

The Civilian CSDP Compact: Strengthening or Repurposing EU Civilian Crisis Management?

by Tobias Pietz

More than 15 years since the EU deployed its first civilian crisis management mission under Europe's Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) it is high time to revisit this instrument and update it for present circumstances and future endeavours.

The Civilian CSDP Compact (CCC) – recently promoted by Sweden, Germany, Denmark and other like-minded governments – could provide the impetus for new ideas and reforms, improving overall structures while renewing much needed commitments by member states.

Yet, due to the current political climate in Europe and the concomitant rise of populism in many member states, issues of internal security – above all the migration phenomenon – might well dominate debates on the Civilian Compact as well as the future of CSDP missions. An excessive repurposing of such missions to allow for a prioritization of migration control and

border management carries several risks however and may ultimately undermine a central tool for the EU's external action and credibility.

The EU's civilian CSDP missions have been a key instrument for international crisis management. However, the days of large civilian missions such as the ones the EU deployed to Kosovo, Georgia and Bosnia are now behind us. These have given way to smaller advising and capacity-building efforts, such as EUCAP Sahel Niger, EUTM Somalia or EUTM in the Central African Republic (all with less than 200 personnel).¹ More recently, and with the exception of the 2015 military Operation Sophia against migrant smuggling in the Mediterranean, the EU has not deployed its full crisis

¹ Tobias Pietz, "Flexibility and 'Stabilization Actions': EU Crisis Management One Year After the Global Strategy", in *ZIF Policy Briefings*, September 2017, http://www.zif-berlin.org/fileadmin/uploads/analyse/dokumente/veroeffentlichungen/ZIF_Policy_Briefing_Pietz_GSVP_Sept_2017_EN.pdf.

Tobias Pietz is Deputy Head of the Analysis Division at the Center for International Peace Operations (ZIF), Berlin.

management potential.

Since the treaty of Lisbon, civilian missions – similarly to military CSDP missions – have suffered from a lack of political commitments as well as resource and personnel allocation. The EU's first deployment to the Central African Republic, for example, took a staggering six force generation conferences and would ultimately not have been possible without contributions by non-EU member Georgia.²

It is therefore high time for the EU and its member states to think carefully about the future of civilian CSDP – not least since the military side of European security has recently been energized through the launching of Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) and the European Defence Fund in 2017.

Discussions on a civilian CSDP started the same year. The idea of a Civilian CSDP Compact was first mentioned in November 2017,³ and eventually gained traction in 2018. An internal concept on *Strengthening Civilian CSDP* was endorsed and specified by the Council in May 2018.⁴ The Council stressed

that the EU's civilian CSDP capabilities should still allow for participation in a great variety of mission types, from executive to non-executive, from large scale monitoring or rule of law missions to small advisory teams at all stages of the conflict cycle.

The Compact also seeks to tackle the responsiveness and readiness of civilian missions. It strives to craft future mandates which are tailor-made, flexible, modular and scalable thus finally providing missions in the field with the means to react to changing circumstances.

Moreover, the Compact envisages a more integrated and joined-up civilian CSDP, which cooperates closely with Justice and Home Affairs (JHA) agencies, as well as with deployed military CSDP personnel. However, it falls short of calling for a truly integrated CSDP with civilian, military and police elements in one single mission under the auspices of a civilian Head of Mission, thus limiting an integrated approach to crisis management.⁵

An important element endorsed by the Council and included in the Civilian Compact is the delineation of new tasks for future missions. These include: a) countering organized crime; b) support to border management; c) countering terrorism and violent extremism; d) addressing irregular migration; e) support to maritime security; f) hybrid threats and cyber security; and, finally e) protection of cultural heritage.

² Thierry Tardy, "EUFOR RCA: Tough Start, Smooth End", in *EUISS Alerts*, No. 17 (March 2015), <https://www.iss.europa.eu/node/1056>.

³ Council of the European Union, *Council Conclusions on Security and Defence in the Context of the EU Global Strategy*, 3574th Council meeting Foreign Affairs including Defence issues, 13 November 2017, para. 14, <http://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-14190-2017-INIT/en/pdf>.

⁴ Council of the European Union, *Council Conclusions on Strengthening Civilian CSDP*, 3621st Council meeting Foreign Affairs, 28 May 2018, <http://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-9288-2018-INIT/en/pdf>.

⁵ That would be according to the UN model of a peace operation.

With the exception of the latter element, such tasks have traditionally been carried out by the police, border and coast guard, security services or even the military. Moreover, some of these tasks are also highly contested and politicized domestic policy issues, with important ramifications on the stability and legitimization strategies of a number of populist movements across Europe.

It is worrying but not surprising that the EU and its member states are pushing the CSDP in that direction. This follows a trend that by now affects almost all EU instruments and policies. Such developments can in general be traced back to the summer of 2016, when the EU published its new Global Strategy (EUGS), a document that sought to realign external policies with the internal security interests of member states. It would of course be naïve to think that EU foreign policy was never influenced by the interests of its member states, not least since the EU has a key interest in fostering a stable, norms-based and market oriented global order for which European crisis management missions have also played a role.

Nevertheless, the advent of the Global Strategy has clearly shifted the direction of European crisis management. The EUGS outlines five central priorities for EU foreign and security policy, with only one being: protection of the Union, its citizens and territory. As a result, CSDP operations have begun to change too.

Previously, missions were mostly focused on supporting local partners in stabilization and peacebuilding efforts. Nowadays, an increasing number are tailored to advise governments on how to close their borders and manage migration.⁶ It seems as if the EU and some member states are trying to sell these EU operations to populist governments in Italy, Austria, Poland and Hungary by advertising them as part of a global approach to curbing migration to Europe.

Such trends are also reflected by the foreseen growth of the European Border and Coast Guard Agency (Frontex) under the EU's next Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF). The MFF 2021-2027 has indeed envisioned more money for border management (30 billion euro) than funds for development and assistance to Sub-Saharan Africa (26 billion euro).⁷ In response to these developments, many in Europe and beyond are criticizing the EU's growing focus on the so-called security-migration-development nexus.⁸

⁶ Tobias Pietz, "How a Focus on Migration Could Weaken the EU's Crisis Management Missions", in *World Politics Review (WPR)*, 7 August 2018, <https://www.worldpoliticsreview.com/articles/25428>.

⁷ Jorge Valero, "EU Will Spend More on Border and Migration Control Than on Africa", in *EURACTIV*, 1 August 2018, <https://www.euractiv.com/?p=1261079>.

⁸ Cf. Elise Cuny, "The EU's New Migration Partnership with Mali: Shifting towards a Risky Security-Migration-Development Nexus", in *EU Diplomacy Papers*, No. 1/2018, <https://www.coleurope.eu/node/45681>; and Jérôme Tubiana, Clotilde Warin and Gaffar Mohammud Saeneen, "Multilateral Damage. The Impact of EU Migration Policies on Central Saharan Routes", in *Clingendael CRU Reports*, September 2018, <https://www.clingendael.org/node/9485>.

Setting aside general questions of how international cooperation is affected if third countries are seen by the EU through a migration prism – one should still consider what impact these trends may have on CSDP missions, both civilian and military.

First, EU civilian crisis management missions have neither the expertise, resources or the capacity to fulfil the high expectations of member states for these new tasks. Clearly, crisis management missions will do little to address the EU's internal security threats if conducted in isolation. These threats can only be countered in concert with other policies, such as comprehensive EU approaches to climate change, trade and development. However, it is rightly expected that CSDP missions should provide added value when combined with the EU's other tools and policies.

Second, the EU's new mission priorities are out of step with the demands and priorities of local partners in post-conflict situations. The government of Niger, for example, needs support in peacebuilding, stabilization and development. Sealing its northern border to shut down migrant routes is not high on its agenda (even though they might endorse it to receive European support and funds). The same is true for the UN peace operations that EU missions are meant to complement, including in the context of the UN mission in Mali.

Last but not least, realigning CSDP and other EU instruments for short-term domestic priorities and concerns could weaken the EU's long-term contributions to regional stability and

international security.

In the case of Niger, for example, EU efforts – including the EU Capacity Building Mission (EUCAP) – may actually lead to a further destabilization of the country and surrounding region, let alone to rising numbers of people dying in the Saharan desert.⁹ By pushing Niger to prioritize border control and migration management, EU policies may end up strengthening repression and authoritarianism as well as disrupting local inter-state trade and migration routes that have developed over the centuries and today still represent key sources of sustenance for important sections of the population.¹⁰

Against this backdrop, it is advisable not to repurpose what is currently a relatively small but valuable instrument for crisis management and instead focus on how to actually provide further capabilities for such missions in a flexible, fast and more responsive way. Strengthening existing capabilities while improving rapid-reaction and coordination, not repurposing, should therefore be the guiding objective of these efforts.

This would already represent an improvement in overcoming traditional challenges, allowing civilian CSDP to be ready to deploy and fulfil all of its original tasks (the Feira priorities).

⁹ Jérôme Tubiana, Clotilde Warin and Gaffar Mohammud Saeneen, "Multilateral Damage", cit., p. 22 ff.

¹⁰ Luca Barana, "EU Migration Policy and Regional Integration in Africa: A New Challenge for European Policy Coherence", in *IAI Commentaries*, No. 18|42 (July 2018), <http://www.iai.it/en/node/9429>.

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Moreover, missions mandated for politically contested tasks such as migration management and border control could end up being taken hostage by populist governments, with all the risks and concerns this may imply. Recent debates on Operation Sophia are an example of this possibility.¹¹

only operate on behalf of European self-interest without meeting local demands, they could damage the EU's ability to manage global crises, with adverse effects on the EU's internal stability and security as well.

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Ultimately, it is a rather regrettable coincidence that Austria's populist, conservative government holds the rotating presidency of the EU in the second half of 2018 when the bloc will decide not only on the future focus of its external crisis missions but also on its migration policy.

Echoing some of the underlining principles contained in the EUGS, and drawing inspiration from French President Macron's emphasis on the EU's role in providing protection to its citizens, the official motto of the Austrian EU-presidency is "A Europe that protects". Few should be surprised, therefore, if the first of Austria's three priorities for its presidency is "security and the fight against illegal migration".¹²

Member states will face important challenges in seeking to persuade the presidency and like-minded governments in Italy, Hungary, the Czech Republic and Poland that civilian CSDP in 2018 needs strengthening but not repurposing. Yet, if future missions

¹¹ Tobias Pietz, "What Salvini Teaches Us about Operation Sophia", in *EUobserver*, 13 August 2018, <https://euobserver.com/opinion/142565>.

¹² Austrian Presidency of the Council of the European Union, *Programme of the Austrian Presidency*, June 2018, p. 7-8, <https://www.eu2018.at/agenda-priorities/programme.html>.

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Via Angelo Brunetti, 9 - I-00186 Rome, Italy

T +39 06 3224360

F + 39 06 3224363

iai@iai.it

www.iai.it

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- 18 | 48 Karolina Muti, *Poland: The Missing Link in European Defence*