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**A NEW IGC REPORT ON EU CRISIS RESPONSE
CAPABILITIES**

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In 2001 the International Crisis Group-IGC published a thorough assessment of the EU's crisis response capabilities.¹ In January 2005, it published a second assessment with a view to updating the previous one.²

Both reports are based on an integrated concept of conflict prevention and management as responses to changing stages and time frames in a crisis cycle stemming from a coherent security policy. Because of its centaur-like communitarian-intergovernmental nature, the EU suffers from deficits in its instruments as well as lack of coordination. Therefore, its coherence is weak and uneven. Indeed, such coherence, more often than not, is also lacking when it comes to full-fledged states or international organization. Yet, coherence remains a structural and basic challenge for the EU. For this reason, the ICG's assessment has particular significance, for it provides not only a measure of EU's crisis response capabilities but also - and most important - its wider capability as an international actor.

The concern about EU's "actorness" is central in the ICG report. The report considers changes and new perspectives relating to EU crisis response capabilities and concludes that between 2001 and 2005, thanks to institutional, operative and political advances on varying grounds, the EU foreign and security policy became actually more coherent and robust. Accordingly, its capabilities to respond to crises appear significantly increased. Furthermore, taking into account the enhanced foreign policy profile the new Constitution would provide - if ratified by all members - the report points out that the Union should be enabled to combine more coherently military and civilian capabilities. More in general, it foresees that "prospects for foreign policy development in the next few years are fairly good". It warns, however, that to take advantage of this favourable trend, EU members have to become able to act according to a more "effective multilateralism". This expression is employed in the "European Security Strategy"³ to allude to a world shaped by the rule of law and international cooperation. It refers, however, also to the need for more stringent political integration among the EU member states so as to become more "results oriented". The ICG report stresses the lack of European political will and points out the need to combine progresses in policies and instruments with a more distinctive political will so as to translate EU potential into concrete results.

While the EU ability to upgrading its political will depends on future developments (essentially the implementation of the European Constitution) and achievements (the success in integrating new members and establishing viable relations with neighbouring

¹ *EU Crisis Response Capability: Institutions and Processes for Conflict Prevention and Management*, Issues report No. 2, 26 June 2001.

² *EU Crisis Response Capability Revisited*, Europe Report No. 160, 17 January 2005. The ICG's website is: www.crisisgroup.org.

³ EU Secretary-General and High Representative for Foreign Policy, *A secure Europe in a better world: European Security Strategy*, 12-13 December 2003.

countries), the ICG report provides a detailed analysis of advancements in EU conflict prevention and management capabilities so far. Let's underscore the most important achievements.

The report illustrates the improvements that are taking place in the structures and organisation of the Commission and the Council.

The Commission has initiated a "deconcentration" of its activities to its Delegations abroad, which is expected to improve effectiveness. It has strengthened its specialised units bound to respond to crises: first of all, the Conflict Prevention and Crisis Management Unit; then, the European Humanitarian Aid Office (ECHO) which is in charge of dispensing EU humanitarian aid, and, finally, Europe Aid, the agency for the implementation of projects relating to EU external relations and development. Furthermore, the Commission has improved and refined its policies of international peace-building through its own enlargement and, with respect to external countries, thanks to the new European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP). As far as the Mediterranean and the Middle East are concerned, the ENP aims at reinforcing the policies already carried out within the framework of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (without replacing it). While the report does not dwell on this development, what it is worth recalling here is that the policies planned by the ENP, in particular the Action Plans, will combine political and economic cooperative endeavours and will be of the utmost significance for long-term peace building, especially in terms of conflict prevention capabilities.

The reports illustrate improvements in the Council's structure as well. In a sense, these improvements are more impressive than those of the Commission, because in the beginning of the 2000s, when the EU started to acquire crisis response capabilities, the structures of the Council, including the Secretary-General and High Representative for Foreign Policy, were almost non-existent. A full-fledged Policy Planning and Early Warning Unit assists the High Representative today. Furthermore, the EU governments set up in the existing intergovernmental structure of the Council a Political and Security Committee as well as a EU Military Committee and a Committee for Civilian Aspects of Crisis Management. A Joint Situation Centre assists these Committees and the High Representative.

Beside the High Representative's political capabilities, in the last five years the EU has also developed an intergovernmental common military force intended to deal with preventing and managing crisis within the framework and at the service of international legality. As of today, this force, although it has to be completed in many respects, is available and, in fact, it has already implemented a few interventions abroad. This force is a most significant accomplishment with respect to the task of upgrading EU crisis response capabilities. When coming to illustrate progresses in EU capabilities, the report talks at length of this military force. In fact, a military force is an essential factor in the perspective of building a crisis response capability, beginning with the need to protect aid, personnel and other civilian endeavours on the ground. It provides the EU short-term capabilities to be combined with existing long-term economic capabilities.

From the report one understands that coordination between the Commission and the Council and their respective instruments has also improved since the beginning of the 2000s (when it was not present and instead competition prevailed). Cooperation, as the report notes, has been prevailing due to the personal cooperation between the then

Commissioner for External Relations, Mr. Chris Patten, and the High Representative, Mr. Javier Solana, although the inclusion of both of them in the same institution, the new presidential troika, must have not been foreign to that cooperation. However, the report also notes that a more effective cooperation will be possible only with the implementation of the Constitution, when there will be a Union's Foreign Minister combining powers and instruments as of today unevenly divided between the Commission and the Council.

To sum up, according to the ICG report, in 2001-05 the EU definitely improved its crisis response capabilities. It has strengthened its institutions and policies and has successfully developed its military force to deal with conflict prevention and crisis management. It also enjoys a good degree of coordination and prospects for further improvements are good. The report gives a detailed account for all these changes and prospects. It deserves to be circulated abroad, in particular in the Mediterranean and the Middle East, where EU policies dealing with conflict prevention and crisis management are either poorly known or decidedly misunderstood.