European Union Institute for Security Studies

Expert Discussion 2 – Assessing comprehensive effectiveness and impact

Rapporteur: Thierry Tardy, EUISS

This session addressed the issue of assessing the effectiveness and impact of CSDP military operations. Three case studies were analysed: EUTM Mali, EUTM Somalia and EUSEC DRC. A field perspective largely prevailed in the discussion, with very little input from the Brussels-based institutions. The debates were focused on two themes: first, the reality of the comprehensive approach on the ground, and second the measurement of impact and the related methodological and political challenges.

As far as the comprehensive approach is concerned, one of the main conclusions of the discussion was a general uneasiness *vis-à-vis* the overall coherence of CSDP policies.

The necessity to develop a comprehensive approach was widely acknowledged, with calls for CSDP operations to be better embedded in broader security policies and political processes or for military training to be a building block of security sector reform and good governance programmes. Most importantly, military operations are to be instruments of a strategy that must be wide-ranging and multi-sectoral.

This is where the security-development nexus comes in, as a response to the inherent limitations of military activities in the absence of parallel economic progress. At the EU level, the comprehensive approach also enhances efficiency insofar as it aims at preventing unnecessary duplication of efforts and may even be a way of facilitating access to financial resources.

These various aspects were indications of the necessity to move comprehensiveness forward and to ensure compatibility between military operations and broader EU activities.

However, the discussion also revealed a general perception of a lack of strategic guidance from the EU political level: such guidance is provided neither by the regional strategies nor by specific country-level strategic input. Military operations may have clear operational objectives, yet the way those objectives fit into the EU's broader aim in the country or region (cross-agencies' objectives, entry and exit strategy, etc.) is often difficult to deduce at the field level.

The existence of the comprehensive approach is partly dependent on how it is perceived by the actors that are supposed to implement it. Often such perceptions are less positive at mission level than what the narrative may suggest at headquarters' level. This analysis does not take account of progress over time in the way coordination or coherence are being promoted (despite shortcomings, is the EU delivering on its crisis management mandate in a more coherent manner than five years ago?). It is rather a snapshot of the perceived reality of the comprehensive approach that reveals a somewhat pessimistic or at least sceptical mindset in the military community.

In the field, difficult relations may often be observed between various EU actors who are characterised by different planning processes, sources of funding and financial regulations, chains of command or reporting procedures. Equally importantly, the extent to which the EU member states coordinate their own policies with the EU could be improved. Member states may run programmes in countries that host CSDP operations but there is often little transparency regarding those activities and no systematic coordination with the EU Delegation, let alone the CSDP operation(s).

Within those missions, diverging agendas between member states eager to limit operational risks as well as financial expenses, and the priorities of the operation mandated to deliver a certain number of results with the required capabilities, are also a matter of concern. This reveals the gap between on the one hand mandate design and the level of expectations that it creates, and on the other hand actual member states' commitment in terms of mandate implementation.

Such difficulties are exacerbated by cumbersome financial regulations (e.g. the complexity and rigidity of the Athena mechanism), and the opacity of operation-related financial and administrative procedures which can be an irritant for the operation's leadership.

Finally, the comprehensive approach may also suffer from the lack of EU administrative and legal flexibility. For example, capacity-building in the military field would benefit from the possibility to equip the trained armed forces, which is not feasible under the current EU financial regulations.

The second issue discussed in the session was measuring the impact of CSDP military operations. Any lessons learned exercise must factor in the degree of effectiveness of operations, and how this is being assessed and then processed at various levels of mission planning and implementation. Measuring impact is difficult for methodological and political reasons and also requires dedicated personnel both at headquarters and field level. Overall, despite recent efforts the EU remains ill-equipped for the task.[1] In methodological terms, measuring impact (of training missions) must combine quantitative (number of people being trained) and qualitative (skills being acquired) indicators through a three-level output-outcome-impact analysis. The number of people trained is the output of the training; better skilled personnel is the outcome; while the impact relates to the improved performance of those trained personnel as a result of being more skilled. For the time being, the EU focuses more on a quantitative assessment (output) than on the outcome or impact. No instrument of systematic outcome or impact measurement is in place; most of the analysis in this respect results from the subjective and 'snapshot' assessment by the operation leadership.

The output-outcome-impact trilogy also relates to what is to be measured. The prevailing approach focuses on mandate implementation (narrow approach) rather than on the medium or long-term effect of the operation on sustainable peace in the country (broad approach). Again, this has to do with the viability of the measurement criteria (how to assess if an operation has indeed prevented a country from becoming a failed state?). But there is also a political dimension, as ultimately the choice of what is to be measured says

[1] The session did not discuss the CMPD-led Strategic Reviews and their role in assessing the effectiveness of operations and the overall coherence of EU actions, nor the CMPD-led CSDP Lessons Report process.

a lot about the criteria of success and how success will be communicated to various constituencies (local actors, EU member states' parliaments and public opinion, etc.). In the case of training and capacity-building operations, declaring success will be facilitated by a choice of quantitative indicators rather than benchmarks defined in terms of long-term, ill-defined or simply too ambitious objectives.

Finally, impact measurement is complicated by the sensitivity of the issue. First, measuring the effectiveness of an activity entails the risk of acknowledging failure if the evaluation is negative, and this is not part of the EU's (nor of any other crisis management body's) institutional culture.

Second, there is a field-headquarters dimension to this debate, as operations' staff may feel reluctant to communicate to their hierarchies on deficiencies in the operations' mandates or within the missions themselves. This is the case both for fear of being seen as responsible for the failure and because of the tension between the possible blunt nature of bottom-up feedback and the prevailing HQ diplomatic and consensual culture.

Overall, the culture of impact measurement is not well-developed within the EU, and dedicated human resources are often missing. Benchmarks have been designed and regular reporting on these benchmarks (in coordination with the host government) exists at mission-level (through the Six-Monthly Reports presented by the Heads of Mission), partly as a result of a growing awareness that impact measurement is needed. Yet, the EU is still in the early stages of mainstreaming impact measurement in its CSDP operations and a systematic approach still needs to be established in terms of methodology and instruments, reporting (bottom-up) and feedback processing (within the EEAS and back to the operation).

In this context, a few recommendations were made in the session on how to improve the comprehensive approach, such as: better coordination between Brussels and the field for operations where there is no OHQ; establishment of a single EU peace and security planning structure (involving both the EEAS and the Commission); harmonisation of EU budget mechanisms and sources of funding (military through common costs and 'costs lie where they fall', and civilian through the CFSP budget); better coordination of member states' policies with the EU wherever they operate simultaneously with a CSDP operation; an increased role for the EU Delegation as the focus point of all EU activities at country level; and the necessity of long-term commitments (which might be the sign of the weak impact of ongoing missions and of the non-sustainable character of their achievements).