



Civilian CSDP: what next?

by Thierry Tardy

Since its inception, the EU's Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) has developed through two parallel processes – military and civilian – that have the same goal but are run separately and differ significantly on some key characteristics. The attempts to revitalise CSDP that started with the European Council in December 2013 and led to the release in June 2016 of the EU Global Strategy (EUGS) have tended to focus on the military aspects of policy. In the current security environment, civilian CSDP nevertheless remains an essential instrument of the EU toolbox, and if properly designed, used, and publicised, can be of strategic importance.

The virtues of civilian CSDP

Most security challenges that the EU and its member states are facing call for some sort of civilian response. On the EU's periphery, there is an urgent need to develop areas such as the rule of law, good governance, or security sector reform in states characterised by their fragility and from which threats to Europe can emanate.

The EU currently runs 10 civilian missions, most of which are about capacity-building and strengthening the rule of law in third states. Almost all of them provide support in the fields

of security sector reform (SSR) and good governance, while some deal with the fight against organised crime, counter-terrorism and border management (e.g. EULEX Kosovo, EUPOL Afghanistan, EUCAP Sahel Niger, EUBAM Rafah), anti-piracy and maritime capacity (EUCAP Nestor), or the management of illegal migration (EUCAP Sahel Niger and EUCAP Sahel Mali). This is done through monitoring, mentoring and advising (MMA), as well as training and, in some cases, the provision of equipment. EULEX Kosovo is the only mission with executive powers, and is also the largest in terms of number of personnel. On average though, CSDP civilian missions are relatively small in size, with around 100-120 EU and local staff combined. Civilian CSDP is funded through the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) budget (approximately €250 million was spent in 2015 on CSDP from a total CFSP budget of €320 million), as well as directly through the member states via the secondment of personnel.

Civilian CSDP missions display at least two sets of comparative advantages, in a field where other actors – *inter alia* the European Commission and the United Nations, as well as increasingly Justice and Home Affairs (JHA) agencies – are also active.



First, they are flexible, i.e. they can be shaped in accordance with changing needs, embrace a wide spectrum of activities in various formats, and can theoretically be deployed relatively quickly. Second, civilian missions are instruments in the hands of member states, which grants them political clout and credibility *vis-à-vis* recipient countries that other instruments may not enjoy. The deployment of active service personnel is essential in this respect. The type of control and strategic direction exerted both by the Political and Security Committee (PSC) and Committee for Civilian Aspects of Crisis Management (CivCom) over the missions also reinforces the notion of member state ownership.

This said, civilian missions are also confronted with a series of challenges that are not new but are being revisited in light of the implementation of the EUGS. There are three main strands of debate on the subject: the *strategic vision* of the role of civilian CSDP; the *relevance* of civilian missions in the current security environment; and more operational questions related to *force generation* and *capability development*.

What vision?

The speed of the evolution of the security environment and the magnitude of the needs pose a number of challenges to civilian crisis management. As is the case for any security instrument, civilian CSDP has to build up its long-term relevance in an era characterised by the multifaceted nature of threats, the intertwining of internal and external security, and the interdependence between security and development.

What, in this context, should be the level of ambition? How should civilian CSDP evolve so as to contribute to the ‘security of our Union’, the top priority of the EUGS? If tomorrow’s security challenges are linked to terrorism and radicalisation, transnational organised crime and the continuous flow of illegal migrants to Europe, then what kind of institutional structures, capabilities, funding and political oversight mechanisms are required in the next 10-15 years?

The debate surrounding the strategic objectives – and associated expectations – that civilian CSDP

is to serve is key to understanding the more operational questions. So far, with the exception of EULEX Kosovo, civilian missions have been mainly about providing limited support to third states, and even if that support sometimes targets the highest level of recipient countries’ political and administrative systems, missions have fallen short of producing any strategic impact. Is this kind of limited support the level of ambition for future civilian CSDP, or shall it aim at more strategic outcomes and impacts – and, if so, with what kind of capabilities?

The current level of civilian CSDP deployment is at 2,500 personnel in ten different places, spread out over Europe, Africa, the Middle East and Central Asia. How likely is it that these numbers will suffice to meet the future challenges and what is a realistic quantitative objective? Recent debates tend to dismiss reflections on numbers in favour of the identification of tasks and capabilities to fulfil those tasks (personnel, training requirements, equipment, guidelines, etc.). Yet a level of ambition also determines to some extent the type of required capabilities in quantitative terms, as well as the expected duration of commitments. Given the nature of the security environment on the EU’s periphery, would it not be useful to foresee a significant increase of needs for civilian CSDP, if not an increase in numbers of people to be deployed? If so, will the EU deploy

more people in smaller groups so as to be reactive and focused, or shall it also contemplate larger missions to maximise impact in key countries?

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Second, how will the EU and its member states articulate civilian CSDP with other

actors of crisis management, be they the military, the European Commission, the EU Delegations, the JHA agencies, or non-EU actors? The debate is political insofar as it deals with the type of state control to be exerted in various crisis management activities, but it also has an operational dimension as it touches upon the division of tasks among entities with different capabilities and expertise. At best, civilian CSDP is one component of a much broader response that can be EU-led or not. Will civilian CSDP manage to assert its added-value so that it finds its place in the ever-changing crisis management architecture and is not threatened by actors/competitors that display other comparative advantages? Are

member states willing to maintain the specificity of civilian CSDP and therefore provide the resources for it?

Third, the debate touches upon the very nature of CSDP, in particular how much it should be about urgently responding to the *immediate* effects of an ongoing crisis or whether it should also address the longer-term causes or consequences of a given problem. In practice, civilian CSDP has largely developed as a long-term policy that deals in part with certain structural issues (SSR, for example), and this broad conception is likely to remain. Yet, while these long-term activities contribute to stabilisation or state-building, they have little to do with ‘crisis management’, which is what CSDP is fundamentally supposed to be about. The debate also concerns the extent to which CSDP should embrace a more central conflict prevention agenda, which would in some cases imply a long term and multifaceted commitment which is not necessarily in tune with the notion of ‘crisis management’. If CSDP embraces all types of responses, then the question arises of what this implies in terms of overall coherence, but also in terms of missions, capabilities, and interaction with other actors.

What relevance?

Strategic debates on the purpose of civilian CSDP lead to equally important questions on the degree of relevance of the current missions. The first issue is about the impact of civilian missions, as well as how to measure it. Beyond methodological obstacles relating to quantitative versus qualitative indicators, most observers would agree that civilian missions face many difficulties in implementing their mandates and obtaining local buy-in for their activities.

Second, how adapted are CSDP missions to threats such as terrorism, illegal migration, hybrid threats or cybercrime that by nature challenge traditional security actors? The state-centric approach that characterises CSDP makes it difficult to provide responses to very specific needs that may not be the exclusive prerogatives of the state apparatus. The nexus between internal and external security also challenges CSDP in its ability – through activities that take place

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outside of the EU – to contribute to the ‘security of our Union’. The internal-external nexus calls for a more self-centred EU approach, i.e. CSDP missions more clearly tailored to issues that have a direct impact on the EU’s own security. This is not entirely new as most missions in the Western Balkans did make the connection between the

security of the Union and the security of third states. More recently, the adaptation of the mandate of EUCAP Sahel Niger to include migration-related tasks, or ongoing thinking about the role of CSDP in response to mass migration provide examples of this

evolution. If the link between CSDP missions – taking place outside the Union – and internal security becomes more central, then it is the way missions are being planned and manned that needs to be revisited, in particular in connection with JHA agencies or national ministries and their associated expertise.

Most importantly, while there have been calls for the EU to act in a more interest-driven manner, a more EU-centric security agenda is also likely to undermine local buy-in as it differs from the host country’s own threat perceptions. In Africa, in particular, CSDP missions that would focus on migration would not necessarily be perceived as the most appropriate nor urgent response to local needs. And counter-terrorism could draw attention at the expense of equally destabilising factors on the ground that are of secondary importance for the EU. The challenge is therefore to strike the right balance between serving the EU’s own security agenda and meeting the needs of the third states where it intervenes.

In this context, the May 2015 Foreign Affairs Council noted the ‘significant [EU] engagement in civilian CSDP missions and the broad range of tasks that they are increasingly called upon to fulfil’, before calling for ‘revisiting the priority areas which were endorsed by the European Council in Feira’ in 2000 (‘police’, the ‘rule of law’, ‘civil administration’ and ‘civil protection’). Police and the rule of law still feature prominently in CSDP missions, but civil administration and civil protection have never been central aspects.

In fact, such work did start some years ago in the framework of the 2012 Civilian Capability

Development Plan (CCDP), as well as within missions. This led to the identification of ‘generic civilian CSDP tasks’ on the basis of which a ‘Requirements List’ of capabilities needed is being elaborated (to be compared with what is available so as to identify possible shortfalls). The Implementation Plan on Security and Defence that will follow the EUGS is supposed to further identify the level of ambition of member states and provide clarification on what civilian CSDP should be about and how it can be strengthened, both at the political level and in operational terms (force generation, training, deployment, etc.).

However, civilian CSDP by and large gets little attention from within the EU, as well as from the member states. Only a few member states have developed a genuine interest in and expertise on the topic, while the number of seconded staff in CSDP civilian missions is a third of the total (873 of 2,566 as of June 2016).

The EUGS talks about civilian missions as ‘a trademark of CSDP’ and implicitly refers to them when talking about capacity-building and resilience, but they are not prominent in the document and the extent to which they will benefit from the current momentum remains to be seen.

What resources?

The third strand of the debate dwells on some existing operational hurdles to a more effective civilian CSDP. The EUGS calls for the further development of civilian CSDP by ‘encouraging force generation, speeding up deployment, and providing adequate training based on EU-wide curricula’. It also asks for the streamlining of the institutional structure, in relation to military missions and synergies to be sought between the civilian and the military planning structures and processes.

Although theoretically quick, the deployment of civilian missions has in reality often been difficult and slow, principally due to shortfalls in human resources and in the EU’s mission support and logistical capacities.

Human resources constitute the bulk of civilian capabilities, and these come mainly from the member states. The dispersion of staff manning civilian missions among various national ministries (defence, interior, justice) makes the coordination and centralisation of human resources management difficult. Issues pertaining to the availability of experts, the benefits of serving in

civilian missions for individual career paths and the safety of the various postings have often impacted negatively on recruitment. All attempts to establish rosters of experts have failed, to the extent that the idea of pools – that some countries still manage to maintain on a national basis – is often dismissed outright in debates on rapid deployment. Most importantly, member states have proven reluctant to relinquish control over the missions and their own personnel, thus limiting the number of contracted personnel – about a third of international staff and less than 20 percent of the total staff – in CSDP missions (in stark contrast with Commission practices).

Yet the outsourcing of some of the tasks to contracted staff carries merits that will have to be considered sooner or later. There is also an issue about the quality of the expertise and how to develop and sustain it, in capitals, in Brussels, within missions and in EU Delegations. The efforts made by the European Security and Defence College (ESDC) in this respect over the last ten years have helped in terms of building up a wide range civilian expertise, setting training standards, and fostering civil-military relations.

Finally, more than its military counterpart, civilian CSDP lacks visibility as a crisis management activity within the EU institutions, member states and a broader audience (public, think tanks, media, etc.). Discussions are ongoing about the need to acquire a capacity for strategic communication that exists in individual missions but is lacking at an EU level. Strategic communication is a key element of the EUGS where it is presented as a way to ‘connect EU foreign policy with citizens and better communicate it to our partners’. This will become all the more important as the level of ambition is high, and the quest for legitimacy is paramount.

Civilian CSDP missions have been downsized in 2016 (largely due to cuts in EULEX Kosovo and EUPOL Afghanistan), and a significant share of the allocated budget has gone unspent. This is paradoxically happening at a time when security needs are growing – with threats largely of a non-military nature. These changes call for renewed investment in civilian CSDP so that it can find its place in the evolving global crisis management architecture and therefore better serve EU interests.

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