



# ELEVATING THE EU'S ADDED VALUE AS A SECURITY PROVIDER

## STRENGTHENING THE UNION'S PEACEBUILDING CAPABILITIES

### ABSTRACT

Current debates about European strategic autonomy have tended to focus on narrow conceptions of autonomy, where the concept is solely understood in military and defence terms. Envisioned in such a way, strategic autonomy equates to a 'fuite en avant' which fails to resolve existing shortcomings in EU external action. This brief argues that it is in the areas of conflict prevention, mediation, post-conflict peacebuilding and resilience-building where the real EU's strengths lie and that any vision of strategic autonomy should take this as the starting point. Otherwise, this debate only risks increasing the exiting gap between the Union's ambition as an international security actor and its practice. The policy brief identifies four distinctive areas where the EU's added value lies, namely, in relation to its integrated approach; the emphasis on multilateralism; its relative adaptability and flexibility; and a normative approach which has privileged non-coercive means and increasingly bottom-up approaches to conflict prevention and resolution. The purpose of this brief is to identify the strengths of the EU in these areas, but also shortcomings so that current debates about strategic autonomy can be geared to addressing these problems. Specifically, the brief argues that the EU and its member states should focus on strengthening the EU's engagement in key areas, improving co-ordination within the EU but also with other actors, and ensuring buy-in from member states by promoting inclusivity, but also differentiation within this policy area. Placing the need to strengthen the Union's peacebuilding capabilities at the centre of the debate could thus help shift the existing narrative towards one that is more sensitive to the comparative advantages of the EU as an international security provider.



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## 1. Introduction

The debate about how to improve the EU's strategic autonomy has largely focused to date on the need to enhance the security and defence capabilities of the Union, with the fiasco of the Afghanistan withdrawal and the AUKUS pact adding urgency to the matter. In a context of increasing geopolitical competition, key concerns have revolved around the protection of Europe and the need for the EU to defend itself by improving capabilities. Both detractors and supporters of strategic autonomy have made use of the concept to debate the merits of a strong transatlantic relationship/dependence. Yet not enough attention has been paid to broader considerations regarding the links between strategic autonomy and the EU's normative commitment to promote peace and security beyond its borders.<sup>1</sup> Narrowly conceived, debates on strategic autonomy equate to a 'fuite en avant'<sup>2</sup> which fails to resolve existing shortcomings of EU external action. This brief argues that it is in the areas of conflict prevention, mediation, post-conflict peacebuilding and resilience-building where the EU's real strengths lie and that any vision of strategic autonomy should take this as a starting point. Otherwise, this debate only risks increasing the existing gap between the Union's

ambition as an international security actor and its practice.

Despite the positive contribution the EU has made in areas of prevention, mediation and peacebuilding,<sup>3</sup> current trends suggest that the EU and its member states have become increasingly inward-looking and interest-driven. On the one hand, and notwithstanding the rhetoric contained in the EU Global Strategy (EUGS) of 2016,<sup>4</sup> total personnel deployed by member states in Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) operations and missions have steadily declined in recent years.<sup>5</sup> On the other hand, where missions and operations have been deployed, mandates have become more focused on pursuing EU interests (such as counter-terrorism and migration-related tasks). These developments put at risk the added value and contribution of the EU to addressing conflicts and crises worldwide. The pursuit of strategic autonomy might exacerbate these trends if the 'protection of Europe' becomes the only driving goal.<sup>6</sup>

Crucially, this brief does not argue that the Union should not improve its military capabilities or become more forceful when defending its

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1 But see T. Palm, 'Normative power and EU strategic autonomy', in M. Foulon and J. Thompson, *The Future of European Strategy in a Changing Geopolitical Environment: Challenges and Prospects*, The Hague Centre for Strategic Studies, August 2021.

2 Literally translated as 'flight forward', this term usually refers to an unwise move that does not resolve pre-existing problems and might even create new ones.

3 The brief focuses on the following areas: prevention, mediation, resilience building, and the civilian dimension of the CSDP. Other issues such as democratisation or institution-building (for instance, in the context of the EU's enlargement and European Neighbourhood Policies) are not considered here.

4 High Representative, 'Shared vision, common action: A stronger Europe. A global strategy for the European Union's Foreign and Security Policy', Brussels, 26 June 2016.

5 Military personnel deployed in CSDP missions has gone from 3,394 troops in 2016 to 2,781 troops in 2021 (EU-ISS, *EUISS Yearbook of European Security*, 2017; D. Fiott (ed.), *EUISS Yearbook of European Security* (Paris: EU-ISS, 2021).

6 R. Youngs, 'The EU's Strategic Autonomy Trap', Carnegie Europe, 8 March 2021.

interests at the international level, rather than this should not be done by foregoing its civilian contribution to international security. Such a move would not only undermine the distinctive role the bloc plays, but also its identity as a normative actor committed to the promotion of norms and values beyond its borders. This is not inevitable: placing the need to strengthen the Union's peacebuilding capabilities at the centre of the debate could help shift the existing narrative towards one that is more sensitive to the comparative advantages of the EU as an international security provider.

The policy brief begins by identifying where the EU's added value lies, namely, in relation to its integrated approach, the emphasis on multilateralism, flexibility, and bottom-up

approaches to conflict prevention and resolution. It assesses the role of the EU in international conflicts and crises with a view to distilling some of the distinctive features of the EU as a security provider and how strategic autonomy might elevate such a role. In the second part, it is argued that for this to happen, the EU and its member states should focus on identifying key areas of engagement, improving co-ordination, and ensuring buy-in from member states. In sum, while acknowledging the potential risks linked to the pursuit of strategic autonomy at the EU level, especially where strategic autonomy is exclusively defined in military terms, the current debate should provide a valuable opportunity to improve the EU's overall contribution to international peace and security.

## 2. The EU's added value as an international security provider

The road towards establishing the EU as a security provider has been a bumpy one, with missed opportunities during the Yugoslav wars of the 1990s being a case in point. Yet the launch of the European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP) in 1999 and the activism of the EU in the early 2000s raised expectations about the EU's role and its ability to fulfil the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) objectives of preserving peace and strengthening international security (Article 21, TEU). At the Feira Council (2000), EU member states pledged to provide a minimum of 5,000 police officers, with 1,000 deployable in 30 days, as well as experts in the areas of rule of law and civilian administration. Between 2003 and 2011, the EU managed to deploy 24 CSDP operations, including seven

military operations and 17 civilian missions.<sup>7</sup> Ten years later, however, progress had slowed down, with no new operations launched between 2017 and 2020, and with member states showing little commitment to becoming involved in new conflicts or crises around the globe. This sorry state contrasts with some of the rhetoric contained in policy documents such as the EUGS<sup>8</sup> and recent developments, including the establishment of a new EU military headquarters (the Military Planning and Conduct Capability) or the launch of initiatives to support capability development in the defence area – the European Defence Fund and Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO)<sup>9</sup>. When it comes to the EU's role as a security provider there seems to be an increasing gap between its ambitions and current practice.

7 See G. Grevi, D. Helly and D. Keohane (eds), *European Security and Defence Policy: the first 10 years (1999-2009)* (Paris: EU-ISS, 2009).

8 High Representative, *op cit.*

9 On military capabilities, see Biscop, Sven (2022). 'Strategic Autonomy: not without integration' *Foundation for European Progressive Studies*.



This is unfortunate, because the EU has clearly demonstrated it can add value in the area of international security through its involvement in conflicts and crises. Specifically, the EU's strengths lie in a) its ability to deploy an integrated approach; b) its commitment to multilateralism and developing partnerships with different actors and at different levels; c) its relative adaptability and flexibility to address new security threats and challenges; and d) a normative approach which has privileged non-coercive means and increasingly bottom-up approaches to conflict prevention and peacebuilding. To clarify, each of these features should be seen as an area of strength, but it does not mean that the EU is the only actor that has exhibited such traits or ambitions. However, taken together, these four elements have contributed to establishing a unique identity for the EU as a security provider. It also does not mean that EU interventions have been without problems or difficulties, especially when it comes to implementation on the ground.<sup>10</sup> The purpose of this brief is to identify strengths, but also shortcomings so that current debates about strategic autonomy can be geared to addressing these problems.

### **a) An integrated approach to conflicts and crises**

The EU's ability to implement an integrated approach to conflicts and crises has become one of the trademarks of the EU, especially since the EUGS. The EU is able to deploy a wide range of tools and instruments such as development and humanitarian aid, trade agreements and civilian and military operations to address

the complex and interconnected root causes of conflict throughout the conflict life-cycle. The Western Balkans and the Sahel have become the main testing grounds of an integrated approach. The EU has not been the only actor claiming to develop an integrated or joined-up approach, but – with the exception perhaps of a global organisation such as the UN – the EU has displayed the most holistic and strategically driven approach to dealing with conflict and crises. For instance, NATO cannot rely on the civilian and economic instruments at the disposal of the EU; and while the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) adopts a broad approach to security, it is constrained by operational constraints when it comes to its implementation due to limited resources and heterogeneous membership.<sup>11</sup>

Both in Brussels – with the establishment of a new division in charge of the integrated approach – and on the ground, steps have been taken to ensure better complementarity and co-ordination among different EU instruments and actors, for example between civilian and military CSDP and between Council and Commission instruments.<sup>12</sup> However, issues remain regarding civilian-military co-ordination and the need for a more joined-up approach between CSDP initiatives and those dealing with internal security issues (for example, migration and counter-terrorism) which come under Justice and Home Affairs (JHA). On the ground, joined-up action, especially in terms of joint programming and implementation, can result in a more efficient use of resources, but also carries the risk of prioritising some objectives over others.

10 See, for instance, the final evaluation of the EU-CIVCAP project regarding key challenges and lessons learned in relation to EU conflict prevention and peacebuilding (A. E. Juncos, et al, EU-CIVCAP Policy Recommendations: Executive Summary of the Final Report including Guidance for Policymakers, 2018).

11 G. Faleg, 'The EU: from comprehensive to integrated approach', *Global Affairs*, 4: 2-3 (2018): 171-83.

12 See EEAS and European Commission, 'The EU integrated approach to external conflicts and crises', EEAS/COM(2017)8, 2 June 2017.

For example, in the Sahel, it has been argued that the EU's integrated approach has meant an increasing focus on security objectives through building the capacity of state security forces, while neglecting other governance issues and long-term approaches to addressing the root causes of conflict.<sup>13</sup>

### **b) A commitment to multilateralism and partnering in conflict and crises.**

Multilateralism and regionalism are in the DNA of the EU and have strongly informed the EU's approach to dealing with conflicts and crises.<sup>14</sup> When it comes to conflict prevention, mediation and peacebuilding, the EU has sought to build partnerships with others at the local, national, regional and international level. For instance, the EU has supported the involvement of civil society actors in mediation activities through financial and technical assistance in places like Colombia or Northern Ireland, as well as conducting its own direct mediation efforts (such as in the case of the EU-mediated dialogue between Serbia and Kosovo).<sup>15</sup> The pursuit of effective multilateralism is also evident in the making of CSDP missions, with contributions from third countries such as the US, Turkey, Morocco or Georgia, to name but a few, playing an important role. Effective multilateralism also takes place at the level of inter-organisational co-operation between the

EU and other international organisations, for instance with the UN (in Mali), the OSCE (in Ukraine) or NATO (in Kosovo).<sup>16</sup> It goes without saying that multilateralism also comes at a price in that it increases complexity and risks of overlaps, which have affected EU activities on the ground. For instance, the EU's co-operation with other actors like the OSCE or the UN in places like Armenia, Kosovo or Mali shows that despite largely complementary mandates, they still tend to work 'in parallel' and that potential synergies have not been exploited.<sup>17</sup>

Like the integrated approach, partnering with other actors to deal with conflict is not unique to the EU. Others, including international powers such as the US, China or Russia, have also sought to form alliances and partnerships to deal with security issues. However, the EU's support for multilateralism stands out. First, the EU has been more consistent in pursuing multilateral solutions than other actors such as the US, which has not hesitated to react unilaterally to international crises. Needless to say, the EU's commitment to multilateralism does not stem just from normative aspirations. It can also be explained by more instrumental concerns as multilateral solutions are more suited for an organisation such as the EU, which has less coercive means at its disposal. By contrast, the US can afford to act unilaterally or to rely on a 'multilateralism à la carte'.<sup>18</sup>

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13 B. Venturi, 'An EU Integrated Approach in the Sahel: The Role for Governance', IAI Papers 19/03 (February 2019).

14 See the recent joint communication on multilateralism: European Commission and High Representative of the Union, 'Strengthening the EU's Contribution to Rules-based Multilateralism', JOIN/2021/3 (17 February 2021).

15 A. Niemann, T. Haastrup and J. Bergmann, 'Motives, Roles, Effectiveness and the Future of the EU as an International Mediator', *International Negotiation* 23:2 (2018): 319–30.

16 For more on partnerships, please see Major, Claudia (2022). 'Never walk alone: How partnerships can increase the European Union's capacity to act', Foundation for European Progressive Studies.

17 H. Dijkstra, E. Mahr, P. Petrov, K. Đokić, K. and P. H. Zartsdahl, 'The EU's partners in crisis response and peacebuilding: Complementarities and synergies with the UN and OSCE', *Global Affairs* 4:2-3 (2018): 185-96

18 On the EU and US differing approaches to multilateralism, see M. Smith, 'The EU, the US and the crisis of contemporary multilateralism', *Journal of European Integration*, 40:5 (2019): 539-53.

The EU's advocacy for multilateralism and a rule-based international system also differs from the approaches championed by countries such as China or Russia which focus on multipolarity (a system where multiple powers and normative orders co-exist), while not hesitating to undermine the rules of the liberal international order. Yet the wider crisis affecting the multilateral order and internal factors such as the rise of illiberalism within the EU have also dented the EU's support for multilateralism, turning it at best into a 'qualified multilateralist'.<sup>19</sup>

### **c) Adaptability and flexibility to address new security threats and challenges**

Considering the overly technocratic and legalistic nature of the EU as an international organisation, its response to conflicts and crises has fared relatively well in terms of adaptability and flexibility. A case in point, civilian CSDP<sup>20</sup> has been able to adapt to new external threats and challenges over the years with the expansion of mandates from the original four 'Feira tasks' (police, rule of law, civil administration, and civil protection) to new tasks including cybersecurity or hybrid threats. These changes have stemmed from an awareness of the changing security context, as well as lessons learned during the implementation of missions. For instance, broadening the scope of EU civilian missions from narrowly focused police missions (such

as the EU Police Mission launched in Bosnia in 2003) towards more holistic ones focused on security-sector reform (for example the EU Advisory Mission in Ukraine) responded to criticisms about the need to address the rule-of-law dimension in the fight against criminality. While not an exclusive feature of the EU, as a relatively new security actor, learning by doing and learning from others has had a significant impact on the way the EU operates on the ground and its effectiveness and credibility.<sup>21</sup>

Compared to traditional security actors, in the case of the EU, flexibility can be aided by its multi-level nature, with member states supporting EU efforts on the ground. The example of Pekka Haavisto, Finland's foreign minister, acting as an EU Envoy in Ethiopia, shows how the EU might be able to make use of the good offices provided by member states. It can also rely on the combined expertise of 27 nation states to support initiatives, such as the deep historical ties of some of its members with particular regions or countries (for example France in Sub-Saharan Africa or the Baltics in Eastern Europe). Obviously, flexibility also presents the challenge of how to ensure leadership, inclusivity and coherence of action.<sup>22</sup>

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19 See R. Youngs, *The European Union and Global Politics* (Palgrave MacMillan, 2021), ch. 4.

20 The CSDP has both military and civilian dimensions, with the latter referring to EU interventions involving civilian instruments to support host states in areas such as rule of law or border monitoring. The first civilian CSDP mission was launched in 2003 (an EU Police Mission in Bosnia) and since then over 20 missions have followed, including rule of law, security-sector reform and monitoring missions deployed in Southern and Eastern Europe, Africa, the Middle East and Asia. For an overview, see [https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage\\_en/430/Military%20and%20civilian%20missions%20and%20operations](https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage_en/430/Military%20and%20civilian%20missions%20and%20operations).

21 M. E. Smith, *Europe's Common Security and Defence Policy: Capacity-Building, Experiential Learning, and Institutional Change* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017).

22 On flexible approaches to EU foreign policy and coherence, see G. Grevi, P. Morillas, E. Soler i Lecha and M. Zeiss, 'Differentiated Cooperation in European Foreign Policy: The Challenge of Coherence', EUIDEA Policy Papers (2020).



#### **d) Non-coercive means and bottom-up approaches to conflict prevention and peacebuilding**

Overall, the Union engagement in conflicts and crises has reflected the EU's normative aspirations as set out in the Treaty – to promote democracy, the rule of law, and human rights (Article 21, TEU). Prevention, mediation and capacity-building tasks undertaken by the EU have sought to achieve these objectives generally via the use of positive incentives instead of coercion, for example conditionality, facilitation and support, and the implementation of mentoring, monitoring and advising mandates by civilian CSDP missions. In line with UN approaches to 'sustaining peace',<sup>23</sup> the EU has increasingly adopted bottom-up methods, emphasising the need to foster local ownership and long-term approaches to peacebuilding.

Yet, this has not been without problems. EU interventions in crises situations have at times only paid lip service to local ownership when it comes to the inclusion of local voices in the design and evaluation of programmes, as illustrated by the EU's maritime capacity-building mission in Somalia (EUCAP Nestor/Somalia).<sup>24</sup> This is sometimes due to structural problems (such as the rotation of personnel in the field, lack of language skills or country-based expertise), at other times to an undue focus on EU security interests (organised crime, counter-terrorism)

to the neglect of local needs, for instance in the Western Balkans.<sup>25</sup> In other cases, a narrow approach to capacity building which ignores broader governance issues such as corruption, democratic oversight and accountability can actually result in unintended consequences such as strengthening the resilience and capacities of states and endangering civilian population – a case in point being the EU military training mission in Mali. By strengthening the capacities of the central state, which is seen by the Malian population as involved in abuse, corruption and oppression, the mission has failed to address the insecurity and socio-economic grievances that are at the root of the conflict.<sup>26</sup> This is why normative considerations (good governance) and accountability need to remain at the centre of the EU's engagement in conflicts and crises.<sup>27</sup>

The increasing contestation of the liberal order and geopolitical tensions have however challenged the EU's preference for carrots rather than sticks and its reliance on democratic conditionality. The EU's approach has contrasted with the more coercive and unilateral methods preferred by the US or the illiberal models championed by new peacemakers such as China or Russia, which might provide equipment support but without conditionality attached. However, in what appears to be an increasingly hostile world, the EU must speak 'the language of power' or risk disappearing 'geopolitically'.<sup>28</sup>

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23 UN Security Council Resolution 2282, 27 April 2016, UN Doc. S/RES/2282; General Assembly Resolution 70/262, 27 April 2016, UN Doc. A/RES/70/262.

24 F. Ejodus, "Here is your mission, now own it!" The rhetoric and practice of local ownership in EU interventions', *European Security* 26:4 (2017): 461-84.

25 See T. Edmunds, A. E. Juncos and G. Algar-Faria, 'EU local capacity building: ownership, complexity and agency', *Global Affairs*, 4:2-3 (2018): 227-39.

26 A. Schmaude, G. Soto-Mayor and D. Goxho, 'Strategic Missteps: Learning From a Failed EU Sahel Strategy', ISPI (5 November 2020). Also Venturi, *op cit*.

27 See, for instance, similar arguments relating to the implementation of the European Peace Facility, EPLO, 'The European Peace Facility: Minimising Significant Risks in Implementation' (October 2021).

28 J. Borrell, 'Embracing Europe's Power. Project Syndicate', 8 February 2020; Emmanuel Macron on Europe's fragile place in a hostile world, *The Economist* (7 November 2019).

Increasing awareness of those external pressures within EU policy circles have led to calls for strategic autonomy by leveraging the EU's weight in areas of international trade, financial and monetary policy, regulatory policies and security. However, in terms of security provision, too much attention has been paid to the development of defence capabilities as illustrated by the drafting process of the Strategic Compass, to the detriment of civilian instruments.

Instead of addressing (well-known) problems linked to the implementation of EU conflict prevention, mediation and peacebuilding (see above), the focus on protective policies runs the risk of creating new ones and diluting the EU's unique identity in the process. If strategic autonomy results in the EU distancing itself from multilateralism, this could have negative consequences for the EU's role in building peace by undermining its ability to build effective partnerships at the international, regional and local level.<sup>29</sup>

### **3. How can strategic autonomy strengthen the EU's role in addressing conflicts and crises?**

The previous discussion has highlighted the unique features of the EU's contribution to the prevention of conflict and the promotion of sustainable peace, as well as some of its shortcomings. It has also warned about some of the perils associated with a narrow focus on strategic autonomy and a potential shift towards more unilateral, interest-driven, militaristic, and securitised approaches in EU external relations. Instead, this policy brief argues that any efforts

Strategic autonomy can also accelerate ongoing securitisation trends with a stronger emphasis on EU security interests. Where the objectives of EU missions are perceived as promoting EU interests rather than values – that is, operations covering border management, the fight against counter-terrorism, illegal migration or organised crime – the EU's soft power could be undermined, putting into question its commitment to local ownership. An increasing focus on migration also risks turning some of the EU's current civilian missions into an instrument to control external migratory flows, arguably undermining both the effectiveness and the legitimacy of those missions. Moving away from its normative commitments could further weaken the image of the EU as a relatively impartial actor and more generally its reputation as a credible security provider. This is particularly concerning when it comes to delivering CSDP capacity-building mandates which rely on building long-term relationships of trust through mentoring, monitoring and advising.

to build strategic autonomy should place the promotion of peace at the centre of the debate and that this should be used to address existing problems and deficits in EU conflict prevention, mediation and peacebuilding initiatives as outlined in the previous section. To elevate the EU's added value as a security provider, the EU and its member states should focus efforts on three inter-related issues:

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29 Youngs, 2021, *The European Union and Global Politics*, op. cit.

### 3.1 Strengthening key areas of engagement

To elevate the EU's role as a security provider, EU interventions need to be future-proof and based on a clear understanding of which types of crisis and conflict the EU wants to address/respond to, especially where others are not willing or able to intervene (such as previous situations in Palestine or Libya). Such a role needs to be based on the Union's strengths as a security actor, a realistic assessment of its capabilities, and its commitment to multilateralism.

In terms of strengths, the EU has already been able to demonstrate added value in the field of **mediation** through all stages of conflict, from early warning to the implementation of peace agreements, and should continue to do so both by intervening directly as in Georgia or Kosovo and supporting the role of others, such as in the case of the Afghanistan Peace Support.<sup>30</sup> In June 2020, the European External Action Service (EEAS) established a Pool of EU Mediators to strengthen the EU's capabilities in this area. However, for mediation to become a true political instrument in the CFSP toolbox, member states need to be more proactive and supportive of EU mediation efforts to avoid situations like Libya where EU mediation initiatives were hampered by member state disagreements and the securitisation of CSDP activities on the ground.<sup>31</sup>

With the arrival of a new 'geopolitical' Commission in 2019, **resilience building** understood in terms of facilitating adaptive capacities, bottom-up approaches and long-term strategies in the neighbourhood has lost prominence in EU policy circles. As witnessed during the drafting of the Strategic Compass, resilience has shifted attention from external processes to the EU itself, with the focus being on the protection of critical infrastructures, fighting misinformation and disinformation, and cybersecurity.<sup>32</sup> This marks a new shift from the promotion of EU values externally to the protection of Europe, which can undermine the EU's role in the promotion of peace in the neighbourhood for two reasons:

- 1) it can weaken local buy-in if the EU is perceived to focus only on the pursuit of its own security interests;
- 2) it can divert resources from the promotion of peace outside the EU's borders to the strengthening of resilience within the EU.

Thus, building the resilience of partners through capacity-building interventions needs to continue to be a priority, with civilian CSDP missions being a key instrument. However, as mentioned earlier, such an approach to capacity building needs to broaden to incorporate more concerns regarding good governance, inclusivity and accountability.

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30 On EU mediation efforts, see T. Karjalainen, 'EU Peace Mediation in the 2020s. From Intervention to Investment', FIIA Working Paper No. 118, October 2020.

31 V. Dudouet, 'New Policy on EU Peace Mediation', Impulse 02/2021.

32 Preceded by a common threat analysis undertaken in 2020, the Strategic Compass was drafted in the first half of 2021 and sets out the EU's strategic vision in areas of security and defence. See EEAS, 'A Strategic Compass for Security and Defence – For a European Union that protects its citizens, values and interests and contributes to international peace and security', 13638/21 (9 November 2021).

This takes us to another related issue. **Civilian CSDP** has become more ambitious in terms of scope, yet in practice deployments have become more modest both in terms of size and mandates.<sup>33</sup> For instance, the total share of deployments of seconded nationals to civilian CSDP has gradually reduced from around 80 percent in 2008 to current levels of 62 percent despite the committed target of 70 percent agreed at the Civilian CSDP Compact.<sup>34</sup> Despite the addition of new tasks, CSDP operations have in practice become less ambitious and paralysed, with most of them focused on capacity building and training.<sup>35</sup> On paper, the EU is still committed to strong interventions and new international crises, including Covid-19, underline the importance of civilian CSDP. However, gradually, the EU has taken a more inward-looking approach and this has also impacted on the mandates of CSDP operations on the ground. A mismatch between the EU's level of ambition and its actual engagement has developed over time.

The obvious long-term solution to increase resources dedicated to civilian CSDP would be to make more use of **Commission projects and EU agencies** to carry out some of these tasks outside the EU's borders. This is what we have witnessed in relation to migration and border monitoring with the expansion of **Frontex**. Yet there are many reasons that explain why member states might not give up on civilian CSDP: CSDP interventions have high symbolic and

political value for both EU member states and the host countries; they provide higher visibility for the EU than the more technocratic projects led by the Commission; they are surrounded by less controversy than Frontex, which has been accused by civil society organisations of human rights violations;<sup>36</sup> and last but not least, CSDP still remains an intergovernmental tool in the hands of the member states, with minimal involvement from the Commission and little oversight from the European Parliament, which is also why member states might be reluctant to give it up.<sup>37</sup> Hence, to strengthen the EU's ability to act (its strategic autonomy), the only solution is to ensure stronger contributions from the member states in the form of appropriate capabilities, resources, equipment and training.

While the emphasis should be on consolidating the EU's role in prevention, mediation and post-conflict peacebuilding, there is still room to improve such a role by taking account of **new threats** at the international level. The EU's integrated approach, the ability of the EU to make use of a wide range of tools, also means that the Union is well placed to do so. This will be crucial, for instance, when dealing with a structural threat such as climate change and its impacts on security (the so-called **climate-security nexus**). A new Concept for an Integrated Approach on Climate Change and Security prepared by the EEAS in September 2021 foresees stronger integration of climate change impacts in the planning and conduct

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33 On civilian CSDP, see A. E. Juncos, 'Beyond civilian power? Civilian CSDP two decades on', in D. Fiott, *The CSDP in 2020. The EU's legacy and ambition in security and defence* (Paris: EU-ISS, 2020), 74-87.

34 T. Smit, 2020, op cit. Smit observes a small increase in the total of seconded personnel, but the total share has decreased because of a bigger increase in contracted personnel.

35 T. Pietz, 'EU Crisis Management: Back to the Future', *Internationale Politik Quarterly* (3 June 2021).

36 See, for instance, the Abolish Frontex Campaign and other controversies surrounding Frontex involvement migration operations: <https://euobserver.com/migration/153294>. Or on Europol: <https://euobserver.com/opinion/153276>.

37 See also T. Tammikko and J. Ruohomäki, 'The Future of EU civilian crisis management. Finding a Niche', FIIA Briefing Paper No. 262 (May 2019).



of civilian CSDP missions, the management of the environmental footprint of the missions, and the provision of capacity building in this area.<sup>38</sup> Environmental advisors are already expected to join civilian CSDP where required. Thus, building strategic autonomy in this case means supporting partners to deal with issues such as environmental crime using the tools at the EU's disposal, including civilian CSDP. Increasing the capacity of the EU to act would go hand in hand with stronger multilateral action and the bloc's legal and normative commitments (for example, the European Green Deal or the Fit for 55 package).<sup>39</sup> However, for this to happen, EU member states will need to demonstrate stronger commitment by providing CSDP missions and Commission projects with the right expertise as well as specialised training.

### 3.2 Ensuring better co-ordination

While the integrated approach and a preference for multilateralism constitute key features of its approach to conflict and crises, the EU has faced and continues to face difficulties when it comes to their implementation due to the multilevel and complex institutional nature of the EU, as well as the number of international actors and organisations involved on the ground. This has impacted on the operational effectiveness of mediation, conflict prevention and civilian crisis management.

In line with its commitment to multilateralism, the EU should continue to work with the UN to reinforce their partnership. As mentioned earlier, fostering synergies and the complementarity of mandates of EU and UN missions and

operations on the ground should be one of the key priorities in this regard. This should be tackled as part of the discussions regarding the updating of EU-UN priorities on peace operations for the period 2022-24, focusing on existing crisis management operations, as well as on new priorities such as climate change and the protection of children in armed conflict.<sup>40</sup>

Regarding the EU's integrated approach, one of the key areas of tension remains co-ordination between civilian and military actors. For instance, at the EU level, civilian and military CSDP continue to have their own chains of command because of the way CSDP has evolved historically and the make-up of EU member states, which includes neutral and non-aligned countries. Problems of civil-military co-ordination run so deep that when the Covid-19 crisis hit, military CSDP operations which had access to medical infrastructure were not always able to share them with civilian missions deployed in the same theatre because they have separate chains of command.<sup>41</sup> Having said that, there are some past experiences of integration between civilian and military components. At the headquarters level, the Joint Support Coordination Cell, JSCC, has sought to strengthen co-ordination between the two sides of the house. On the ground, there have been some limited examples, such as the coastguard component in EUCAP Somalia, or even previous attempts to launch hybrid civilian-military operations such as the monitoring mission in Aceh, Indonesia, which contributed to implementing a peace agreement. The UN's model of integration has been suggested as an alternative to facilitate civilian-military

38 EEAS, 'Concept for an Integrated Approach on Climate Change and Security', EEAS(2021)770 (5 October 2021):7.

39 For more information, see European Green Deal, [www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/green-deal](http://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/green-deal).

40 See EU priorities at the United Nations during the 76th United Nations General Assembly, September 2021-September 2022, Council conclusions, Brussels (12 July 2021).

41 T. Pietz, 'The Impact of Covid-19 on CSDP. Forging opportunity out of crisis?', EU-ISS Brief 17, (Paris: EU-ISS, 2021).

42 Pietz (2021), 'EU Crisis Management', op cit.



co-operation,<sup>42</sup> but such level of integration has not been possible in the EU for the political and practical reasons outlined earlier. Yet, in the medium and the long term, integration between civilian and military structures remains the only viable solution. In the short term, the development of strategic autonomy needs to find the right balance between strengthening the EU's military capabilities, while continuing to invest in civilian CSDP. In this regard, the implementation of the Strategic Compass provides a crucial test for the appropriate integration of civilian CSDP into the EU's crisis-management toolbox.

Even more problematic is the need to ensure co-ordination and co-operation between civilian CSDP and other civilian instruments, in particular Commission projects and EU agencies dealing with internal security issues. The expansion of civilian CSDP tasks to issues such as organised crime, criminal justice, countering radicalisation and violent extremism, counter-terrorism, and hybrid threats (cybersecurity, protection of critical infrastructures, disinformation and cyberwarfare) has led to significant tensions between those two sets of actors. As a way to generate synergies and avoid overlaps, there has been a push for closer co-ordination in the field under the umbrella of the EU Delegation and exchanges of personnel (for example the secondment of Commission experts to civilian CSDP missions).

However, problems of co-ordination run deeper and these 'quick fixes' will not be enough. With the push towards strategic autonomy, civilian CSDP is not only being squeezed by a focus on military solutions, but also by the increasing emphasis on internal security, challenging in turn the *raison d'être* of civilian CSDP. While little progress has been made towards improving civilian CSDP capabilities, we have seen an increase in the use of internal security agencies such as Frontex, Europol or Eurojust to deal with threats at the border and beyond. Compared to fewer than 2,000 personnel currently deployed in civilian CSDP missions, Frontex is expected to become the biggest externally facing agency, strengthening arguments for the replacement of civilian CSDP missions – especially those dealing with border management, migration or counter-terrorism.<sup>43</sup> Frontex has gone from an initial budget of €6 million in 2005 to €543 million in 2021. It is also expected that by 2027, the European Border and Coast Guard standing corps will reach around 10,000 personnel.<sup>44</sup> However, there are dangers attached to making a homeland security agency responsible for external interventions both in terms of the EU's normative commitments to promoting sustainable peace and its legitimacy vis-à-vis external partners. Moreover, it is unlikely that member states will relinquish control of an intergovernmental tool such as civilian CSDP at least in the short term. For this reason, it is essential that member states retain ownership of the process and step up their commitment by, among other things, increasing their contributions in terms of personnel, resources and expertise.

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43 R. Parkes, 'Reading the runes. The future of CSDP and AFSJ', in D. Fiott (ed.), *The CSDP in 2020. The EU's legacy and ambition in security and defence* (Paris: EU-ISS, 2020), 97-109.

44 Frontex, Key Facts, 2021, <https://frontex.europa.eu/about-frontex/faq/key-facts>.

### 3.3 Strengthening the commitment of EU member states

The discussion above hints at two issues: first, the push for strategic autonomy has not only neglected existing challenges but might also bring with it new problems; second, the commitment of the member states remains crucial when it comes to addressing these issues and future challenges. Over the years, we have seen how the capability-expectations gap that paralysed EU foreign and security policy in its early years has turned into a consensus - expectations gap.<sup>45</sup> For instance, when it comes to civilian CSDP, while member states acknowledge the value of having an intergovernmental tool to intervene beyond the EU's border where required, they have grown more reluctant to deploy CSDP instruments in the neighbourhood, which explains the decline in troops and CSDP engagements over time.<sup>46</sup> In the midst of increasing geopolitical rivalries, member states are also becoming more concerned about their own internal security and about 'protecting Europe'. Problems of slow response (for example the EU's inability to swiftly deploy civilian experts)<sup>47</sup> and problems of micromanagement from Brussels (as member states seek to retain control) have also impacted the effectiveness of the EU as a security provider.<sup>48</sup> The question is one of how to square the new geopolitical realities with the EU's commitment to promote peace and to be

an effective external crisis-management actor. The key here is to ensure member states remain committed to the provision of both internal and external security and that they retain ownership of the process.

The requirement for inclusivity and ownership means that proposals to move to qualified majority voting in areas of external security provision such as civilian CSDP might be neither workable nor desirable.<sup>49</sup> Moving responsibilities to the Commission, such as in the case of the EU border assistance mission to Moldova-Ukraine, could partially address the lack of commitment from the member states in the short term, but would alienate member states in the medium and longer term. Resorting to other agencies dealing with justice and home matters like Frontex would also not solve the problem of capabilities as member state experts would still need to be seconded and could instead reduce the commitment, ambition and visibility of EU initiatives.

There are two ways in which to boost the commitment of member states to civilian CSDP and other activities such as conflict prevention and mediation, and these should be pursued in parallel. The first set of initiatives should be focused on fostering inclusivity of the 27 member states, with the second set of proposals focused on increasing buy-in and flexibility through differentiated integration.

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45 A. Toje, 'The Consensus—Expectations Gap: Explaining Europe's Ineffective Foreign Policy', *Security Dialogue*, 39:1 (2008): 121-41.

46 Also T. Tammikko and J. Ruohomäki (2019), *op cit.*

47 According to the Civilian CSDP Compact, EU member states have committed to be able to deploy 200 staff in 30 days.

48 F. Ejodus, *op cit.*

49 J. Borrell, When member states are divided, how do we ensure Europe is able to act? EEAS blog, 2 October 2020, available here: [https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/86276/when-member-states-are-divided-how-do-we-ensure-europe-able-act\\_en](https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/86276/when-member-states-are-divided-how-do-we-ensure-europe-able-act_en)

Firstly, an **inclusive approach** to foster dialogue among the 27 should be maintained to ensure the implementation of commitments and to facilitate strategic convergence. Member states have already agreed to a number of commitments and pledges as part of the Civilian CSDP Compact, but implementation is being closely monitored through the annual reviews.<sup>50</sup> Annual reviews are useful in that they can help with co-ordination among member states, identification of key capability gaps, and forward-looking planning.<sup>51</sup> In parallel, closer integration between different initiatives at the EU level (for example the Civilian Compact and the Strategic Compass) should also be pursued. Such proposals could be complemented with some institutional reforms aimed at fostering dialogue as well as placing conflict prevention, mediation and peacebuilding at the centre of EU external action, for instance with the

establishment of a dedicated Council working group on conflict prevention and mediation.<sup>52</sup>

A focus on inclusivity could then be complemented with initiatives that foster more flexibility and a more **ambitious approach** from some key member states, for instance by exploring the possibility of developing specialised teams of civilian experts among a group of member states. Co-operation among small(er) groups of countries could also be incentivised through the use of the CFSP budget, mirroring military initiatives such as PESCO and the European Defence Fund. These ideas are not necessarily new, but the debate about strategic autonomy and the drafting of the Strategic Compass could provide momentum to address some of the shortcomings of the EU as a peacebuilding actor.

#### 4. Conclusion

By focusing solely on the protection of Europe and military solutions, the debate on strategic autonomy risks undermining the EU's international commitments in the areas of conflict prevention, mediation, resilience building, and civilian CSDP. Yet when it comes to strategic autonomy, these areas continue to be key not only regarding the EU's normative commitments as per the EU Treaties, but also in preventing further international instability and new threats affecting the EU's own security. This paper argues that the EU has already

been able to demonstrate added value in these areas by a) implementing an integrated approach to conflicts and crises; b) supporting multilateralism and partnerships at local, national, regional and international levels; c) its adaptability and flexibility to address new security threats and challenges; and d) adopting non-coercive and bottom-up approaches to conflict prevention and peacebuilding. However, key shortcomings are holding back the EU's potential as a security provider.

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50 See, for instance, Council of the EU, Council Conclusions on Civilian CSDP Compact, 13571/20, Brussels, 7 December 2020.

51 See also C. Böttcher, 'The First Year of the Compact: How the Review Process Can Make Civilian CSDP More Capable', DGAPKompakt No. 20 (October 2019).

52 See European Parliament, Resolution of 12 March 2019 on building EU capacity on conflict prevention and mediation, 2018/2159(INI).

To strengthen the EU's added value, more needs to be done in relation to strengthening key areas of engagement, improving co-ordination within the EU and with other actors and, more importantly, ensuring the commitment of member states to these goals.

## 5. Policy recommendations

On the basis of the analysis conducted above on the EU's role as a security provider, it is possible to identify some recommendations for the Union:

- True strategic autonomy requires first and foremost enhancing the **EU's civilian and normative contribution** to sustaining international peace. To elevate the EU's role as a security provider, member states should start by strengthening its mediation, **conflict prevention and civilian CSDP capabilities**.
  - Member states need to fulfil their pledges (in terms of **personnel, resources, and expertise**) to match the ambitions of the EU in these areas. Quick fixes based on contributions from Commission resources or agencies such as Frontex do not constitute a viable solution for **civilian CSDP**.
  - A focus on **building the capacities of partners** should be retained, while ensuring that EU initiatives and missions prioritise addressing **broader governance issues** such as corruption, democratic oversight, and accountability of state security forces.
  - **Mediation** necessitates stronger political backing and support from the EU member states if it is to become an effective tool in promoting and sustaining peace.
- The development of civilian capabilities and instruments for prevention, mediation and peacebuilding should not come as an afterthought in debates about strategic autonomy. Instead, they should be at the centre of any processes aimed at elevating and strengthening the role of the EU as a security provider.
- The **climate-security nexus** needs to be incorporated into the design and implementation stages of EU mediation, conflict prevention and peacebuilding initiatives.
  - Stronger **co-ordination with other international actors** such as the UN should concentrate on fostering synergies and complementarity of mandates in conflict prevention and crisis management.
  - **Civilian-military co-ordination** requires further integration of chains of command in the medium and longer term.
  - To **strengthen EU member states' commitment and sense of ownership**, more inclusive initiatives, fostering engagement and dialogue among the member states, should be facilitated, for instance with the establishment of a Council working group on conflict prevention and mediation.
  - **More flexibility** in the form of supporting the creation of specialised teams of experts or clusters among a group of member states or tasking an individual member state with mediation missions would ensure that ambition complements inclusive approaches.

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**AN ARCHITECTURE FIT FOR STRATEGIC AUTONOMY**

**INSTITUTIONAL AND OPERATIONAL STEPS TOWARDS A MORE AUTONOMOUS EU EXTERNAL ACTION**



**ABSTRACT**

This policy paper analyses several institutional and policymaking priorities conducive to a more strategic autonomy agenda for the whole of EU external action. It departs from two different understandings of strategic autonomy: the geopolitical understanding on which most political efforts have been placed so far, and an institutional/operational understanding, where substantial work remains to be done. The policy paper reviews three recurrent institutional shortcomings for strategic autonomy: the political paralysis at the EU level and the need for more flexible institutional responses, the divisive and often distracting discussions on QMV in the field of foreign and security policy, and a limiting focus on security and defence when it comes to implementing strategic autonomy as a policy priority. The final section provides some policy options to advance the EU's strategic autonomy agenda, in line with its operational purposes, namely broadening the focus of discussions on strategic autonomy to the whole of EU external action, securing the buy-in of member states in processes and policies leading to more strategic autonomy, promoting thematic and regional steps forward in its operationalisation, fostering political consensus at the highest level, promoting a strategic autonomy esprit de corps, and enhancing the institutional tools, methods and capabilities for more strategic autonomy in the field of EU external action.

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STRATEGIC AUTONOMY SERIES

**POLICY BRIEF**  
January 2022

FOUNDATION FOR EUROPEAN PROGRESSIVE STUDIES

**STRATEGIC AUTONOMY: NOT WITHOUT INTEGRATION**



**SUMMARY**

One dimension of strategic autonomy has been firmly decided upon since the EU created its Common Security and Defence Policy in 1999: the projection of military force outside the borders of the EU. That is also the dimension that must, and can, be acted upon in the very short term.

Autonomy is a mindset. An actor that does not think autonomously will never act autonomously, regardless of its capabilities. Five components of that mindset are essential. First, member states must see the EU as a great power, in the same league as the US, Russia, and China. Second, the EU must take the lead in stabilising its own periphery – nobody will do that for it. Third, the only meaningful level of ambition remains the Headline Goal of up to 60,000 troops. Fourth, autonomy can only be achieved in a European grouping, not by any member state alone. Finally, autonomy requires integration of national forces, not just interoperability between them. While the weak argue amongst themselves – Do we have strategic autonomy? Do we want strategic autonomy? – the strong exercise their autonomy. There is no time to waste, therefore.

Those member states that share this mindset can create a set of permanent multinational formations, with national brigades, ships, and air squadrons as building-blocks. They can do that now, so that when the EU adopts its Strategic Compass in March 2022, it can unveil a real capability initiative at the same time.

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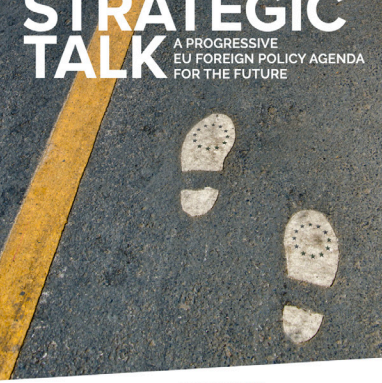
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**FEPS POLICY BRIEF**  
March 2021

FOUNDATION FOR EUROPEAN PROGRESSIVE STUDIES

**A EUROPEAN HEALTH UNION AS THE WAY FORWARD FOR THE HEALTH OF THE CONTINENT**



**SUMMARY**

The ongoing health crisis has highlighted the limits of existing European integration policies, with their emphasis on the development of the internal market while marginalising what most Europeans consider most important: saving lives and promoting health and wellbeing.

The Social Democrat position paper of 12 May 2020 entitled 'A European Health Union – increasing EU competence in health – coping with COVID-19 and looking to the future' has opened a new chapter in the European project.

With the pooling of European resources for the prefinancing of research and public procurement of vaccines proving to be more efficient in comparison to competitive bidding by the member states, Europeans will be the first to feel the benefits of a European Health Union (EHU). The potential scope for further actions within the EHU is vast, with some avenues for moving forward being clear. However, the risk of a return to a policy where the EU does not act remains.

The best choice for Europeans would be to amend the Treaty on European Union (TEU) to provide the EU with the explicit legal competence in health policy to construct a real European Health Union, while preserving subsidiarity where functional. The European Union should not be concerned simply with 'a single market' and 'an economic and monetary union'. The call for a more social Europe, for concrete progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the Green Deal, can no longer be dismissed. Health must be at the core of a renewed Social Europe.

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