

A reappraisal of CSDP missions and operations

Dr Patryk Pawlak (EUISS)

Selling power: The EU Assistance Mission in Ukraine, the Training Mission in Mali, and the Capacity Building Mission in the Sahel are among the most recent additions to over 30 missions and operations launched by the EU since the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) began to materialise some 12 years ago. Even though CSDP has become one of the Union's key instruments for dealing with instability or post-conflict environments, its added value has been put into question. The adoption of the Comprehensive Approach as a guiding paradigm, as well as the increasing attention paid to outcomes, civil-military coordination, and cooperation with third actors, illustrate EU attempts to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of CSDP. Conceived to defend the EU's values and interests worldwide, is it still a product that adequately projects the Union's power?

Product design: CSDP is constantly evolving. This stems partly from a highly unpredictable and unstable global environment which often requires simultaneous planning, design and implementation. For instance, the deployment of the military operation in the Central African Republic occurred while the EU was still digesting lessons from its missions in other parts of the world. Consequently, the CSDP's 'line of production' needs to continually adapt in order to deliver tailor-made products, and in this regard the EU has been fairly successful. The progress achieved to date on transition strategies, mission funding and impact assessments provides further grounds for optimism.

Supply chain: A commitment by member states to contribute to CSDP missions and operations is a precondition for its success. It is not certain, however, if the ambition of turning CSDP into the member states' instrument of choice will ever become a reality – and there is no unanimity on whether such an outcome is welcome in the first place. Indeed, past experiences have demonstrated that member states do not use CSDP in a consistent manner. The lack of equal levels of commitment from all EU member states, in turn, strengthens the argument of those who claim that, rather than being a manifestation of solidarity among member states, CSDP has become an instrument through which members can avoid taking full political responsibility for missions with uncertain outcomes.

Market research: It is almost impossible to deliver the right product without thorough market research. Any failure to bring member states together around a clearly defined and shared cause results in the emergence of coalitions of the willing or unilateral operations as an alternative to CSDP missions and operations. Engaging in a strategic debate about the Union's security environment and challenges is therefore a precondition for making CSDP useful and attractive. The shift towards the adoption of regional strategies – an effort to streamline the Union's actions – has only partly remedied the situation. There is still a certain sense of urgency for the EU to define what it wants to be responsible for – and whether and when it wishes to defend its interests alone or in cooperation with others.

Marketing strategy: The complexity of ongoing security challenges imposes serious limitations on the use of CSDP and, consequently, on how it is perceived by other actors. The Comprehensive Approach relies on the combination of different elements when designing the most effective response. However, there is a fear among policymakers that reliance on this methodology may dilute the response. In addition, if CSDP is *not* the only answer, the use of other instruments needs to be a credible alternative. This implies that civilian expertise should be available and that shared objectives in other policy areas should take security concerns into consideration: for instance, the elements of crisis prevention and response could be better integrated in the EU's development

policy. The credibility of CSDP missions and operations within the EU's toolbox is one its biggest advantages: both the scope of mission mandates and existence of a broad agreement among member states show that there is much potential for EU action short of fighting wars.

Sealing deals: The launch of new missions and operations – seven in the past two years – despite the economic crisis and institutional transition in the EU demonstrates that member states still view CSDP as an important tool. The progress achieved to date and the ambition that guides developments in this area leave room for optimism. Yet a number of challenges still need to be addressed:

- More flexibility to navigate self-imposed limitations, like those resulting from mission mandates;
- More effectiveness in streamlining structures and measuring the impact of missions;
- Better use of time to reduce the gap between the decision on and the launch of a mission;
- Higher visibility to counter the lack of knowledge about CSDP achievements.

As the customisation of products and services is a new trend, the EU has a unique opportunity to benefit from first-mover advantage on the global marketplace of security providers. In order to project EU power more effectively, member states need to fully embrace flexibility and comprehensiveness – and see them as values in their own right, not a handicap.