

The NPT-Review Conference: Opportunity and Challenge for the EU

Madrid, 9.4.2010

Fundación Alternativas / Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung

Summary

The workshop addressed two main topics:

1. What are the challenges and opportunities for the EU at the NPT Review Conference, and what are the topics the EU wants to promote?
2. What are the problems the EU will be confronted with at the summit?

Beginning with the first topic, the participants pointed out the current „state of play“: there is less existing nuclear material than in the 1980s, in spite of a world-wide renaissance of nuclear power as an energy source, but instead of the mere quantity of nuclear material currently the networks spreading fissile material are of major concern for the international community.

The challenges for the EU lie in strengthening the main pillars of the Treaty:

- disarmament of all nuclear weapon states (NWS),
- nonproliferation, i.e. renouncement of all non-NWS to hold, build or develop nuclear weapons, and
- peaceful use of nuclear energy accompanied by the inspection of the IAEA.

With regard to Iran (as well as North Korea), Europe – with its experience in organizing effective control regimes for nuclear energy resources and establishing well-functioning regulations – could play a significant role in promoting compliance, verification and transparency.

On the other hand the workshop showed that Europe will not be able to act as a leader during the Review Conference. The Spanish side underlined that Spain – neutral due to its current EU-presidency – will not put any pressure on France or Great Britain to disarm further their nuclear weapons. According to the Spanish point of view – accepted and promoted by all participants within the workshop – the EU´s agenda to promote the Non-Proliferation Treaty will consist in:

- supporting nuclear free-zones (Middle East),
- engaging for the peaceful use of energy by promoting proliferation-resistant technologies
- supporting the additional protocol to be signed by all members,
- building a bridge amongst the different groups of states at the Review Conference.

Rolf Mützenich, Foreign Relation spokesman of the German social democratic party (SPD), pointed out that the Treaty should not just be seen as an instrument to count and diminish nuclear weapons, but as a forum of dialogue and cooperation that could lead to more multilateralism. He proposed that disarmament of nuclear weapons should come along with an enlargement of non-proliferation also of non-strategic and missile defence weapons. This would be a discussion that would be outside the agenda of the NPT, but nonetheless it would be important for strengthening international security if these topics could be dealt with accordingly.

The EU's difficulties before or at the NPT Review - the workshop's second topic - are mainly related to its unique character as a union of member states, and especially to the differences between the NWS (France, Great Britain) and the NNWS. While Sweden and Ireland, for example, represent the EU's "disarmament" fraction trying to make progress on nuclear disarmament, France still resists nuclear disarmament, blocking a more „progressive“ stance of the European Union.

Furthermore, the member states not only act through the EU, but through several other institutions such as the G8, New Agenda Coalition, NATO-7 or others. This fragmented landscape leads to limited political coherence and could reduce the political bargaining power of the EU - also during the NPT Review Conference. The main task for the Spanish presidency is therefore the management of the different member-states' delegations during the Conference within the framework of the Common Position that was presented end of March in Brussels. Although this seems like herding cats, the Common Position offers a rather balanced approach to the three pillars of the NPT allowing all member states to adhere to it, although it is of a rather general nature.

The third problem - directly linked to the previous ones - is the relatively weak record of European foreign policy, which is strongly determined by the intergovernmental character of the EU. Foreign and security policy still depends on unanimous decisions of 27 states. Accordingly, common policy statements by the EU tend to be quite broad, leaving sufficient room for manoeuvre to the member states and excluding the sensible topics - as happened with nuclear disarmament.

Christos Katsioulis highlighted that as long as the EU does not agree on the question of nuclear disarmament - one of the three main pillars of the NPT - or as long as France and Great Britain do not intend to decrease their nuclear arsenal, the EU will not be able to play a leading role during the summit. He also noted that coming to a common position only four weeks before the NPT Review shows the difficulties of agreeing on a common position inside Europe.

Regarding the outcome of the NPT Review Conference the European Union will play a moderating and facilitating role. As the main problems in New York could be the Middle East (with most emphasis on Iran), withdrawal from the treaty (discussed on the example of North Korea) and the question of how to deal with non-state actors in the field of nuclear non-proliferation, such a role fits the EU best, as the United States are gain driving forward the international debate on more disarmament and tighter rules for nonproliferation.