



The EU and the UN: together for peace

by Tobias Pietz and Thierry Tardy

Over the past decade, the EU and the UN have become true partners in crisis management. Since the EU-UN Joint Declaration of September 2003, the two institutions have progressively developed and institutionalised their partnership in ways unmatched by other organisations. From the Democratic Republic of Congo to Mali and the Central African Republic (CAR), the EU and the UN have cooperated in the field through various activities and frameworks. The two organisations have thus shown a certain ability to adapt to the new reality of international crisis management, which is by nature multi-actor and requires a high degree of synergy. Most recently, the Dutch and Swedish contributions to the UN operation in Mali have hinted to a European come back to UN peacekeeping that has been particularly welcomed on the UN side.

Together with renewed cooperation in the field, the 2012 EU 'Action Plan on CSDP support to UN peacekeeping' has helped revitalise the partnership. It comes to its two-year conclusion in this rather positive context and, in all likelihood, will be refreshed in a format still to be agreed upon.

Planning together

Inter-institutional cooperation in planning is essential to the effectiveness of the two organisations' operations whether they are deployed in parallel or sequentially. Such coordination has improved significantly over the years. The degree of mutual

understanding is reasonably high, and information is being shared as much as possible. Improved coordination has been further facilitated by the recent elaboration by the two institutions of 'mutually agreed modalities for coordination on planning', which were tested first in Mali, and then in the CAR.

Meanwhile, certain constraints still limit the scope of coordinated planning. First, EU-UN coordination in this area is conditioned by a convergence of views on the division of tasks at the highest political level. Second, coordination is restricted by the two organisations' respective cultures and planning rules. One challenge is related to the conflation of strategic and operational planning within the UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO), as opposed to the delineation of responsibilities within the European External Action Service (EEAS). Another is related to the level of political control over the planning process on the EU side, compared with the much stronger autonomy of the DPKO and the decentralised decision-making process of the UN. Third, coordination is also reliant on the levels of awareness among respective staff members, institutional memory, and the turnover of personnel.

Training together

Training relates to the technical rather than political dimension of the EU-UN relationship, but is nonetheless crucial to make the partnership stronger.



The completion of the EU Action Plan coincides with parallel review processes of both EU and UN training policies, adding to the momentum for closer cooperation. EU-UN cooperation could be expanded to include the cross-fertilisation of training standards (e.g. on security sector reform (SSR), ‘monitoring, mentoring and advising’, gender issues, human rights and child protection) and staff guidance, as well as the delivery of training modules for both participants and trainers.

Cooperation may also allow the two institutions to confront common challenges, most notably in relation to the management of the pool of trained personnel, training certification procedures, and bridging the gap between preliminary training and actual deployment. As a matter of good practice, Europe’s New Training Initiative for Civilian Crisis Management (ENTRi) has targeted both CSDP and UN personnel for its training courses, which include pre-deployment modules for countries where both organisations are present. Such cooperation might well be widened and intensified.

Delivering together

The debate on capabilities that both institutions can draw on is shaped by the relative low numbers of European troops in UN operations. For the time being, EU member states have remained mostly absent from large UN operations in Africa, which they nonetheless largely fund through assessed contributions.

That said, Europeans have long provided the bulk of troops for the UNIFIL operation in Lebanon. More recently, the Netherlands returned to UN peacekeeping with a contingent of little less than 400 personnel (supported by four Apache and three Chinook helicopters) deployed within the UN operation in Mali. Sweden followed suit with 250 personnel also due to be sent to Mali in the first half of 2015. Other EU member states have approached the DPKO and expressed the wish to contribute to UN peacekeeping efforts once more if circumstances allow. Should this materialise, it would change the nature of the partnership.

Also, while there is no example (to date) of an ‘EU component’ in a UN operation, the EU supports UN peacekeeping in other ways, such as through the CSDP mission in the CAR, which is acting as a ‘bridge’ to the UN operation.

More generally, what the UN is asking for, rather than simple infantry units, is so-called ‘strategic enablers’ such as rapid reaction forces (e.g. the EU

Battlegroups), logistical assets or high-tech equipment. A ‘capabilities list’ was issued by the UN to that effect and passed on to the EEAS. In their response, however, EU member states have tended to opt for direct bilateral links with the UN rather than acting through an EU-coordinated mechanism (as envisaged by the EU Action Plan).

Reforming justice and security together

Rule of law and SSR activities have been at the core of both UN and EU missions over the past decade. However, interpretations of what the rule of law and SSR mean – and how to implement them on the ground – still differ. While the UN has been able to achieve system-wide coordination on these issues, internal coherence on the CSDP side remains a challenge. That said, with the Action Plan and the ‘modalities for coordination’, instruments are already in place to raise joint efforts on SSR to a new level. Both documents highlight these areas as key for improving cooperation, calling, for example, on the EU for a ‘division of labour and complementarities/synergies with UN planned activities in the rule of law and security sectors’. Synergies could be achieved by training together, co-locating units or SSR personnel, conducting joint assessment missions and after-action reviews, as well as creating a standing working group on SSR and the rule of law which serves the two organisations (and possibly other regional ones like the African Union and the OSCE).

The cooperation – and division of labour – in place in Mali might set a good precedent for future endeavours. The Union’s recently established SSR mission, EUCAP Mali, has been prepared in close collaboration with DPKO, with the aim of complementing UN efforts. Feedback from the field indicates that this spirit of cooperation remains strong, with fixed coordination meetings and reciprocal liaison officers at EUCAP and the UN’s MINUSMA.

While the UN is exploring new avenues and reforms through its Peacekeeping Review and the EU is looking for new momentum in the CSDP domain, the UN-EU partnership provides an example of relationship that has produced results, with best practices that could help develop other types of inter-institutional relations and shape security governance over the coming decade.

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