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EU-GRASP aims to contribute to the articulation of the present and future role of the EU as a global and regional actor in security and peace.

Therefore, EU-GRASP is aimed at studying the processes, means and opportunities for the EU to achieve effective multilateralism despite myriad challenges.



The EU as a Peace and Security Actor in Regional Conflict

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Executive Summary

Even if most contemporary violent conflicts are defined as intra-state or 'domestic', they invariably spillover to neighbouring countries and become 'regionalized'. An examination of the European Union's engagement in various regional conflicts in Africa and the Middle East shows that the EU often overestimates its own achievements and impact. In a few cases, the EU *has* played a limited and arguably successful role. One arguably positive example which is often referred to, is Operation Artemis in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) in 2003 in which the EU quickly militarily intervened and prevented further violence until the UN could mobilise a more comprehensive and long-term peacekeeping mission. However, in most other cases where the goals and mandates are more comprehensive, the EU's policy has been much more problematic. Due to a general lack of genuine conflict analysis, the EU's policies are generally not adapted to the complexity of current regional conflicts. This has led to counterproductive effects on the ground. Other weaknesses include both the Union's internal institutional fragmentation and poor cooperation with other actors. Taken together this leads to the conclusion that the EU tends to be more concerned with establishing a symbolic presence and political representation than achieving real results that may help those affected by ongoing violent conflict.

Introduction

This Policy Brief examines in which ways the EU has engaged with the problems and challenges caused by 'regional conflicts'. The focus is on potential lessons learned from the analysis of four specific cases in which the EU has been particularly active: the African Great Lakes Region (with emphasis on the DRC), Central Africa (the Chad-Sudan-Central African Republic security complex), the Horn of Africa and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict (IPC).

Background:

The European Security Strategy highlights the interconnectedness of regional conflicts and other security threats, such as state fragility, terrorism, WMD, human rights and unregulated migration. In line with this and due to the close geographical proximity, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is considered as a primary security threat to the EU. Although geographically more distant, the African conflicts are also seen to impact on European interests, either directly or indirectly.

In the most general sense and in official policy, the EU claims to acknowledge the contextual and historical specificities of each regional conflict, thereby allowing some flexibility in its own approach. However, a deeper examination of actual policy implementation reveals that the EU's policies towards regional conflicts tend to be very similar. Any such one-size-fits-all policy is obviously deeply problematic and undermines both the lasting impact of any EU initiative and its credibility as a peace and security actor.

In brief, the EU's policies towards regional conflicts in Africa are heavily influenced by the notion of state fragility. The EU's understanding of the conflicts is built on the notion that countries such as Somalia, Sudan and the DRC are caught in a vicious cycle of weak governance and recurring conflict. The conclusion the EU has drawn from this is that stabilization policies and the rebuilding of core state institutions (such as the police and the judiciary), are seen as key solutions. State-building is then often combined with the protection of civilians and humanitarian assistance, together forming a 'comprehensive approach' to peace-building in violent conflicts. This approach is linked and justified in more general documents and partnership strategies with Africa, such as *The EU and Africa: Towards a Strategic Partnership* in 2005 and *The Africa-EU Strategic Partnership* in 2007.

In the most general sense, the EU's policy in the IPC is focused on a two-state solution to end the conflict. Even if the Israelis do not share the vision, the EU perceives itself as a neutral mediator and a diplomatic actor, who aims to assist in establishing various forms of dialogue between the core actors (i.e. Israel and Palestine, as well as the neighbouring Arab states). Apart from the diplomatic efforts regarding the conflict, the EU's approach is quite similar to the African cases in the sense that Brussels is heavily focused on state-building and helping to construct the Palestinian Authority, as well as being a 'development provider' and acting as a catalyst to encourage human rights and liberal democratic norms.

The normative nature of the EU's approach is striking in all cases. The explicit self-declared *raison-d'être* for the EU's foreign policy regarding conflict-affected areas is to promote human rights, democracy and liberal state-building. The EU's approach is at the same time dominated by various types of civilian and military missions under the aegis of the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP), such as police reform, army training missions, military intervention/stabilisation, and security sector reform.

Two of the military interventions that the EU carried out in Africa, the EUFOR Chad/CAR mission and Operation Artemis in the DRC, were designed both to stabilise the security conditions in the affected areas and to rapidly improve the humanitarian situation in a geographically confined space. Meanwhile, the first CSDP maritime deployment, the European Naval Force Somalia - Operation Atalanta, was only meant to tackle the piracy problem on the coast of Somalia without addressing the situation and the root causes of the problem in Somalia itself (which arguably include EU fishing practice). These three missions have been generally assessed as being reasonably successful in achieving their limited and rather specific goals. However, most other CSDP missions with a more long-term perspective and a broader mandate are arguably considered to be much more problematic, with very broad objectives but little or no lasting impact, as will be detailed below.

Critique of the existing policies

There are at least five general weaknesses of the EU's role as peace and security actor in regional conflicts.

1. *The EU's fragmented and ineffective institutional structure:* The EU's complex institutional set-up invariably results in overlapping and competing competencies, institutional divisions, personal agendas and turf wars. The overlapping of responsibilities and the rivalry between different European actors (including the member states) are then compounded by coordination weaknesses springing from structural issues related to the nature of the various mandates and diverse instruments of the EU's agencies, in particular the rivalry between the European Commission and the Council. In addition, there is a systematic lack of coordination between the administrative EU centres in Brussels (and the various European capitals) and the operational levels and EU representatives on the ground.

2. *"Ineffective" multilateralism:* The EU's official stance is to support a UN-led system and to contribute to a more "effective multilateralism". In most regional conflicts, however, there is a systematic tendency for external powers and donors involved in peacebuilding to focus on their own 'visibility' through implementing highly noticeable projects that promise immediate results rather than following a comprehensive and coordinated – and thus necessarily joint and long-term – strategy. Most donors focus on their specific projects and want to see

immediate results as a means to justify the expenditure of resources to their domestic constituencies. This is perhaps understandable. However, in a complex humanitarian emergency such as found in the DRC and the Sudan long-term goals are incredibly complicated. To achieve sudden results is highly unlikely. Yet it is in precisely such environments where coordinated and long-term approaches are most needed.

3. Failure to deal with regional dimensions of the conflict. Officially, the EU acknowledges the cross-border dimensions of conflicts and Brussels has indeed some coordination mechanisms at hand for managing these—for example through appointing special representatives for specific regions. In reality however, the EU's policies and governance strategies remain fundamentally state-based, and the EU prefers working with governments bilaterally (and in some cases not even the most relevant ones), focusing on state-building and necessarily promoting national, rather than regional, approaches. Obviously, it is necessary to work with individual state governments, but it is vital to also have a co-ordinated and credible regional strategy (even if there are seldom any credible regional counterparts for the EU to deal with). To compound the problems further, the EU's weakness to acknowledge and deal with regional conflict dimensions in a regional manner is further exacerbated by the weaknesses of the EU's institutional machinery, as outlined above.

4. Poor conflict analysis. A general feature of the regional conflicts assessed here is that the EU usually lacks a comprehensive conflict analysis before engaging in any

conflict mitigation. As an example, the deployment of the EUFOR Chad/CAR mission was initiated without sufficiently discussing the political and security situation on the ground. The result was that the EU was predominantly perceived as not being impartial but instead was following French-driven policies and siding with the two incumbent regimes in Chad and CAR. Likewise, many EU actions in the Middle East are not understood by the different conflicting parties and are also seen as being biased towards one or other of the protagonists. The lack of poor preparatory work often results in a lack of knowledge on how to define successful strategies as well as what are the likely consequences of an external intervention and involvement on the ground. In contrast, there tends to be one-size-fits all strategy, which is poorly adapted to the present specific contexts. The most important goal for the EU appears to be seen to be 'doing something' and showing a presence instead of ensuring real and lasting achievements on the ground. This was candidly lamented by one EU representative in one regional conflict who was interviewed and who stated that 'I do not know what I am doing here' and went on to say that 'the EU's involvement is purely political'.

5. A too normative approach. The EU has often lacked the flexibility that is at times needed to mediate and resolve conflicts because of overemphasizing the respect of a particular set of norms. This normative stance has prevented the EU from engaging in a collaborative way with some of the key actors in the conflict, which has consequently reduced the effectiveness of the EU's actions. This was clearly visible

in the case of the IPC where the EU failed to engage with Hamas since it considered it as a terrorist organisation. In the case of Sudan, the EU's insistence that President Al-Bashir and other high profile Sudanese officials be indicted and tried by the ICC put it at loggerhead with the government in Khartoum and even jeopardized the ongoing peace process. Strong norms are not necessarily problematic by themselves. However, the EU's normative approach is counterproductive because its double-standard, because it tends to be political (even rhetorical) instead of genuinely normative, and because of the lack of proper conflict analysis.

Policy Recommendation

1. *Improve the EU's institutional machinery:* The EU will never become an important global peace and security actor without improving its institutional machinery. The new European External Action Service and further institutional changes following the Lisbon Treaty are likely to solve some of the problems and institutional turf wars but the current changes will not be sufficient. More radical changes need to be implemented in order to reduce internal tensions. There is a great need to develop the division of labour between the different European institutions, especially regarding the traditional field of development cooperation and security policies, which are particularly problematic. At the same time, the EU must find a way to avoid national interests of member states disrupting and undermining the EU's collective efforts. In Africa, this invariably plays out with reference to colonial legacies and, perhaps, neo-colonial aspirations.

2. *Towards effective multilateralism:* The EU has to enrich the empty words behind effective multilateralism with content and through improving the coordination and cooperation with the United Nations and other actors involved in the conflicts. Too often, the EU acts alone and unilaterally. This may be explained by the EU's own interest in retaining full control over their projects and/or wishing to maintain international 'visibility' as an engaged global actor. However, effective multilateralism requires leadership. Here, the EU must be prepared to lead and invest resources to take on such role, but at the same time be prepared to be part of coordination and multilateralism in initiatives initiated by non-EU actors.

3. *Better conflict analysis and learning:* The EU has to invest more resources to first of all understand the context of the conflicts in which it intervenes. This implies that the various conflictual causes, as well as the potential factors contributing to peace, have to be identified. In addition, the EU has to determine the key actors that can influence the course of the conflict in order to engage with them. Although the EU has been active in various regional conflicts during the last decade, there seems to be little systematic evaluation of what was done, how and why, and what has succeeded and what has not.

4. *From presence and visibility towards credibility and durable peace:* The EU has to transform the political will of being 'present' into actual achievements through increasing both the resources as well as bolstering its effectiveness. This is particularly relevant regarding the various CSDP missions so far, which have been simply too weak and underfinanced to

have any real impact. Some observers have claimed that several of the EU's interventions are not carried out to help civilians in conflicts or to achieve lasting impact on the ground, but rather to first and foremost promote the EU's identity and visibility as a security actor: This severely undermines the credibility of the EU as a global peace and security actor and is regrettable. It needs to change.

