

IN DEPTH

## Between aspirations and reality

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Against the background of the ongoing crisis in Ukraine, the president of the European Commission, Jean-Claude Juncker, has recently made the case for a European Army. An army would allow the EU to react in a “credible manner” to threats to peace in a member state or in a neighbouring country, he noted. Undoubtedly, as one of the most experienced politicians on the European stage, Juncker himself knows best, that for an array of reasons there is no prospect for the short-term realization of such an ambitious project as a European Army.

However, Juncker’s attempt once more reveals an often observable imbalance of the public and political debate when it comes to question in which way and with what means the EU could and should contribute to peace. The problem is that, once again, the military side receives the utmost attention. We are given the impression that mainly powerful military means are required to sustain peace; however the experiences with the protracted conflicts in weak or failed states tell us another story. To put it simply and to say the least, military means alone are not sufficient to transform these kinds of conflict into a lasting peace. At best, and acknowledging all the severe problems which occur in connection with international law (which cannot be discussed here), military means are only suitable to stop current violence and bloodshed. But the task of conflict transformation and peacebuilding actually begins when weapons are silent. Understood in a broad sense, peacebuilding therefore means the application and deployment of a broad range of civilian and military activities and the application of several civilian means to solidify peace and avoid the relapse into violent conflict. By specifically applying its civilian instruments for peacebuilding, the EU sees itself

already able to influence the deeper root causes of conflict – be the instruments directed at the political, the societal or the economic conflict-dimension of a conflict.

## **Failure to produce durable peace**

Civilian peacebuilding has become a central element of the self-conception and self-description of the EU as a foreign policy actor. At least the EU claims that, with the civilian component of the 1999 founded Common Security and Defense Policy (CSDP), it has developed a proper instrument for this kind of activity. And one may argue that the gradual development of civilian operational capabilities as a specific element of CSDP “is indeed particular to the EU and has no equivalent in other organizations”<sup>1</sup>.

**“ The EU has failed to produce durable peace in many countries. Afghanistan may serve as the most obvious example ”**

Be that as it may: In operational terms, civilian peacebuilding of the EU under the CSDP entails dispatching missions with experts who operate in a crisis region committed to a broad spectrum of activities encompassing inter alia the setup of functioning police forces, security sector reform and the construction of constitutional structures. Taken together the EU has launched 22 of these civilian missions in several countries over the last sixteen years. Of these, the Police Mission in Afghanistan (EUPOL Afghanistan) and the Rule of Law Mission in Kosovo (EULEX Kosovo) probably might have gained the most public attention.

However, the contribution of the EU to durable peace in crisis regions, to peace and security, is contested. Indeed, the record of EU peacebuilding is – cautiously formulated – only a mixed one, since the EU often failed to produce durable peace in many countries; Afghanistan may serve as the most obvious example.

## **Insufficiently prepared, too small and badly equipped**

To understand why the EU struggles with peacebuilding, it is firstly necessary to reconsider that CSDP is, to this day and despite all reforms, a field of intergovernmental policy-making. The EU member states are still not willing to abandon their sovereignty in the field of security and defense – they remain the key players in a highly sensitive policy field. Furthermore, there are still large differences between the strategic cultures of the member states, causing severe consequences for civilian EU peacebuilding as well. In short, civilian peacebuilding is not equally important for all EU members: “Many states do not explicitly reject civilian CSDP, but just attribute little priority to it”<sup>2</sup>. Subsequently this disinterest in civilian peacebuilding has repeatedly led to a situation in which the problem has not been receiving the mandate for an operation. The problem has often rather been the insufficient implementation of a once-agreed operation in terms of the limited political and material willingness of EU member states to contribute to these missions in an appropriate manner: “As a consequence, missions frequently are too small, ill-prepared, and badly equipped. Moreover, they then enjoy little political support and therefore have only limited impact on conflict resolution on the ground”<sup>3</sup>. Apart from this, the EU members which have been involved in the implementation of such missions repeatedly have had severe “difficulties in satisfying the demand for personnel, ensuring the required speed, and supplying personnel that can cope with complex mission tasks”<sup>4</sup>. To give only two examples: Both, EUPOL Afghanistan and EULEX Kosovo, neither reached their designated manning level.

**“ The EU needs an effective civil-military cooperation and coordination. Its missions are ill-prepared and badly equipped ”**

#### **The need for a comprehensive approach**

To understand why the EU struggles with peacebuilding, it is furthermore necessary to consider the characteristics of the institutional design or setting of the EU, since the EU is no consistent or monolithic actor in peacebuilding<sup>5</sup>. To begin with, besides the above discussed civilian operations, there are also military operations under the CSDP. With

the deployment of these operations, the EU rhetorically claims to stop violence in a crisis region to create space and time for civilian peacebuilding. However, time and space – if given – have to be used. Taken together the EU is therefore in need of effective civil-military cooperation and coordination as essential conditions for successful peacebuilding. Yet in the past, the EU often failed to coherently implement simultaneously deployed military and civilian operations in the same theatre. All too frequently coherent interaction was hindered by rivalries, disputes about matters of competence as well as coordination difficulties between the different operations. For instance, in its beginnings, the European Union Police Mission (EUPOL BiH) and European Union Force Althea (ÉUFOR Althea) in Bosnia and Herzegovina quarreled about the competence of combatting organized crime. However, military and civilian operations under the intergovernmental CSDP are mainly oriented towards short-term stabilisation efforts.

By contrast, policies and programmes, for example, the development policy of the EU or its humanitarian aid, fall into the realm of the European Commission and are mainly oriented towards longer-term stabilisation; that means towards longer-term sustainable peace. Yet, the interaction between short-term and long-term stabilisation efforts was also shaped by inconsistencies and disputes. In broader terms the problem could be put as follows: “Everybody wants to coordinate, nobody wants to be coordinated”<sup>6</sup>. The entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty, with the foundation of the European External Action Service (EEAS) as the cornerstone of the new EU institutional architecture in its Foreign and Security Policy, has not really altered the picture, since the establishment of the EEAS has not entirely remedied the institutional fragmentation of the EU as a peacebuilder. Again and again we still witness conflicts of jurisdiction and coordination difficulties between the EEAS and the European Commission on matters related to civilian crisis management and peacebuilding. This involves humanitarian aid and disaster relief, but also questions of project funding in a crisis region or planning processes. Furthermore, the EEAS itself has not been working smoothly. The more recent crises in Libya, Mali and Syria as well as the policy of the EU towards these crises are symptomatic of these findings: The EU is still ill-prepared to function as an effective civil-military actor.

Accordingly, as a peacebuilder, the EU is still confronted with the challenge to knit together the short-term-oriented and the long-term-oriented instruments into a comprehensive peacebuilding approach. In order to make good this deficit, the EU has, in the meantime, presented two comprehensive strategies for crisis regions: The Strategy for Security and Development in the Sahel Zone and the EU Strategic Framework for the Horn of Africa. Yet, neither the Horn of Africa nor the Sahel Zone can speak of effective peacebuilding of the EU.

### **Between aspirations and reality**

No doubt: It is not only the EU which has to be blamed for the absence of durable peace in many crisis regions. The EU is only one actor among a variety of international governmental and non-governmental actors, which are also engaged in peacebuilding activities. Totally apart from this, the core responsibility for peace naturally lies in the hands of the conflict-parties themselves. For the future of the EU as a peacebuilder one consequence should it therefore be more than before, to promote “local ownership” of conflict resolution: The EU should pay more attention to strengthening, fostering and supporting local actors with an active interest in building peace. The EU policies towards South Sudan and the Sahel Zone are already pointing in this direction. However, despite all the good intentions the EU might have and all progress the EU has made, at present there is still a large gap between the rhetoric aspirations of the EU as a peacebuilder and the political reality in the crisis regions in which the EU has intervened and still intervenes. Instead of constantly returning exclusively to the military (as for example in the recurring debate about a European Army), the actual challenge for the EU, which has committed itself to the promotion of peace again and again and which can be understood itself as an internal European peacebuilding project, is therefore still the coherent application and deployment of its different instruments for peacebuilding.

1. Agnieszka Nowak, “Civilian crisis management within ESDP”, in *Civilian crisis management: the EU way*, ed. per Agnieszka Nowak (Paris: Institute for Security Studies, 2006, Chaillot Paper no 90), 17.

2. Claudia Majo and Martina Bail, "Waiting for Soft Power: Why the EU Struggles with Civilian Crisis Management", in: *Preventing Conflict, Managing Crisis. European and American Perspectives*, ed. Eva Gross et al. (Washington, DC: Center for Transatlantic Relations, 2011), 21.
3. Claudia Majo and Martina Bail, "Waiting for Soft Power: Why the EU Struggles with Civilian Crisis Management", in: *Preventing Conflict, Managing Crisis. European and American Perspectives*, ed. Eva Gross et al. (Washington, DC: Center for Transatlantic Relations, 2011), 21.
4. Claudia Majo and Martina Bail, "Waiting for Soft Power: Why the EU Struggles with Civilian Crisis Management", in: *Preventing Conflict, Managing Crisis. European and American Perspectives*, ed. Eva Gross et al. (Washington, DC: Center for Transatlantic Relations, 2011), 21.
5. On the following cf. also Simon Duke and Aurélie Courtier, "EU Peacebuilding: Concepts, Players and Instruments", in: *The European Union and Peacebuilding*, ed. Steve Blockmans et al. (La Haia: T·M·C Asser Press, 2010), 15-53.
6. Hans-Georg Ehrhart, "The EU as a civil-military crisis manager. Coping with internal security governance", *International Journal* 61 (2006): 441.

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