

When it comes to peace, is the EU really a great power?

A look at Europe’s track record in peacemaking suggests the continent may be less than the sum of its parts

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Even before he became the European Union’s new foreign policy chief, Josep Borrell suggested that Europe should speak the “language of power”. And German foreign minister Heiko Maas called for a “strong and sovereign Europe”, which could be a bigger player on the world stage through a proposed European Security Council.

It is fitting, then, that Europe has spent time in the opening weeks of the new decade talking about war and peace. This past Sunday, the continent hosted a grand summit in Berlin on the Libyan conflict. On Monday, EU foreign ministers discussed Luxembourg’s push for European recognition of a Palestinian state.

The EU is good at talking. Asle Toje, a Norwegian foreign policy analyst and member of the Nobel Committee, once made the following claim: “The European Union was born out of an understanding that ‘the great decisions of our day will be made by speeches and majority decisions, not by blood and iron’, to reverse Bismarck’s quip”.

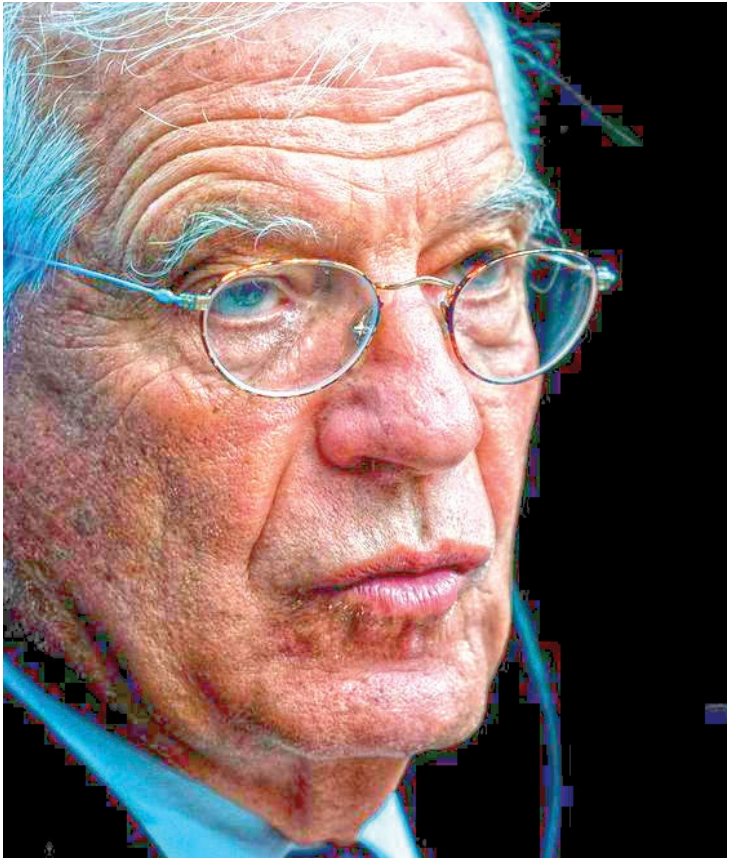
Indeed, speeches and majority decisions could be the essence of the European project and the reason it was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 2012. By joining 28 countries in a grand union of values, the EU has brought peace to a once-turbulent continent. But what of its role beyond its own borders? How successful has Europe been as a peacemaker? Has it even tried, and having tried, succeeded?

Its record is mixed. From the Balkan wars of the 1990s, through the US invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq and the Darfur crisis, as well as ongoing con-

flicts in Syria, Libya and Yemen, Europe has suffered from its lack of cohesiveness. EU “actor-ness” – to use the choice phrase of European scholars – has been hamstrung by its semi-supranational, semi-intergovernmental character. It could be argued that the bloc has not lived up to expectations that it would act as a great power.

When the EU has notched up limited foreign policy successes in the last decade, such as co-ordination of sanctions on Russia after the annexation of Crimea and putting together the 2015 Iran nuclear deal, they were premised on support from the Obama administration. The exception is the so-called Belgrade–Pristina dialogue, facilitated between the governments of Serbia and Kosovo. The talks began three years after the latter’s declaration of independence from the former in 2008. Within two years, the EU managed to broker a limited normalisation of bilateral relations. Though the deal was seen at the time as ground-breaking, it failed to achieve the broader objective of resolving Kosovo’s status. That failure is all the more biting given that the EU’s leverage with both parties was their aspirations to join the bloc as independent states. For Kosovo, recognition from certain EU member states – one example being Spain, Mr Borrell’s home country – continues to seem a distant prospect, adding further insult to injury.

Further afield, the prospects for EU-led peacemaking have hardly been more encouraging. On Syria, there has been little European coherence – or effort – beyond robust expressions of support for the UN-led intra-Syrian dialogue in Geneva.



High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Josep Borrell

When Donald Trump pulled back American troops from north-eastern Syria in October, effectively green-lighting the Turkish invasion of Syrian Kurdish-controlled territory, the EU cried foul, but not with one voice. And there was little take-up of German defence minister Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer’s suggestion that an international force, with a substantial German military contribution, be deployed to establish a security zone on the ground.

In Iraq and Lebanon, both rocked by popular protest, the EU has limited itself to calling for peace. There are European boots

In Libya, the EU’s positioning has been weakened by divisions between the north African nation’s former colonial powers, Italy and France, but it has been scrambling lately to regain the diplomatic initiative from Ankara and Moscow.

on the ground in Iraq – roughly 3,000 soldiers from 19 EU states

Being happy at work is not impossible and comj

Justin Thomas

Dysfunctional thinking and unhealthy mental patterns are more common than we realise. They affect our relationships with our families, friends and colleagues. When these patterns remain unchecked, they can morph into disorders, manifest in how people behave and relate to one another. So for example, the frequent breakdown of relationships is a red flag, a first sign that “it’s not them, it’s you” and this can be a bitter pill to swallow.

Often, workplaces are a part of the problem. In nations such as the UK and the US, the leading cause of workplace absenteeism is depression.

If we apply the idea of personality disorders to the office, it becomes clear that some employers consistently relate to their staff in potentially damaging ways, resulting in high rates of relationship breakdown. In the world of work, of course, we choose to call it employee turnover.

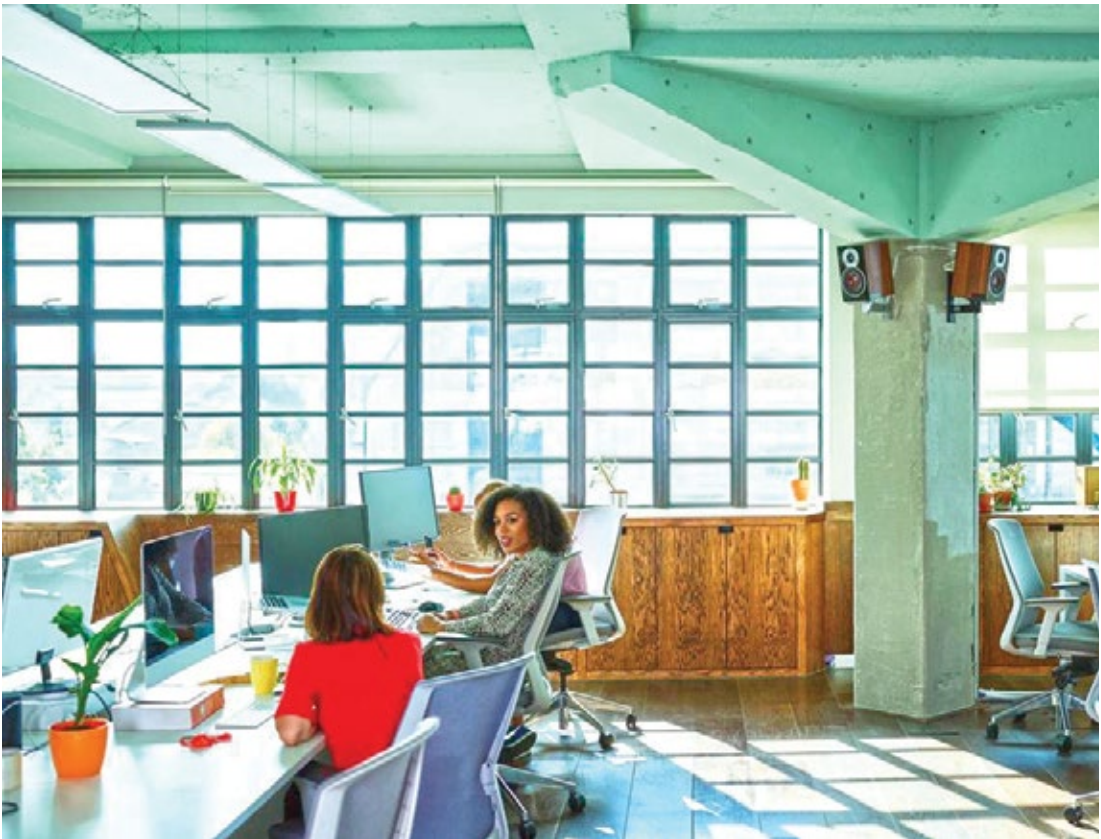
Many of the best and the brightest employees quickly move on from toxic workplaces. Those who remain can become disillusioned or embittered. People even fall ill when they have to go onto a toxic workplace day after

day. It does not take a degree in economics to figure out that none of this is good for organisations. A toxic culture affects productivity, hits their bottom line, and keeps companies from attaining their objectives.

Conversely, employers who relate to their employees in a consistently compassionate style reap the rewards. Such organisations are likely to be concerned with the well-being of their employees. They put in place initiatives to promote contentment, along with fostering a strong sense of purpose and belonging.

When such workplaces properly carry out these moves, the outcomes are invariably positive, with higher levels of employee loyalty, and lower rates of sickness and absence. Furthermore, such working environments tend to be characterised by higher levels of creativity and innovation, good corporate-citizenship and pan-organisational camaraderie. In short, they are better, more pleasant places to work. Once word spreads, these organisations get the first pick of the best talent, and they keep them.

The idea that organisations benefit from promoting employee well-being is gaining global traction and the UAE has been quick to act on this. In 2016, this



A warehouse-style open plan office.

country took the bold and innovative step of appointing a Minister of State for Happiness. By 2017, organisations across the UAE, private and public sector, created special roles to this end. Some

even appointed chief happiness and positivity officers. All these measures made it evident how committed the country was to the cause and to the UAE’s National Programme for Happiness and

Well-being.

At least nine workplaces in the UAE have completed or are pursuing a standard set by the International WELL Building Institute (IWBI), which says tha

The UAE has been quick to act on the idea that offices are better places when they prioritise employee well-being