

# EUROPEAN POLICYBRIEF

## THE EUROPEAN UNION EXTERNAL ACTION IN TIMES OF CRISIS AND CHANGE

### INTERNATIONAL SECURITY CHALLENGES AND CRISIS RESPONSE



Advocacy, Governmental Organisations and Research networks Associated – AGORA Forum ([www.agora-forum.eu](http://www.agora-forum.eu)) – Organised by the Institut d'Etudes Européennes de l'Université Libre de Bruxelles in partnership with the European External Action Service and the European Commission on 27-28 February 2013

6<sup>th</sup> Round Table's Summary of Findings and Policy Recommendations

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*Ceci n'est pas un Simple Forum*

The EU's Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) emerged at the end of the Cold War. It derived from shifts in the international system, the acceleration of European Integration, the appearance of new forms of conflict in and around Europe, the need to foster a viable defence industrial base, and certain post-modern normative approaches to international relations.

Schematically, prior to the Lisbon Treaty (2009), European analysts warned against excessive optimism but underlined the dynamism and significance of this new policy area in driving forward European integration, while Americans interpreted it as a form of "balancing" against the US.

Since then, re-assessments offer a more sober interpretation, as tougher questions are being asked about the coherence, ambition and overall direction of the EU as a global actor. The Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) and CSDP dimensions included in the Treaty did indeed call for a more lucid analysis. The current power transition affecting major global players; the mission fatigue (which prevented any new CSDP operations between 2009 and 2012); the continuing failure of the member states to deliver deployable military and civilian assets; and the global and European contexts of financial crisis (and subsequent retrenchment in military spending) all help explain the more pessimistic mood among commentators.

In 2010, the Franco British Treaty raised the question whether it would become an alternative or a complement to CSDP. In 2011, the Arab Spring (and more particularly the Libyan crisis) resulted in serious misgivings about the future of CSDP as, on the one hand, most of the EU member states were not willing to engage in military action against Gaddafi; and on the other, the HRVP was reticent to establish a robust EU mission. Libya was precisely the type of regional crisis that CSDP had been preparing to manage for 20 years: yet once again, the EU proved dependent on Washington.

Although observers proved excited about the idea of a CSDP, the Libyan crisis proved crucial to understand why their mindset progressively shifted towards disappointment. In the current stance, each of the four words composing CSDP can be questioned.

Do Europeans actually want CSDP? The fact of the matter is that member-states vary in what they think the CSDP should be, while simultaneously it faces a financial, political and strategic crisis.

The EU has not come close to defining what role military instruments would play: could stronger ties with NATO be a solution? Since the US redeployed its strategy towards other regions, is Washington serious about wanting the Europeans to assume a new leadership role?

## CSDP FACES POLITICAL, STRATEGIC, PROGRAMMATIC, FINANCIAL AND INSTITUTIONAL DIFFICULTIES

### National Security vs. Human Security

EU member states vary in their understanding of the nature and objectives of CSDP, as well as of the underlying rationale behind it. Most of them haven't yet embraced human security paradigms, which – in contrast to the traditional notion of national security – argues that the proper referent for security should be the individual rather than the state. Most involved stakeholders underline the will of member states to foster CSDP – illustrated by their recurrent participation and daily intergovernmental meetings at EU level – but a lack of common ambition and interest remains.

### EU wide policy facing Member States Sovereignty

CSDP suffers all the more from the EU member states' preoccupation with sovereignty as it touches upon a sensitive area: security. This results in an absence of overall vision regarding the EU's objectives on the global stage at a time where a better definition of the EU's common security interests seems crucial. In matters of energy for instance: as Europe's dependence on foreign resources grows daily, what security provisions will protect them remains unclear.

### Lack of leadership and of democratic legitimacy

The general absence of leadership and limited democratic legitimacy of CSDP also results in the EU's incapacity to match means and large ends, and to develop long-range forecasting and planning efforts. Most Europeans know nothing about CSDP. The new prerogatives of the European Parliament (Lisbon Treaty) could be helpful for the promotion of CSDP in member states through MEPs who now do have their word to say.

### Soft vs. Hard Power

From a global perspective, observers agree on the rising influence of soft power, and the majority of EU missions are small and civilian, but as Javier Solana<sup>1</sup> pointed out, no division can be made between civilian and military assets in matters of security and defence. Some may call for the EU to concentrate on the improvement of its civilian missions with military might, but the main question is actually how the EU might foster synergies between both civilian and military aspects of CSDP. Civil planning remains messy, but work on integration of military and civil dimensions in some sectors remains a necessity.

### Transforming the CSDP Modus Operandi

A radical transformation of the CSDP's modus operandi is necessary to shift its mindset from reactive ad-hoc to proactive strategic planning. The vertical coherence between 28 national security and defence policies, and the facilitation and acceleration of the mechanisms for generating deployable military and civilian assets for crisis management operations also depend on it.

### Coordinating in a crisis context

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<sup>1</sup> Former NATO Secretary General (1995-1999) and former EU High Representative for Common Foreign and Security Policy and Secretary General of the Council of the European Union (1999-2009)

This being said, the success of CSDP will depend on which way the EU can contribute to peace, where and when the EU is engaged. Tensions between EU and member state agencies and preferences have to be dealt with in this context. While the global downturn and Euro-zone crisis are often taken as an excuse for the lack of member states' investment in CSDP, as they have led to further spending cuts, defence cuts might not always be the main point, as pooling and sharing is sometimes more expensive. A main challenge resides in seeking more coherence in the development of military and civilian capacity. The consolidation of the existing defence industries remains a challenge in this regard (only 6 countries have a defence industry).

#### Exploring the strategic perspective

Focussing on geopolitics, an efficient EU crisis response mechanism is clearly needed, yet by having to deal with day-to-day issues, the EU loses the strategic perspective. Stronger ties between CSDP and NATO might be an option to explore further.

### **BUT CSDP REMAINS NEEDED, AND POSITIVE DEVELOPMENTS ARE TO BE NOTICED**

#### A smooth running but perfectible core institutional framework

The Political and Security Committee (PSC), the European Union Military Staff (EUMS), the European Union Military Committee (EUMC), the Committee for Civilian Aspects of Crisis Management (CIVCOM) and the Council working-groups are all performing well. It is too soon to judge the added value of the EEAS, but observers notice hopeful signs that it will fulfil its initial promise. Most, however, believe that the scope and terms of reference of the HRVP position need to be fundamentally reviewed before decisions are taken on the 2014 replacement.

#### Well-recognised capacity of conflict prevention

The need for CSDP has never been greater, and the well-recognised capacity of conflict prevention, which rests on its unique multilateral decision making process, embodies its main comparative advantage on the international scene. While the US clearly excels in rapid reaction, the EU remains a reference point in matters of small-scale, mainly civilian, missions.

#### Publicly supported missions

There is a need for a more comprehensive approach to regions where the EU is making a difference. A positive development in this regards is the setup of 1 new military and 4 new civilian missions: EUBAM in Libya; EUAVSEC in South Sudan; EUCAP NESTOR in the Horn of Africa; EUCAP SAHEL in Niger and EUTM Mali. The need for assistance to the countries of the Sahel is compelling.

European public opinion actually supports CSDP as proven by multiple CSDP Eurobarometers. Furthermore, this support has remained solid, even in critical times. The question is therefore "who do we need to convince?" rather than "do we need to convince?"

#### Integration in day-to-day activities

Recurrent proposals for a European White Book on defence and security are indicative of a new acceptance of the need for greater coherence; the European Defence Agency's role in setting its 11 priority procurement projects; the attempts of the Ghent Framework to categorise European military assets into national, pooled and shared instruments; the regional clusters of collaborating states; the European Global Strategy initiative; the potential of permanent structured co-operation.

## CSDP & NATO: A RELATIONSHIP TO BE RE-EXAMINED

Particularly since the Libyan operation, voices are being raised on both sides of the Atlantic calling for the EU to re-examine its relationship with NATO. While the US security and defence strategy turns towards new, Asian horizons, the debate whether it is sustainable and wise for Washington to keep its traditional support for its European allies grows. France's return to NATO combined with proposals to transfer NATO to a European command, underline the necessity to revise its relationship with the CSDP<sup>2</sup>.

Some observers call for a long-term merger between the two entities, yet the debate remains intense. At first glance, it seems logical to merge NATO and CSDP if Europe wants to have a footprint in regional security, but: (1) many consider NATO as both too political and too much orientated towards combat operations to meet such expectations; (2) in the current situation, the Cypriot / Turkish obstacle remains; (3) and above all, while regular meetings take place between NATO and CSDP officials, the fact that several NATO members are non-EU states is likely to shift this potential perspective to a far future. Also, (4) if NATO endures beyond a reduction in American involvement, economies of scale through a merger involving CSDP make sense, but will remain controversial and thus uncertain.

Actually, the fact that CSDP proved irrelevant in handling the Libyan crisis remains an object of controversy. While some observers describe it as "far from being a disaster"; as a "short and efficient European initiative"; and as having allowed successful operations such as air-to-air refuelling, others depict Operation Unified Protector as illustrating the dependence of the EU CSDP on Washington. France framed its intervention in Mali as response to a request from the African Union and ECOWAS, without EU-wide support and it was eventually organised by NATO. Some also state that if the EU has the legitimacy to intervene in Mali it is precisely because it did not intervene as such in Libya.

Whatever the relationship between NATO and CSDP will be, the Libyan crisis illustrates the lack of effectiveness of EU security provisions. It calls for more integration between the soft and hard components of CSDP, underlines the EU military industry weaknesses, and fosters the necessity to look at these kind of crises well in advance.

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<sup>2</sup> POSEN Barry, "Pull Back – The Case for a Less Activist Foreign Policy", *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 92 n°1, Council on Foreign Relations (New York)

**Strategic Agenda**

- While tensions exist between the definitions of security itself (human security vs. national security): a political dialogue should be encouraged to guarantee a clear set of common standards leading to an EU security paradigm.
- To further smooth out national preferences and set a clear joint strategic horizon, an EU-wide White Book on Security and Defence should be drafted.
- Security policy is a sensitive policy agenda largely dominated by member states in the name of national sovereignty. The establishment of a “European Strategic Council”, as an independent agency, charged with the identification of common interests and strategic priorities would be welcome.

**Legitimacy (input and output)**

- As CSDP is lacking in both leadership and democratic legitimacy; co-ordinated efforts on the part of all the leaders of the EU member states should be made in order to explain the rationale behind CSDP to their public. The role of Members of the European Parliament should also be explored in this regard.
- The EU should support research on the outcomes of its missions to better assess their strength and weaknesses, with an aim to set strategic priorities through the identification of the best ways to deliver results.

**EU institutions and capacity**

- The functions, remit and scope of the HRVP post should be reviewed at highest level before any decision is taken in view of its 2014 replacement.
- Further synergies and coherence should be sought between the civilian and military components of CSDP so as to reach a shared understanding of the EU strategic equilibrium in matters of military spending cuts.
- The Libyan crisis highlighted a discrepancy between the EU’s willingness and capacity to act. The EU military industry should be enhanced and the European Defence Agency’s role should be significantly upgraded in this regard.

**EU-NATO**

- As CSDP is not to be abandoned; as the US is currently redeploying their military assets towards other horizons than NATO; responsibility in guaranteeing the EU’s security and defence should be better shared operationally with member states.
- Fostering CSDP / NATO relationships in the direction of ever greater co-operation should be re-examined in depth, with the aim of reaching a common EU-wide position on the future of this partnership.

## PROJECT IDENTITY

**PROJECT NAME** Global Re-ordering: Evolution through European Networks (GR:EEN).

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*United Nations University- Comparative Regional Integration Studies*  
Bruges, Belgium

*University of Western Australia*  
Perth, Australia

*Waseda University*  
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**WEBSITE**

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**FURTHER READING**

All working papers, policy briefing papers and other publications are available on our website: [www.greenfp7.eu/papers](http://www.greenfp7.eu/papers)