

Geostrategic aspects and future challenges of CSDP

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This section highlights eleven aspects that on the one hand will shape the backdrop of future EU Peace Engagement and on the other hand include some recommendations directed at fostering the image, effectiveness and flexibility of EU actions.

1) Need for EU's Contribution to International Conflict and Crisis Management

On a global scale, the number of violent conflicts and wars is quite stable, not falling under the “magic” threshold of 30. Still, the vast majority of conflicts occur within states – they are intrastate conflicts often characterized by blurred frontlines and ambiguities. A regional concentration of conflicts can be observed in the Middle East and the Maghreb, in Sub-Saharan Africa and in Asia. Weak or bad governance, respectively un-governed or uncontrolled areas, are perceived as root causes for instability, organized crime, crimes against humanity, civil wars and other threats to international peace and security.

In addition, the effects of climate change and demographic change are going to have a severe impact on regimes and governments, putting many of them under heavy pressure over the next decade. Projections of trends regarding demographic and climate changes even show that these changes will mainly affect regions and countries already shattered by crisis and war. This means that the root causes of violent conflicts will not only persist but be further fuelled by additional factors like loss of arable land, draught, population growth, urbanisation, etc.

2) Four Regions Are of Highest Strategic Importance to the EU

A single glance on a map shows very clearly which regions are of highest strategic importance to the EU. Besides South East Europe – which is likely to become an integral part of EU within one decade (though far

from being certain) – the developments and upheavals in states on Europe’s periphery will have strong and multiple effects on Europe. As recent incidents in Libya and the civil war in Syria indicate, future in the MENA-region will be shaky and stability in the area is far from secured. The countries already affected by evolutionary and revolutionary changes are going to face manifold troubles, as empirical evidence from other countries in similar situations after WW II suggests. According to the World Development Report 2011, the transition of former totalitarian systems to liberal and more or less democratic states based on rule of law etc. takes at least two decades – if a significant change is achievable at all.

In addition, one has to ask, whether these events are already the whole story or whether they represent only the initial part of bigger transformation processes encompassing other poorly legitimized governments in the Arab World and around. Currently, the civil war in Syria is dominating external fears and expectations – but nobody knows how and to what extent it will affect the situation in the entire Middle East.

On its eastern part the EU is still confronted with unsolved problems stemming from the Cold War times. Belorussia, Moldova and Ukraine still cause some security concerns due to unfinished political transformation and the mere fact that Russia is trying hard to reassert its influence on its so-called Near Abroad. Additionally, the situation in South Caucasus is far from self-sustaining peace, requiring permanent attention from the international community.

Sub-Saharan Africa is not as far away as some people in Europe might assume. The Sahel zone is already seen by many security analysts as essential part of an “arc of crisis” reaching from Mauretania to Somalia. This means that Organised Crime and Islamic terrorists can set up safe havens and have free hand in these weak or ungoverned areas. It goes without saying that there are strong interdependencies between developments in this part of the world and developments on European soil. For this reason, events like those in Mali 2012/2013 are of highest importance to Europe or at least to some EU member states.

In setting this regional focus one should not forget the importance of strategic sea lines of communication. It is obvious that unhindered passages are a prerequisite for the global economy and that any disturbance or blockade would cause serious harm to open and free markets and economy.

3) Europe Has to Stand on Its Own Feet

The strongest European ally in security, the US, has been shifting its strategic interest to the Pacific and East Asia for one decade already. This will have an increasing impact on Europe, forcing it to take over more responsibility on security and defence matters than it was used to in the past. Apart from some rhetorical remarks by the US Secretary of Defence, this became evident on several occasions during the NATO air campaign against Libya's former leader Gaddafi. One called the limited US-engagement "leading from behind", others view it as an expression of the low strategic interest the US had in Libya. But anyway, it is a matter of fact that the US will no longer pay the lions share for Europe's security.

This will have a huge impact on Europe – be it for better or worse. With regard to NATO it could lead to its "Europeanization", giving European states like Germany, France and United Kingdom a stronger role in decision shaping and making – and in taking responsibility too.

A comprehensive engagement based on European interests and concepts as well as military and civil capabilities will therefore define the EU's future role in international crisis management and with regard to its domestic security.

4) A Persisting Stalemate in NATO-EU Relations Has to Be Considered

The different membership configurations of NATO and EU are limiting EU's possibilities in security cooperation and engagement, both on the decision making level and in executing peace operations. It has to be

clear that Berlin Plus¹ cannot function according to its intentions as long as Turkey is not a full EU-member and the political problem of a divided Cyprus remains unresolved. Hence, there will always be some uncertainty when it comes to the point that EU might need specific NATO-assets for crisis management operations. There is simply no guarantee that EU can rely on NATO-support in crucial situations due to political considerations inside the organisation and because of particular national interests of some NATO members.

All this means that EU should have autonomous capacities and capabilities – maybe through permanent structures – in line with its political level of ambition. On the one hand this may limit EU's options to engage –, on the other hand, it brings more clarity to capacity planning including the issue of command and control structures. Depending on EU's true (and viable) political ambitions and taking into account the option of not having access to NATO assets, EU capability planning processes should be reassessed. This should be done bearing in mind that rapid reaction is of highest value and importance in crisis management and that one can sometimes achieve more with less by early action.

5) EU's Identity as a Security Actor – Be an Actor Not Only a Contributor

Despite all national reflexes to save jobs in the military-industrial complex and to maintain national sovereignty, within a few years one decisive question will have to be answered: Does Europe want to be a fully fledged security actor, will it primarily be a civilian actor in crisis management or does it see its role only as a contributor to the efforts of other actors like UN, NATO, US or regional security organisations? If its intention is limited to be a contributor to others, then there is no need for a strong EU, because this can also be done on a national or multinational level. But if the EU wants to be a full spectrum actor, it will have to do

¹ Berlin Plus is the short title of a package of agreements between NATO and the EU, allowing EU to draw on NATO's military assets where NATO as a whole is not engaged.

much more than just provide funding for capacity building in post-war theatres or send a limited number of troops or a couple of civilian experts.

This does not mean that EU should become a military super power for large scale interventions or, even worse, that it should be “militarized” as a whole. But a full spectrum actor should be able to use military and civil assets in a balanced and adequate way throughout all phases of a conflict to achieve a significant impact on the situation. EU has the concepts and the means to become and to prevail as a respected security actor – it is “only” a question of common political will among the member states.

6) Austerity and Financial Cuts Enforce Closer Cooperation and Integration

One cannot expect the financial downturn to be over quickly and budgets for security and in particular for the armed forces to increase in a foreseeable time. Against this background, it seems to be obvious that the sooner we can create transnational synergies by intensifying cooperation and taking integrative steps, the more capacities we will be able to save or build up. It can't be in the interest of EU member states to witness an uncontrolled crackdown on defence capabilities that generates 28 “Bonsai-armies” (Mölling, 2011) – being “capable of nothing”. The time is ripe to counter this development and to replace rigid traditional national approaches by Europeanizing ideas, concepts and structures.

7) Threat Assessments and Consequences

Another dividing factor jeopardizing closer cooperation is a different or diverging perception of risks, dangers and threats mainly in relation to geographic parameters and issues of political neighbourhood. Global threats expressed in the Security Strategy 2003 and reassured in 2008 are evident and understandable – but they do not always have the quality and power to convince and to motivate others to form strong coalitions or to build up capacities. Most EU member states perceive some small-

scale security problems and threats as closer and as more urgent to them than large-scale issues at a global but abstract level. The importance of a regional or even local dimension of security should thus not be underestimated.

Some experts argue for a “Global Security Strategy”, seeing it as “the” instrument to translate the EU mantra on “comprehensive engagement” into practice (Coelmont, 2013). Others stress the need for a new security strategy, pointing to the fact that EU itself has become bigger (28 instead of 15 member states) and that the threat perceptions of the new 13 members are not really reflected in the ESS of 2003. In addition, a revised Security Strategy could incorporate CSDP in the broader framework of a Common Foreign Policy. Maybe this approach might indeed be useful and helpful. Nevertheless, doubt will persist unless the “burning” security problems at the heart of EU-member states are not reflected and tackled in a satisfactory manner. Shared views on key threats can foster cooperation, stimulate common capacity building and enhance pooling and sharing efforts on an EU-sublevel. This needs not to undermine EU ambitions as a whole; there could be a two-dimensional approach to security, offering the possibility to participate at EU-sublevels within the framework of CSDP as well as at EU level itself.

8) Mutual Trust as a Precondition for Cooperation and Integration

Europe needs a master plan for restructuring its military and civilian capacities – but even the best plan will fail, if it is not based on mutual trust between the involved partners. Only if a government can totally rely on the determination and the capacities of its partners, it will be ready to provide military capacities on its own and will share specific capacities with those who do not – any longer – have them.

Confidence building among partners is a long lasting affair – but it can be done both bottom-up and top-down simultaneously. At times, there is a need for courage by single states or even individuals in order to make a first step. The fear of losing state sovereignty in this particular context seems already outdated – sometimes one has the feeling that European

citizens do expect “more” than politicians are yet able and willing to deliver.

9) A Coherent European Capacity Planning Process Is Required

Due to general budget cuts we currently witness an unplanned, unstructured, uncoordinated and unguided breakdown of European Military Capacities. This is not only senseless – it can even be dangerous and destructive in its final outcome. An impulse or initiative to tackle this problem can come from either NATO or EU or from both. Whoever will do it, alone or together, the issue is very urgent. Depending on EU’s real ambitions and taking into account that NATO assets will not always be available, the setup and the figures for strengthening capabilities set out in 2008 (Council of the European Union Declaration on Strengthening Capabilities, 11 December 2008) should be reassessed.

10) Engagement Brings Visibility and Confidence

CSDP is like the EURO currency not only a question of facts but also of faith and trust – there is a mass-psychological dimension to it. Every single action in the spirit of CSDP thus contributes to EU’s internal and external visibility, its acceptance and credibility. To the contrary, the non-engagement of military forces like the EU-Battle Groups is undermining the initial vision behind the concept, its credibility and the overall seriousness of the enterprise. In other words, it should be a deliberate intention to act instead of wait.

To engage only in small-scale missions and operations creates the public perception of being a small-scale actor unable to meet bigger challenges and leaves the EU with a notion of being dispensable. Engaging in larger and important operations can lead to the opposite – to be perceived as a strong and indispensable security actor. The EU will not be in a position to launch huge military operations like Iraq or Afghanistan, not even like the 1999 intervention in Kosovo. But already the deployment of smaller contingents up to brigade level embedded in a comprehensive civil-military enterprise could be sufficient to leave a strong and remarkable footprint. In this context, EUFOR Chad/DRC was a good example for

the potential size of further missions and EU's ability to run a peace operation autonomously.

11) Tell the People What CSDP Is and Can Do

“Do good and talk about it” – a well known phrase that also applies to the EU's peace engagement. It is equally well known that the EU and its daily work are perceived by the vast majority of EU citizens as being highly bureaucratic and over-complicated. The essence, importance and impact of EU actions are often not visible or understandable.

A strong peace-engagement in meanwhile 27 different theatres or environments is a message in itself – but it still has to be transmitted to the public. Many Europeans are proud of the EU as one of the most successful peace projects in history and they are equally proud of EU's ambitions to spread peace to its periphery and to support sustainable development in post-war situations. Let them participate in this effort and get a feeling of pride. In addition, there are strong arguments for an intensified cooperation and for further integrative steps in the field of security and defence. It would be quite easy to explain the possible benefits and added values deriving from closer ties.

All these aspects have to be transformed into simple and understandable messages and this has to be done professionally. It is not sufficient to publish dry statistics on how much was spent on what and on how many projects were funded. And not to forget – information has to be provided in a structured way on different levels and in a continuous manner (Feichtinger, 2008).

EU in general and CSDP in particular need a PR-strategy to familiarize European citizens with current developments and needs in order to shape and to foster a common European identity. Efforts and achievements in CSDP can significantly contribute to this goal – hence, let us use them.

Final Remark: CSDP still has the potential for being a powerful motor of integration and to give EU greater visibility and a voice in world affairs. The biggest challenge to foster CSDP lies inside the EU itself! But to say it very clearly:

“Muddling through is not a solution – it is only a kind of behaviour”.