



# Partnering in crisis management: Ten years of UN-EU cooperation

by Thierry Tardy

A decade ago, on 24 September 2003, the UN and the EU signed a Joint Declaration on UN-EU Cooperation in Crisis Management. At the time, the two institutions had limited experience of one another, and apart from some cooperation between the European Commission and UN agencies dealing with development and humanitarian affairs, very little had brought them together in the field of crisis management.

Ten years later, the UN-EU relationship has taken shape and become a permanent feature of the crisis management landscape. The EU works with the UN in most of its missions, and mutual cooperation has been gradually institutionalised. Although EU member states do not contribute much in the way of manpower to UN peacekeeping operations, they do finance a significant share of their costs. Most recently, the EU has also produced a Plan of Action to enhance CSDP support to UN peacekeeping. Yet, despite this progress, the UN-EU relationship seems now to be a bit out of breath, and ten years of cooperation have also laid bare the limits of what the two institutions can achieve together.

## A shared security agenda?

The UN and EU have much in common as security providers. First, they have the same broad and

inclusive agenda that covers the entire spectrum of civilian and military crisis management activities, including conflict prevention, mediation and humanitarian aid during ongoing conflicts, and post-conflict stabilisation.

Second, in both cases, field missions preferably take place in post-conflict permissive environments, with a mandate to support peace where it has been – at least theoretically – established. In this context, the UN and the EU are involved in similar activities that range from military deployments and security sector reform (SSR) to the promotion of human rights, assistance in economic recovery, institution-building and support for the rule of law and political processes.

Third, the UN and the EU both demonstrate a certain reluctance to resort to force. True, the UN has recently moved towards more robust peacekeeping – in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and Mali, for instance – according to which force can be used in cases other than self-defence. Past EU operations (in the DRC and Chad) as well as the deployment of anti-piracy forces in the Gulf of Aden have also shown that the EU is willing to consider coercive measures in its operations. In this respect, the EU's security culture is slightly more robust, and the member states' limited trust *vis-à-vis* the UN is largely due to the



weak military culture of the global organisation. It should also be noted that while peace enforcement is explicitly ruled out by the UN, its inclusion among the EU's policy options continues to be much debated. In any case, neither the security cultures of the two organisations nor the very nature of multidimensional crisis management allow for openly or sustained coercive missions. What both the UN and the EU do is support the consolidation of peace, not its enforcement.

Fourth, both the UN and the EU have made attempts to achieve greater coherence in their respective multifaceted and weakly-coordinated activities. UN efforts to set up integrated missions preceded the EU-led conceptualisation of the comprehensive approach, but both are inspired by the same need to improve strategic unity and thereby impact. These common features have often led observers to present the UN and the EU as 'natural partners' in crisis management, which indeed carries some truth. At the very least, cooperation seems to make more sense than between the UN and any other regional organisation, be it the African Union, ASEAN, the OSCE, or NATO.

Interestingly enough, the UN and the EU are also confronted with similar challenges. Both face a legitimacy crisis, suffer from the constraints of fiscal austerity, and struggle to mobilise and rapidly deploy human and material resources. Both are criticised for their top-down, state-centric – rather than locally-owned – approach, and both are challenged over the effectiveness and long-term impact of their activities. Moreover, contrary to what is sometimes assumed in Europe, there is little evidence to prove that the EU performs ostensibly better than the UN in multidimensional crisis management.

## Terms of engagement

Although they have much in common, a striking difference between the two organisations lies in their respective levels of engagement. With as many as 109,000 uniformed personnel in 15 peacekeeping operations (as of June 2013), the UN is, despite a recent decrease, still at a high point in terms of personnel deployed on operations. The EU is, by contrast, at a low point of its

activities, with less than 7,000 personnel spread over its current 4 military and 12 civilian CSDP missions.

Given the number of trouble spots in regions bordering Europe, it is worth asking how such a difference in the numbers deployed can be accounted for. At least three reasons can be identified, broadly linked to differing mandates and capabilities, degrees of politicisation, and financial resources.

First, the UN is supposed to respond to security needs wherever they arise on the planet, while the EU faces more geographical constraints. In addition, mainly because of the size of its membership, the UN has the capability to deploy large missions – seven of them consist of more than 10,000 personnel – whereas the EU is much more restricted in this regard. The EU military and civilian headline goals were probably too ambitious in this respect, and even in the event of reaching a political consensus on launching a large EU military and civilian mission, it is unlikely that such an operation would exceed 10,000 personnel.

Second, the UN tends by nature to be less politically constrained than the more selective EU, where operations are to a large extent deployed in relation to the perceived security interests of a few key member states. This is not to underplay the political dimension of the UN and its decision-making process at the Security Council, but there is an enshrined commitment to respond to the demand for crisis management in the UN that is not visible within the EU.

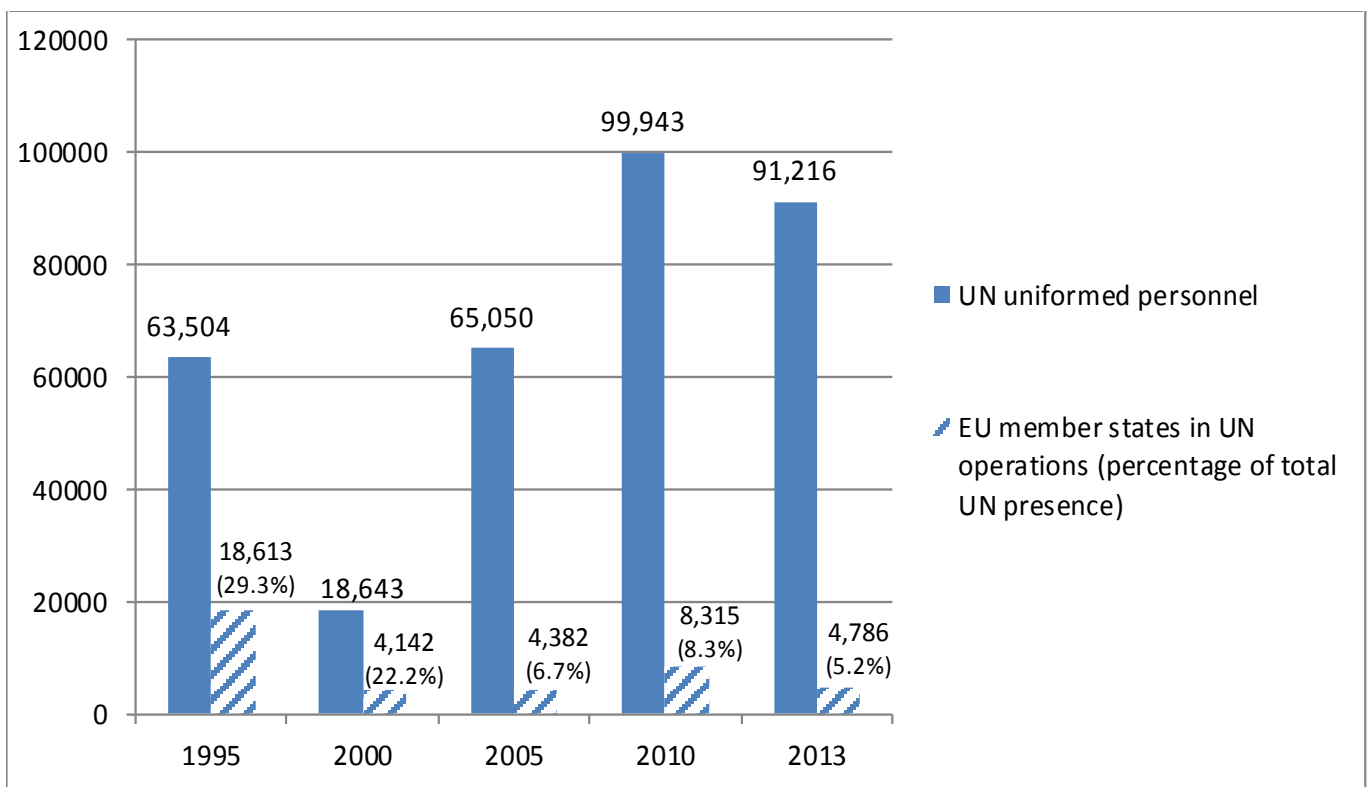
Last but certainly not least, and maybe paradoxically, there are financial incentives to take part in UN operations that do not exist for the EU. This explains the eagerness of some troop contributors to participate in UN operations as much as the reluctance of some EU members to contribute to CSDP operations. While UN operations may bring financial rewards through the reimbursement system in place, it is always an expensive exercise in the EU context, with costs 'lying where they fall' for military operations and only around 15 per cent of expenses being covered by the inter-governmental Athena mechanism.

Taken together, these three elements largely account for the differences between the numbers in

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## Contributions of EU member states to UN peacekeeping operations



Source: Graph by the author using official UN figures (June 2013).

the field. In other words, the UN goes almost everywhere and can draw on resources from a large pool of (financially) interested countries, while the EU chooses more carefully where it wants to go with its limited and costly resources. Although this comparison is quantitative and does not say anything about quality and impact, it does, however, have implications for the framework of possible UN-EU cooperation.

### Terms of cooperation

A recurrent theme in the UN-EU debate is how the EU and its member states can contribute to the broader peace and security efforts of the UN. If the UN and the EU are natural partners and if, as the Lisbon Treaty puts it, the EU 'shall contribute to peace, security, the sustainable development of the Earth, [and] solidarity and mutual respect among peoples', it probably makes sense that the EU does this in close cooperation with the institution in charge of maintaining international peace and security.

As a matter of fact, the EU is the regional organisation most engaged in the support of UN peace and security-related activities, and does so through a

mixture of financial, political, and operational assistance. At the financial level, EU member states contribute 36.8 per cent of the UN peacekeeping budget, which amounted to no less than \$2.7 billion in 2013. In the meantime, UN agencies are the main 'implementing partners' of the Union's Instrument for Stability (IfS), with 46 per cent of the short-term funds (Article 3 'crisis response measures') being spent via the UN family between 2007 and 2012. The IfS (Article 4 'pre- and post-crisis capacity-building') is also used to finance the so-called Peacebuilding Partnership, which includes specific EU-UN agreements relating to EU support of mediation and peacebuilding activities.

Politically, although the two EU countries that sit permanently on the UN Security Council are reluctant to be seen as EU representatives there, their support for the UN's peacekeeping role is unparalleled compared to the other permanent members. In 2011, the EU was granted an upgraded observer status at the General Assembly and in other UN bodies. The EU also has a seat at the Peacebuilding Commission and is a candidate to chair the Peacebuilding Configuration on the Central African Republic (CAR). Furthermore, since the beginning of UN-EU cooperation in crisis management in the early 2000s, better

levels of communications have been established between New York and Brussels. HR/VP Catherine Ashton regularly meets the UN Secretary-General and makes statements at the Security Council, and a high-level dialogue takes place between DSG Popowski and DSG/PD Schmidt, on the EU side, and the UN Under-Secretary-Generals for Peacekeeping and Political Affairs, on the other (these two high-ranking figures also address the PSC). In parallel, the Steering Committee, a body established following the adoption of the 2003 Joint Declaration and bringing together representatives of both secretariats, has been revitalised and allows for a bi-annual exchange of views on thematic and geographical issues.

Although the EU does support UN efforts in the fields of training and SSR, in particular in Africa, its operational presence is harder to identify. As stated before, with the notable exception of the UN operation in Lebanon (which alone accounts for 75 per cent of the total contribution of EU member states to UN operations), EU countries have largely kept away from UN peacekeeping since the mid-1990s. Over the last decade, their combined contributions have never gone above 8 per cent of the total UN uniformed personnel. This has led to some tension with the main troop contributors, who grumble about the unbalance between the West's influence in the mandate-shaping of the operations and the reluctance of European countries to share the burden on the ground. The UN Secretariat has also repeatedly stressed how complex and multidimensional peacekeeping efforts only stand to benefit from greater participation by EU member states, notably through their 'strategic enablers' such as logistics, helicopters, planning assets, engineer units, medical support, and intelligence.

The absence of the West is to a large extent explained by its lingering mistrust *vis-à-vis* the UN and its alleged inefficiency, particularly in the military domain. The European mindset is still much influenced by the operations of the 1990s in the Balkans and Somalia and the ensuing assumption that the UN itself – rather than its member states – was responsible for the difficulties encountered at the time. Yet, beyond legitimate concerns about the adoption of appropriate frameworks for the deployment of their troops, could the mere fact that EU countries contribute so much to the funding of UN peacekeeping not justifiably lead to a stronger political and operational involvement in the matter? Their \$2.7 billion contribution equates to approximately €2 billion, nearly six times the amount allocated annually to CFSP or the IfS (about €350 million each in 2013). It is one thing to fight for budgetary discipline (as EU countries did in the recent debates over

reimbursement rates of UN troop contributors) as outsiders not engaged in operations, and quite another to demand that money is appropriately and efficiently spent while actually participating.

In this broad context, the perspective of the withdrawal of NATO troops from Afghanistan in 2014 has led some European countries to start thinking about alternative options for any future deployments. Nordic countries, among others, are looking at the extent to which they could come back to UN peacekeeping and under what conditions. Some states have even approached the UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations to further explore various options, and Mali has been the first example of timid comeback.

In these debates, several issues need to be considered. First, even if EU states do not participate in UN operations, the probability that the EU will deploy a bridging mission (as in the DRC in 2003 or Chad in 2008) or an operation in parallel with an existing UN operation (as currently in Mali) is sufficiently high to justify the type of dialogue that the EU Plan of Action is calling for. In their discussions, the two organisations need to work on the type of command and control structure that would be put in place so as to reassure European states that the political control and strategic direction of their own forces is guaranteed while possibly giving the UN some sort of overarching coordination role. Second, the dialogue should focus on niche or core capabilities that EU countries may provide in support of UN operations. In this framework, the prospect of a civilian EU contribution to a UN operation (under the modular approach) is an option to be further explored.

Finally, with the December 2013 European Council on defence looming, the opportunity should be seized to reassert the EU commitment to UN peace and security efforts through concrete proposals on SSR, border control, and potentially the battle groups. But, in the meantime, a possible European comeback to UN operations should not take place at the expense of the credibility and visibility of the CSDP, which should remain the priority for the EU.

In other words, EU member states should be careful not to simply shift from the NATO-led mission in Afghanistan to UN operations without ensuring that this is compatible with the goals of the Union. Both the UN and the EU would suffer as crisis management partners were their member states to play one against the other.

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