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VIOLENT CONFLICTS, PROTRACTED CRISES & PEACE OPERATIONS 3.0

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A rise of armed conflicts and humanitarian emergencies in Africa and Asia has led to significant security ramifications that have implications for Austria and Europe. The expansion of ungoverned territories is facilitating civil war economies, irregular migration and radical Jihadism. Violent non-state actors such as militias are becoming more dominant. In fact, there is a clear need for more diplomacy, mediation and realistic initiatives to strengthen governmental structures in fragile states. In addition, an increase of military and development assistance as well as more support for UN-peace operations in Africa may add to more stability. In all these sectors, both Austria and the EU have the potential to contribute effectively.

Conflict dynamics

Rising global environmental risks such as climate change, water shortages and natural disasters have contributed to a significant rise in violent conflicts since 2010, alongside the classic quest for power, resources and reputation (Georg Elwert). In 2018, the Conflict Barometer of the Heidelberg Institute for International Conflict Research (HIIC) recorded 222 violent conflicts, as compared to 154 in 2010.

Despite several peace and reconciliation initiatives in 2018 (e.g. Ethiopia-Eritrea, South Sudan), intrastate conflicts in Africa are on the rise: 17 of 36 ongoing wars have been recorded there and four conflicts escalated to wars in Sub-Saharan Africa alone in 2017. In addition, more protracted crises are leading to increased humanitarian emergencies (cf. in Somalia and Yemen) and to negative “spill over” effects such as from the war in Syria to Lebanon or Jordan.

Ideological wars based on the pretext of religious fundamentalism have intensified (e.g. in Afghanistan) or severely escalated (e.g. in Yemen). In many conflict regions, armed groups and criminal networks are often more assertive than state actors (cf. in Libya). They often use radical Islamist Jihadist ideology as a pretext to legitimise their power while asserting control over the highly lucrative business in human trafficking, weapons and drug trade, such as in the Sahel region.

Traditional peace operations have to be distinguished from military interventions that may affect conflict dynamics even more substantially: the US-led operation “Inherent Resolve” has pushed back Islamist Daesh fighters in Syria and Iraq, France’s “Operation Barkhane” in Mali has

promoted counter-terrorism in the Sahel, and the Russian intervention in Syria has consolidated Assad's regime. However, violent conflicts including insurgency prevail in these scenarios. Such interventions are driven by geopolitics and can also be highly profitable for the involved arms industries. Other success parameters, such as effective protection of civilians, apply for peace operations often carried out in the same region (e.g. in Mali). Furthermore, the budgets for peace operations are scarce.

Quo Vadis peace operations?

Starting with monitoring ceasefire agreements and disengagement procedures in 1948 (UNDOF), the core tasks of peace operations have massively expanded and include military and police personnel. Contemporary stabilisation tasks are intended to prevent relapse into conflict (EUFOR Althea) or mandated to support public security with troops (KFOR) and police officers (UNMIK, MINUJUSTH). Another task is to prevent human trafficking in the Mediterranean by supporting and training Libyan Coast Guards (EU Operation Sophia).

The spectrum ranges from peace enforcement (MINUSMA), training, mentoring, advising and assisting national security forces (RSM Afghanistan) to monitoring human rights situations and peacebuilding efforts (EUMM-GEO). The "Train the Trainers" approach is gaining importance.

In 2018, the 15 ongoing UN peace operations show an ambivalent image. Military contributions from the West have continuously decreased (e.g. Canada, Sweden) and international aid donor fatigue is growing. Low-income countries provide over 90% of the approx. 90,000 UN soldiers and police officers. On one hand, there are quite effective peace operations (e.g. in Ivory Coast or Liberia) and the UN political missions are getting more grip on peace support. On the other hand, operations are too overstretched and underfunded to protect civilians in Africa effectively (e.g. UNMISS, MONUSCO, MINUSCA).

The EU's Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) consists of six military and ten civilian missions with over 5,000 personnel in 2018. The CSDP could overcome operational deficits of UN missions in Africa (e.g. air transport, reconnaissance). However, substantial European support has been provided only to Mali yet (MINUSMA). Despite massive pressure to engage more substantially in Africa, the importance of peace operations is still hard to promote in Europe following the bitter lessons from state building in Afghanistan.

The focus of NATO has shifted towards efforts to strengthen collective defence and cooperative security (e.g. 2% target in defence spending). However, NATO's operations in Kosovo (KFOR) and Afghanistan (RSM) remain cornerstones of crisis management. Furthermore, the OSCE is supporting peace, stability and democracy with multilateral missions and field offices.

Civil crisis management and EU partnerships with Africa

The 2015 migration and refugee crisis has created an innovation pressure on how to effectively curb migratory flows. As such, irregular migration is driving a prospective comprehensive approach of the EU. This has created new momentum for the Joint Africa-EU Strategy (adopted in 2007) to support resilient states and jobs in Africa.

The importance of the EU's political and civilian crisis management is growing. The focus is on capacity building in the fields of police, rule of law, civil administration and civil protection. These tasks were extended in the wake of the EU Global Strategy (2016). The demand for civilian EU missions in Africa (e.g. EUCAP, EUBAM) is rising and goes hand in hand with an enhanced role of the European Commission abroad.

In addition, the European Border and Coast Guard Agency FRONTEX is massively expanding. However, a coherent EU policy on migration and asylum that goes beyond shielding, deterrence and national inte-

rests is not yet in sight. Migration compacts to reduce irregular migrants (e.g. EU-Turkey Agreement) may have a quick impact, but cannot address conflict-induced migration. The trend is to complete political “reform partnerships”, such as the “G20 Compact with Africa” or the “Khartoum Process” of the African Union and the EU on migration. In this context, partner countries such as Sudan, Niger and many others need support, while bearing the responsibility to improve their own structures and the human rights situation.

The new EU migration-related fund proposed for 2021-2027 allocates an instrument of nearly 90 billion Euros, amongst other policy objectives, to diminish root causes of irregular migration. In this process, it has to be taken into consideration that development assistance may even encourage mixed migration flows. As a consequence, strategies are to be reconsidered.

New challenges for Austria’s international engagements

Peace Support Operations with the participation of the Austrian Armed Forces / BMLV were first launched in the Congo in 1960 (ONUC). Official Austrian police officers have first been deployed in Cyprus in 1964 (UNFICYP). In 2018, some 1,000 soldiers are deployed in peace operations and another 1,000 in domestic assistance operations. Priority regions remain the Western Balkans (EUFOR Althea, KFOR) and the MENA region (Lebanon/UNIFIL). In addition, Austria’s military contributions in the Sahel are steadily gaining relevance (e.g. EUTM Mali, MINUSMA).

Austrian Development Cooperation supports projects and programs implemented by partners to combat poverty and ensure peace. The Red Cross, Caritas, Diakonie, CARE, SOS-Kinderdorf and others are providing development assistance and humanitarian aid, especially in the sectors of water, food, shelter and health.

Protracted crises have massively increa-

sed the need for humanitarian assistance, as the example of East Africa with catastrophic draughts is showing. This is also a challenge for the Austrian Development Agency (ADA), as Ethiopia and Uganda are two priority countries.

In general, not only the poor security situation and constantly changing frontlines (e.g. in Syria), but also administrative hurdles make it difficult for humanitarian personnel to access and support people in need. In addition, more civilian casualties are reported in ongoing conflicts (e.g. in Yemen). Therefore, the mandate to protect civilians is included in most of the ongoing peace operations. Austria has declared the protection mandate of the UNSC Resolution 1894 (2009) as one of the guiding principles of its foreign engagement.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Conclusion 1

Approaches to peace support, mediation and conflict resolution are becoming increasingly complex as the stabilisation agenda is often determined by geopolitical interests that do not necessarily coincide with the interest to make peace (cf. Afghanistan or Syria). The likelihood of authorizations to deploy large contingents of EU members to missions in Africa or Asia therefore seems low. However, the strategic relevance of peace operations remains high for Austria. This applies particularly to stakes on the Western Balkans. Furthermore, coordination efforts of Austrian stakeholders have increased substantially, as the pooled funding initiatives of ADA and BMLV to support the engagement in Mali are showing.

Recommendation 1

Adequate civil and military contributions, civil society activities as well as the identification of reliable local partners in crisis regions are altogether decisive factors for Austria’s engagements abroad. Therefore, a Whole of Nation Approach (WoNA) including civil and military actors has the po-

tential to create synergies and might be a further step towards the vision of an “Austrian Stabilisation Team” within EU/CSDP structures. Coordinated, complementary and coherent action (“3C process”) is also important for fixing the joint objectives of an engagement abroad, which often falls short. Violent conflict dynamics can also be better assessed with a WoNA. In addition to BMEIA, BMF, BMI, BMLV, NGOs and private companies, the BMDW (economy), BMBFW (research) and the BMVRDJ (judiciary) should engage actively in a WoNA.

In prospective future peace operations under the UN- or the CSDP-flag (e.g. in Ukraine or Libya), an Austrian involvement as peace supporter and mediator would be an added value if political conditions are conducive. For conflict prevention and peacebuilding, the UN-Sustainable Development Goals and the Women, Peace and Security Agenda should be taken as guidelines.

Conclusion 2

In Africa, it is increasingly important to enable fragile states to take care for its own stability and human rights standards more effectively. The European support for the setup of the G5 Sahel joint force (since 2014) may be an example. However, the massive presence of a variety of international and local security actors and militias leads to a militarization of the whole Sahel. Without addressing the political and social problems, the socio-economic and humanitarian situation of the population is likely to further deteriorate.

Recommendation 2

Humanitarian assistance, investment initiatives and business partnerships are as important as strengthening peace operations and reforming security sectors in Africa. Military contributions in the Sahel

should therefore be embedded in a long-term strategy together with other policy areas. The Sahel Strategy of Switzerland may serve as an example. In this sense, new initiatives for peace talks, mediation as well as educational and vocational training centres in Africa should be launched. In addition, the UN-EU strategic partnership on peace operations should be supported by Austria with a focus on Africa.

Conclusion 3

Measures for containment and control of mixed migration flows have become dominant. However, their impacts are often vague and unintended. Other policy fields, and in particular a migration policy based on empirical facts are undervalued.

Recommendation 3

Austria should maintain its foreign engagement in all spheres, prepare for potential new deployments (Ukraine, Libya), address root causes of conflicts and irregular migration and support policy coherence on migration and asylum at the EU-level. It should also support more diplomatic efforts to settle disputes, crises and violent conflicts. To this end, the budgets for the Austrian Armed Forces, Development Cooperation, diplomatic and mediation efforts should be raised substantially (cf. Sweden with more than 1% of GDP allocated each to defence and development sectors).

More funding is also needed to address security and development policy questions by science and research (e.g. Science Commission / BMLV; Commission for Development Research / KEF). This is crucial to meet current challenges, such as conflicts arising from state fragility and climate change, irregular migration and organized crime, hybrid threats and the protection of civilians and human rights in crisis regions.

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