

EU Civilian Crisis Management: A Crisis in the Making?

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EU CIVILIAN CRISIS MANAGEMENT: A CRISIS IN THE MAKING?

Civilian crisis management has become a central part of the EU's Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP). The EU's ambitions in this field are reaching new heights, as is shown by the expanding geographical reach, the number of personnel deployed, and the operational complexity. But despite positive developments, challenges remain. In its current form, the EU runs the risk of jeopardising its own credibility as a civilian crisis manager. Capabilities, operational effectiveness, and strategic vision are all lagging behind.



German Chancellor Angela Merkel with a group of Afghan police trainees, 06/04/2009

At first glance, the achievements on the civilian side of CSDP are impressive on various levels. Institutionally, Brussels has established a range of tools specifically designed for the planning and conduct of civilian missions, and since 2007, the Civilian Planning and Conduct Capability (CPCC) – under the Civilian Operations Commander – has basically served as the operational headquarters for civilian EU missions.

Besides institutional progress, the EU has also undertaken attempts to develop its civilian capabilities. Initial targets were outlined in the Civilian Headline Goal 2008, where member states agreed to provide personnel for the six priority areas identified: police, rule of law, civil administration, civil protection, monitoring missions, and support for EU special representatives. The complementary Civilian Headline Goal 2010 emphasised the importance of simul-

taneous mission planning, training of personnel, and the cross-national exchange of best practices.

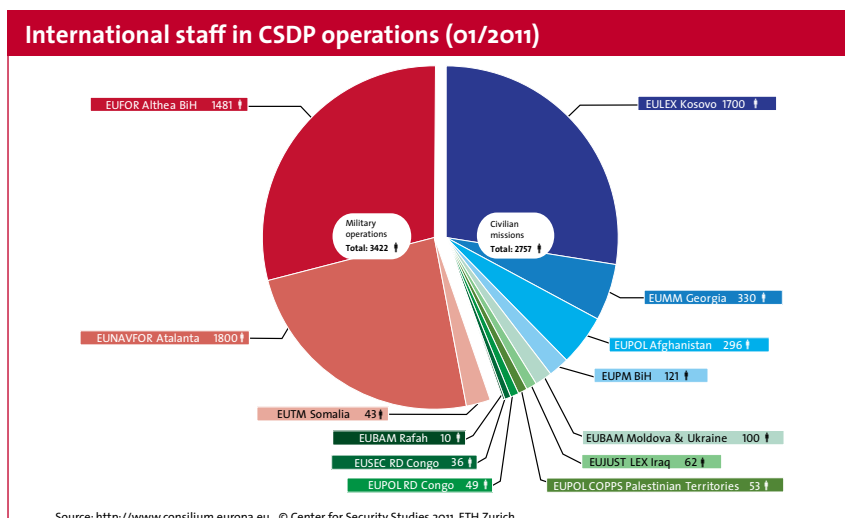
At the operational level, the EU also seems to have developed a decent *prima facie* record of civilian crisis management missions: Seven military operations and 17 civilian missions have been launched since 2003. In geographical terms, the Western Balkans, the Southern Caucasus, Africa, the Middle East, and Asia have all hosted civilian CSDP missions, covering tasks as diverse as policing, providing judicial and administrative expertise, and comprehensive security sector reform (SSR). With such a broad sphere of activity, it is hardly surprisingly that missions have grown both in complexity and scale; specific missions currently number up to 1,700 international staff in EULEX Kosovo, and about 300 in EUPOL Afghanistan.

The drawback is that while the EU has expanded its global and operational reach, lingering difficulties relating to capabilities, operational outcomes, and strategic vision have not been suitably addressed. Until the EU brings operational aims into line with political stances, the credibility of civilian CSDP activities will remain exposed to criticism. This will be even sharper if the EU continues to expand its role as a civilian crisis manager without having the required capabilities at its disposal.

The civilian capability challenge

One of the core problems of civilian CSDP is the fact that it draws its personnel from national recruitment pools, and more importantly, that these pools – although in the process of being deepened – still remain remarkably shallow. On several occasions, personnel contributions promised by member states at the Council negotiation table have not been met upon actual deployment: Some CSDP missions have suffered from persistent deficiencies of police officers, judicial staff, and other civilian experts.

The EU deploys personnel predominantly by secondment, which means that national government institutions cannot be bypassed. The additional problem is that the institutions involved have conflicting priorities when it comes to beefing up staff – be they ministries of foreign affairs, the interior, justice, or finance. This obstacle is especially acute for civilian contributions. In contrast to military personnel, whose *raison d'être* is contributing to international operations, the primary responsibility of civilian experts is to conduct domestic tasks. With budgets and



domestic capacity being tightened more than ever, member states have been highly reluctant to deploy domestically needed police officers, judges, and other civilian personnel to distant dangerous places. Costs of recruitment, training, replacement, and domestic shortages are all common problems, particularly when it comes to senior police and rule-of-law experts.

To its credit, the EU managed to deploy more than 200 civilian experts within three weeks for its Monitoring Mission in Georgia in 2008, but the most pressing challenges undeniably still rest in EUPOL Afghanistan and EULEX Kosovo, where capabilities are stretched. Whereas the decision to launch EUPOL Afghanistan was made in May 2007, it took 14 calls for contributions and almost two years before the planned 195 international personnel was on the ground in February 2009. Similarly, EULEX Kosovo repeatedly struggled to find the required human capabilities. Here, in the largest CSDP civilian mission to date with an initial international staff target of about 1,900, only 300 of them were on the ground by mid-2008. It was not until 14 months later that the mission reached full operational capacity.

The Civilian Response Teams (CRTs) are undoubtedly a step forward. The common pool of 100 experts from all member states presently intends to double its cadre, but will remain little more than a “good idea” if the lack of national commitment persists. The same goes for the improvement of the secondment system through national ministries. Some member states are trying hard to enhance human resource availability for international missions. National training and recruitment centres such as the Center for International

Peace Operations in Berlin, the Swedish National Defence College and Folke Bernadotte Academy, and the Egmont institute in Brussels have provided basic generic training courses, and indeed, are in the process of setting up pooling and recruitment mechanisms. But despite such efforts, the overall shortage for civilian CSDP personnel remains acute.

A small percentage of the international deployed staff is contracted directly by the EU, often in cases where technical expertise cannot be provided through national channels. Increasing the contracted personnel vis-à-vis national seconded staff still only presents a partial solution to the recruitment problem. Not only are there certain categories of experts that are only found within national institutions (e.g., judges), the political implication is that contracting personnel directly on the EU level could lead member states to conclude that they need not bother to expand their pools of civilian experts. Besides, an increased number of contracted personnel would strain the EU budget, from which their salaries are currently drawn. Although this would alleviate the administrative and financial burden for member states, most prefer to carry on pulling the strings. Unless the CRTs are successfully implemented, secondment is improved, and the contracting process facilitated, recurrent shortages will endanger the impact and continuation of many ongoing civilian missions.

Inadequate operational impact

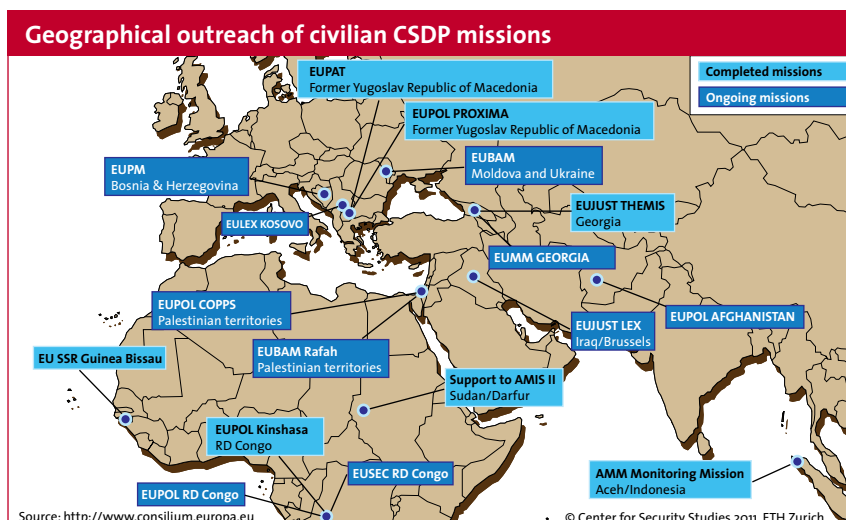
Enhancing capability numbers and getting people deployed is, however, only a first step for mission implementation. Another essential question is what they then do in operational theatres. Data on the op-

erational efficiency of EU missions to date remains somewhat sketchy, but the core conclusion seems to be that the outcome of CSDP civilian missions has been mixed at best.

Obviously, local conditions play a big part in the relative success or failure of operations. With increasing ambitions in terms of Security Sector Reform, a clash with domestic authorities and population should not come as a surprise. This was the case in DR Congo, where local resistance to the EUPOL mission has to some extent hindered successful mission implementation. But also other civilian missions have struggled due to the conditions on the ground. A war-torn country such as Afghanistan obviously provides awkward conditions for police reform. Apart from personnel shortages, EUPOL Afghanistan faces chronic security challenges hindering the successful implementation and expansion of the mission.

Likewise, EUPOL COPPS in the Palestinian Territories, although designed to cover the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, remained limited to the former, and therefore ended up excluding a large part of the Palestinian police force from the mission. Put simply, building a sustainable security sector is unfeasible in an area where a legitimate government and parliamentary control over security forces is lacking. The EU’s exit strategy – dependent on local Palestinian ownership – is thus unlikely to take place, which results in an overall fruitlessly “pending” mission. In a similar way, the EU Border Assistance Mission in Rafah – dormant since Hamas seized power in 2007 – is certainly not a golden page in the CSDP history books.

This points us towards the age-old problem of having proper operational objectives in place from the start. In many cases, objectives do not seem to be in line with the challenging situation in the field. The mission goals of EUPOL Afghanistan have been criticised for being too conceptual and for refraining from making a solid contribution to the technical and functional aspects of policing on the ground. Some technical progress has admittedly been made in the EU Police Mission in Bosnia and Herzegovina, but actual structural police reform has proven challenging. More bureaucratic complexity and politicised policing have been the result, with local actors unable to support new police structures.



Mission goals often fall short of clear definitions and best practices, which then results in a misuse of resources and an ad-hoc “learning-by-doing process”. The EU has been able to muddle through to some degree in a number of small-scale and short-term operations, as well as in countries in its own backyard, but operations have rapidly expanded in size, range, and complexity, while clear exit strategies are often lacking. The EU needs to align its political priorities with matching strategic views if it wants to be seen as a truly credible actor in international civilian crisis management.

EULEX Kosovo is a case in point. Although launched with the objective of proving the EU’s ability to support stability in the Balkans, strong disagreements between the EU member states on Kosovo’s independence have severely hindered comprehensive action in the region. The creation of government institutions without the authority to strengthen independent statehood has not only been difficult, it has also led to the development of two different legal realities in theatre. Despite the mission having a noticeable impact in terms of the technicalities of policing, political disagreement within the EU remains the fundamental barrier to structural reforms.

The consequence is that European “strategy” amounts to little more than politically symbolic gestures rather than proper strategic actions by means of civilian capabilities in the field. No matter how many headline goals are written, strategic momentum is needed at the political level. CSDP still remains relatively low priority for most member states, many of which – although paying lip service to civilian CSDP missions – hardly follow through with convincing capabilities. And even where states are engaged in contributing to EU civilian crisis management, it is often on an almost negligible scale. In addition, EU member states have in some cases shown a preference to contribute to civilian crisis management on a bilateral basis (or via NATO), as in the case of Afghan Security Sector Reform.

On the most fundamental level, the EU has to match (realistic) capabilities to a clear strategic outlook. The gap between political ambitions and capabilities can only shrink if they meet halfway. The EU’s problems of political and logistical overstretch will only amplify when and if CSDP continues to expand its global reach and operational complexity, and are therefore

Getting coordination right is vital not only with local actors, but also with other international players in theatre, along with various mission components. In the case of Afghanistan, alignment with political partners (most notably the US, the UN, and NATO) was also challenging, with the inevitable result of capability overlap and financial losses. It was also in Afghanistan that the Council ignored the suggestion of the EU Special Representative to launch a 2,000-strong civilian mission, which caused friction between EU actors on the ground.

Coordination has also proved difficult in more expansive CSDP missions where both civilian and military instruments have been used. Bosnia serves as a good example. Civil-military cohesion has been lacking, and in fact, civil-civil coordination also continues to be problematic in some cases: reforming police structures and training local police require at least a functioning judicial system, as shown by the Afghan experience.

Finally, the success of civilian CSDP missions is linked to the abovementioned point of overstretched capabilities. Geography might offer part of the solution in this debate – rethinking where and how the EU sets its boundaries for external crisis management engagement will help to shape political ambitions. The key determinant here is where the EU actually has political incentives to make a difference on the ground and make its civilian activities last; obvious tools are accession and enhanced trade agreements. This implies that long-term comprehensive Security Sector Reform missions are more preferable in the EU’s periphery – namely the Balkans and Caucasus. However, civilian crisis

management activities in further remote places such as Africa, the Middle East, and Asia could be conducted from a short-term, fixed starting point instead of on an open-ended basis. The EU could, for example, explore taking up election monitoring, specialist training, and disaster response activities under the CSDP roof.

Obviously, many of these factors refer to mission planning, which must be viewed in a broader strategic vision regarding the purpose of EU civilian crisis management. This is where the sharpest criticism of EU operations resides: Europe’s weakness is due not merely to its performance in theatre, but to a lack of an overarching strategic vision and common ideas as to what such missions should achieve, either from an operational or political perspective. Unclearly defined ends frequently fail to meet adequate means.

Strategic vision

Matching the ends to the means is now just as critical for EU missions as it is for UN or NATO operations. Merely planting an EU flag in faraway countries might be good for diplomatic purposes, but it is not enough to achieve real operational outcomes. Until the member states agree on the exact purpose and desired outcomes of civilian CSDP crisis management actions, the strategic frailty will only grow.

The EU has – beyond CSDP – a wide variety of instruments at its disposal to provide support to (post-)conflict areas. As it stands, there is little sign of a comprehensive cross-policy approach to specific regions the EU aims to engage with. CSDP should be part of an overall strategic vision, rather than representing an isolated view.

in need of a solution. Reaching consensus will be politically difficult, but it is a discussion that must be had. Making sure that a clear strategy is in place, irrespective of the size or scale of operations is critical. Going ahead with future operations without getting the “fundamentals” right will, more likely than not, cause more delays and lead to CSDP taking one step forward and two steps back, which is an unaffordable speed in times of financial crises.

Choices to make

Where this leaves the EU on a global level is a bigger question. Matching civilian capabilities to political ambitions could result in the EU being accused of putting political ambitions higher on the priority list than the actual support to countries in need of external civilian crisis management. A reserved approach towards African governance will have little real impact. On the other hand, trying to do too much with too little will inevitably lead to operational failure. Finding the right balance between engaging where needed and engaging where possible is difficult. At this stage, however, solid strategic decisions are indispensable to push CSDP in the right direction. If these stay out, the EU will never be regarded as a convincing actor for international civilian crisis management.

One of the choices to make for EU civilian crisis management, perhaps even in the framework of a broader strategic approach, is to increase the EU's engagement through regional organisations such as the African Union (AU) and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). This will facilitate local ownership and therefore increase the mission impact, while at the same time reducing the capability burden on the EU's shoulders. Whatever the way forward, key is, a comprehensive strategic approach has become indispensable.

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