Middle East

Speakers noted that today two parallel processes are taking place in the Middle East: The increase in the acquisition of conventional weapons, as well as the adoption of nuclear hedging capabilities, and the fact that regional States have become more willing to negotiate their regional security problems. In this context, three instruments become important to address proliferation risks in the region: First, the JCPOA, as a strong deal could address some of the concerns that cannot be addressed under the NPT. Second, the Middle East Weapons of Mass Destruction Free Zone (WMDFZ). In this regard, the establishment of a WMDFZ was seen by the speakers as the only realistic path towards disarmament in the region. In furtherance of this initiative, one of the speakers discussed the Middle East Association for Non-Proliferation and Security, which will ensure the security of nuclear fuel supply through the Arab Natural Uranium Agency, addressed the issue of missile proliferation, as well as the verification of the WMDFZ. Speakers concluded that helping to build a regional security

architecture and dialogues are of utmost importance to address threat perceptions and should be complementary to the JCPOA as well as the WMDFZ.

THIRD PARALLEL SESSION

Lethal Autonomous Weapons

The panel opened by addressing the mandate of the Group of Governmental Experts (GGE) to examine the increasing autonomy of weapon systems, emphasising that it has not yet been able to clarify a regulatory and operational framework for these weapons. Speakers then addressed the issue of having non-binding forms of governance. One speaker argued that this approach will never be sufficient, as there is a legal vacuum in human agency that needs to be filled with a legally binding instrument. In this regard, the speaker emphasised the inadequacy of the UN Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons (CCCW) to produce a comprehensive treaty on autonomous weapons systems, as their scope goes beyond armed conflict. The speakers then addressed the role of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) in the whole autonomous weapons regulation debate. The panel concluded with some remarks on the EU: A common EU position on autonomous weapons systems could help its member states to exert more influence on multilateral diplomacy and ensure that European values and interests are duly reflected in upcoming debates and potential negotiations.

FOURTH PARALLEL SESSION

Cyber-Security

The panel tackled a variety of topics related to cyber-security. First there was a review of great powers (China, Russia, the US and the EU) postures and actions in cyber-space. Then the panel discussed hybrid-threats and cyber-attacks, particularly the growing difficulty to differentiate between State and private responsibility of cyber-attacks. They also discussed the increasing politization of the cyber-criminal underground, as well as the instrumentalization of cyber-criminals by State actors. The panellists then discussed other challenges such as the lack of an international agreed definition of cyber-space and what constitutes a cyber-weapon, the problem of attributing malicious cyber acts to a specific perpetrator, the lack of geographical boundaries of the digital space, and the lack of international treaties to regulate cyber behaviour. Finally, it was also discussed the implications of cyber-attacks for nuclear weapons. On a final note, speakers said that the EU is making major advancements on these matters presenting itself as an actor with a leadership position in the international system through the protection of values or citizens privacy.

FIFTH PARALLEL SESSION

Responsible Behaviour in Outer Space

Speakers opened the session by noting that most discussions related to responsible behaviour in outer space focus on traditional arms control approaches, which do not allow for effective responses to emerging technologies beyond the realm of outer space. Speakers then noted that work is underway in the UN Open-ended Working Group (OEWG) to address the relationship between legally binding instruments and norms and standards of responsible behaviour by States. In a different vein, speakers

mentioned the need for a differentiated understanding of the strategic culture of security and safety in outer space. Speakers then addressed the importance of space in everyday life and how the lack of consensus among the major space powers prevents the development of a treaty mechanism in this area. However, efforts to revise old norms or formulate new ones have made little progress due to the renewed emphasis on hard power capabilities, balance of power and great power rivalry. The most worrying trend, they concluded, is that some of the norms that have existed for several decades are being openly questioned.

SIXTH PARALLEL SESSION

Missile Technology Proliferation

The panel began by stating that the control of missile technology is both crucial and difficult, as there are currently no legally binding instruments that deal with it in a comprehensive manner. Export control regimes are therefore essential, with the Missile Technology Control Regime (MTCR) being the most important. However, this forum currently suffers from a number of shortcomings: It lacks the support of several major States possessing and exporting missile technology, it operates solely on the basis of consensus, it is voluntary and non-binding, there are no implementation mechanisms, and States Parties to this agreement are unwilling to undertake major reforms. Therefore, to improve the effectiveness of the MTCR, the panellists proposed to increase the transparency of the regime through public communication channels, the publication of more documents on best practices and to develop an appropriate and coherent strategy for the accession mechanism. The panellists then discussed the current situation of missile proliferation in Northeast Asia and the Indo-Pacific. In this respect, most of the discussion revolved around North Korea and its various missile systems. Accordingly, the MTCR and other export control mechanisms should be used proactively.

THIRD PLENARY SESSION

The Ukrainian War and Weapons Proliferation

The panel opened by acknowledging that the Russian invasion of Ukraine has reshaped the security landscape around the world, with serious implications for non-proliferation. In terms of conventional weapons, one of the speakers said that the risks associated with this crisis are the challenges that the influx of weapons into Ukraine will pose to lasting peace. This is an overriding concern, as classical conventional arms-tracing measures cannot be applied in the current scenario. As for the nuclear dimension, two of the speakers argued the reasons why a possible use of a tactical nuclear weapon in Ukraine is unlikely. However, they said, the threat of using nuclear weapons demonstrates that they have great utility for defensive purposes and the States that possess them will continue to cling to them. Moreover, other speaker emphasized the fact that drones are becoming a substitute for manned aircraft in this war, which is having a negative impact on export controls. The panel closed by recognising that the war has damaged the normative framework regulating inter-state conflicts and that this must be rectified by reassuring States that there are better means of resolving disputes than the use of force.

FOURTH PLENARY SESSION

Implementing the EU's NPD Agenda

The panel opened by explaining that since the start of the Ukrainian war, the EU has supported Ukraine significantly in order to locate and diffuse mines and is looking for ways to increase the support to mine action governance in the country. As far as CBRN risks are concerned, the EU has an extensive cooperation with Ukraine in the framework of the EU Centers of Excellence. In the near future, the EU will reinforce its support in the field of protection of critical CBRN infrastructure of biosafety and biosecurity. Coming to nuclear security, the EU has agreed with the IAEA to finance their expert missions to identify and assess the nuclear security needs of Ukraine. In a more general way, non-proliferation, disarmament and arms exports controls are a longstanding priority of the EU characterized by its support and strengthening of the overall NPD architecture, support the activities of multilateral institutions and actors and engagement with third countries. However, one of the speakers stated that the EU needs to focus much more on conventional disarmament and new technologies.

Closing Remarks

Emily Faux, *Mentee at the 2021 edition of the Young Women in Non-Proliferation and Disarmament Mentorship Programme (YWNGI)*

Emily Faux opened her remarks emphasizing the fact that the next generation has grown fearing terrorism and cyber-attacks, which has led to many young people to think about nuclear weapons as a threat from an all-gone era. However, she noted that nuclear weapons systems are also vulnerable such threats. At the same time, she said that today every nuclear weapon State is modernizing and expanding its nuclear arsenal and tension between nuclear adversaries threatens to bring the conflict to the nuclear arena. As a consequence, she said that increasing the awareness about nuclear weapons is vital, and that countering the old narrative that nuclear weapons are necessary for security is fundamental in order to secure earth and humanity. Whether or not future generations are safe from nuclear war will depend on the future of nuclear disarmament. She closed her remarks with a few words on the YWNGI Mentorship Programme and to the opportunities it has brought to her.

Tim Thies, *Researcher in the Arms Control and Emerging Technologies Project at the Institute for Peace Research and Security Policy at the University of Hamburg (IFSH) and speaker at the 2021 Next Generation Workshop.*

Tim This started his remarks by acknowledging that many of the solutions to the problems in the arms control and non-proliferation field already exist and so there is just a need to re-learn and re-apply older lessons. However, this might lead younger scholars to focus and work on topics and debates that have been tackled in the past and bring the discipline into a continuous loop. In order to avoid this, initiatives to support and promote rising scholars are crucial for the success of arms control, non-proliferation and disarmament. As such, he stated that there is a need for young people in this field in order to make sure that the expertise on these topics can be retained. He then stated, that the

technological landscape demands for new technical expertise in the arms control, non-proliferation and disarmament fields. He also stated that there is a need of greater diversity to the field and, as such, new voices must enter with better ideas. Finally, he recognised that the war in Ukraine has exposed the fundamental injustice of the nuclear order where security, and that it is upon our community to lead the groundwork for building a better, more just, more robust nuclear order.

Sibylle Bauer, Chair of the EU Non-proliferation and Disarmament Consortium and Director of Studies, Armament and Disarmament at the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute

In her concluding remarks, Sibylle Bauer emphasized the need to be open to new ideas and unorthodox solutions, and to think outside of the box. She noted that in the last five years the Conference had ensured a gender balance in terms of chairs, speakers, and participants. She added that a greater dose of optimism was required in evaluating developments in the non-proliferation, arms control and disarmament field. In view of this, there is a need to switch to a problem-solving mode and think more deeply on the concrete solutions to the new challenges. She then spoke about the need, in this age of disinformation and misinformation, to build trust between people in the sharing and dissemination of data and other sources of information and analysis. In this regard, she stressed the importance of independent research and the work done by the network of independent non-proliferation and disarmament think tanks. She concluded by calling for intensified efforts to bring a greater diversity of disciplines and approaches into the non-proliferation and disarmament field.

Thanks to the hybrid format, the EU Non-Proliferation and Disarmament Conference proved to be, once again, a central event for the international discussion on the future of arms control, non-proliferation and disarmament. It also contributed to reaffirming the strong EU commitment towards a rules-based global order and showed the increased awareness of EU non-proliferation and disarmament policies among government officials, academics and civil society representatives of third countries. Moreover, the debate explored new ways and means of improving capacities in areas of the world with limited expertise in countering the threats stemming from SALW, WMD and their means of delivery. Finally, as every year, the Conference served as a venue to highlight the role played by European think tanks specialised in non-proliferation and disarmament and the efforts undertaken by the EU Consortium to promote and coordinate their work.

For more information and to watch the videos of the Conference, please visit the Consortium's website: www.nonproliferation.eu