

Expert Discussion 3 – Inter-institutional cooperation and coherence

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This expert discussion featured perspectives from development and humanitarian assistance (DG ECHO and DEVCO), civilian crisis management (CPCC) as well as military support (EUMS) – thereby touching on all cycles of conflict as well as short- and long-term instruments of intervention at the EU’s disposal.

While the panel addressed multiple perspectives, and used many examples to illustrate respective actions and coordination challenges, speakers stressed several common points. First, each crisis is unique – and it is the political parameters that count: hence, familiarity with conflict drivers and the socio-economic-political environment more broadly determines impact. Second, while institutional instruments are and should be kept separate, there is a need to explore more flexible uses of instruments as well as synergies between development and security instruments but also funding mechanisms. This is because of the increasing complexity of the international security environment and the changing nature of military operations – whose tasks increasingly combine civilian and military elements: train and equip, for instance, has a civilian element through the need for simultaneously strengthening accountability mechanisms, a task not usually accomplished by the military. Yet different organisational cultures between civilian and military instruments but also funding structures that are designed to keep the two spheres separate make coordination difficult. There is, then, a strong need to explore synergies, flexibility, and increase sensitivity to respective approaches that can be facilitated through familiarity with respective rules and procedures. The complexity of instruments, planning cycles and budgetary rules – but also of the security environment itself in which the EU operates – means that the comprehensive approach has to be adopted and implemented from the beginning and cannot be applied retroactively.

The discussion revealed several lessons for the planning and operational cycle of a CSDP mission as well as avenues for improvement when it comes to inter-institutional cooperation and coherence.

For all EU elements including CSDP missions, knowledge of what is on the ground is a key element for mission success. This is imperative for mission planning and later also conduct. Familiarity with the presence and approaches of other actors on the ground – be they international organisations or individual states including EU member states – facilitates synergies, prevents duplication but more fundamentally also permits the identification of mission tasks and scopes of mandates. But this also involves a familiarity with and sensitivity to potential and actual conflict drivers so as to avoid unintended consequences of one-sided aid and assistance: a good example here is Burma/Myanmar, where humanitarian aid to the Muslim minority had the potential to offend and provoke the Buddhist majority: simultaneously increasing development assistance served to prevent potential tensions arising from perceived one-sided assistance.

This shows that coordination is imperative also within Commission elements (in this case, humanitarian and development instruments), although the comprehensive approach is

much broader in scope. Engagement in Somalia, on the other hand, put humanitarian and military communities at odds when the green light was given to a military mission without sufficiently coordinating with the humanitarian side – resulting in loss of neutrality (and the authorities' demand that they leave the country) for some NGOs operating there. It also highlighted the fact that lines – but also sequencing – between humanitarian and stabilisation activities need to be kept separate to avoid sending mixed signals and invoke the sense that humanitarian actors are 'cleaning up' after the military. What is needed, at bottom, is further investment in a networked approach to emergency response but also all aspects of civilian and military crisis management tools.

Such examples, but also the more general lesson of sensitivity to host country conditions, put into focus also the challenge of conflict prevention. All speakers stressed that the many crises to which CSDP missions (and other EU instruments) react, such as Mali, the Central African Republic or South Sudan should have been foreseen. At the same time, there was agreement that the challenges of conflict prevention are multiple – ranging from the difficulty of garnering bureaucratic and financial support for the absence of something (in this case, conflict) to the fact that there are many countries that are conflict-prone and a relapse is in fact likely. Still, such lapses in prevention led one speaker in particular to raise the question of whether, given the constrained financial environment for civilian CSDP operations, improved prevention could have avoided the launch of numerous CSDP missions in 2012.

Therefore, it may pay dividends to revisit and invest in improved early warning and response structures; and early contact with other international actors on the ground is a key component for avoiding duplication and identifying synergies in crisis response. Civilian actors in particular need to get involved more quickly. Conflict analysis is the responsibility of several actors; the EU Delegations of course play a large role through their enhanced status and reporting structures – but so do other actors including regional organisations and member as well as third states. A greater investment in engagement with civil society would also go some way to increasing awareness of changing host country conditions as well as interlocutors outside of government.

The planning and conduct of CSDP missions and operations should draw on resources already in place, and include them in conceptualising mission objectives. The planned mission in Ukraine puts to the test a new approach that has included an inter-service field mission in preparation of future CSDP activities. Inter-institutional cooperation during CSDP missions is imperative particularly for coordination of mutual expertise, but also for finding creative ways to work together – for instance, from the humanitarian side, getting NGOs to adjust some of their activities so as to support other intervention aims can serve as flanking measures for other EU activities. Of course, coordination and flexibility also extends to the interaction between CSDP and Commission instruments: for instance, the cooperation between ATALANTA and the Commission in tackling the issue of detainees (that is, persuading neighbouring countries to accept detainees in exchange for EU assistance in prison reform) can serve as an example of successful inter-institutional cooperation to ensure sustainability of a CSDP option.

The discussion also focused on how to end missions: for the sustainability of mission activities it is important that missions have an end-state in mind, and that CSDP activities are conceptualised comprehensively – that is, across their expected life cycles. Ending or transitioning missions is a relatively new topic but signals the need for a more comprehensive approach to mission planning and follow-up activities to make CSDP missions and operations sustainable; but more fundamentally the need for formulating clear objectives for missions and operations.

The discussion following the formal presentations reviewed some of the issues raised by the speakers – in particular conflict prevention – but also centred on three additional issues: training, the role of third actors, and the link between trade and security. Training as a way to enhance familiarisation of respective approaches emerged as the key recommendation that arose from the discussion. Participants pointed out that the ESDC curriculum includes sessions on development, and raised the question of whether in turn the development community received similar training for their activities. This was identified as an area in which to invest further, and the participation in joint exercises was also highlighted as a positive example and something that could be taken forward in the future. Thinking both ways – that is, CSDP actors taking the needs of development actors into account but also vice versa – was highlighted as a key lesson and something that could relatively easily be implemented and expanded.

When it comes to the role of others, and working with others – be it regional security providers such as the African Union (AU) or other bilateral partners – participants agreed that this needs further thought and exploration. While the expert discussion focused on intra-EU coordination which, it was rightly pointed out, needs further elaboration, concerns were raised that the exclusive focus on internal coordination deflects from the need to engage with partners, particularly when a handover of an EU activity to such partners is foreseen or an EU activity involves working with or strengthening the capacity of an individual partner.

Finally, there was broad agreement that trade can contribute to conflict resolution and has an impact on security and development – but that this is one area that is normally not part of security-related discussions. Still, participants highlighted and for the most part supported the position of trade negotiators that the trade agenda should be kept free from conflict and development issues as trade negotiations are complex enough as it is.