



EUNPACK

A CONFLICT SENSITIVE UNPACKING OF
THE EU COMPREHENSIVE APPROACH
TO CONFLICT AND CRISES MECHANISM

Research meets policy: First Crisis Response Policy Forum

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Activity report: First EU Crisis Response Policy Forum

The EU's new Global Strategy on Foreign & Security Policy (EUGS) stresses responsible and decisive crisis response by the Union. But how can the EU make good on these lofty goals? This was the central question at EUNPACK's first 'Research meets policy' forum on EU crisis response. The event took place in Brussels on 26 September 2016 at CEPS in Brussels. More than 50 experts exchanged views with Stefano Tomat (Head of Division, CSDP Coordination & Support, EEAS), Juha Auvinen (Head of Unit, DG ECHO), Pernille Rieker and Morten Bøås (both at NUPI and EUNPACK) on the ways and challenges to implement the EUGS. The main takeaways were:

- A host of existing policy documents help the EUGS chart an 'integrated approach' to the use of EU policies and instruments, working with local CSOs & international partners.
- Local reception & perceptions of EU crisis response (as often conflict insensitive) need to feed into lessons learned which, in turn, need to be applied.
- Seen from the outside, the EU's capacity to act in response to external crisis can be characterised as often too little, always too late. Slow decision-making procedures and a lack of resources are often to blame.

Key points of discussion

Global challenges and crisis countries:

- Fragile and/or illegitimate states struggle with a combination of internal and external shocks.
- The state is obviously weak, but this is not just a technical default: the state is contested and in many places we can also identify a crisis of citizenship.
- From Kosovo and Serbia to Libya, Ukraine, Afghanistan, Iraq and Mali – what we are confronted with is crisis and conflict within fragmented societies, exacerbated by a number of other crises, e.g. economic, financial, climate etc. They produce a high number of refugees.

Case study: Mali

- The United Nations Mission 'MINUSMA' (2013-5: 53 deaths), is supported by an EU Training Mission and Operation Berkhane (France). It is a complicated mission in a violent and politically difficult terrain.
- Mali is a weak state and unpopular national leaders with low levels of legitimacy.
- There is a danger that external crisis response missions end up as a permanent international life-support for a regime and a state that would otherwise have fell/failed.
- In such environments, the EU and other actors may end up trying to protect civilians by attempting to control armed non-state actors that are not only hard to beat militarily but also harbour agendas that leave little if any room for a negotiated settlement.

- The risk therefore, is that there is no clear endgame in sight.

Conflict sensitivity:

- The question is not «not to act»: the issues the EU is confronted with in this type of state are not going to vanish without concerted action. Mali and similar states need help in this regard.
- But all actions and particularly in such fragile situations have consequences – we need to understand these as far as possible.
- **This is what it means to be conflict sensitive: to have a detailed and continuously evolving micro-political perspective that is local, national and regional and is mainstreamed into operations and actions.**
- **The challenge is to institutionalise and mainstream such an approach in order to use such analyses as the basis for both day-to-day policy management as well as long-term planning.**
- **This will mean a transformation from normative (wishful) thinking to policy-making based on facts-based knowledge.**
- The latter is not necessarily absent in current EU crisis response, but the EU — like almost all other external stakeholders — has a tendency to privilege information and policies that are based more on how we think that the world should be rather than what conditions on the ground actually are.

EU crisis response

- Whether the EU likes it or not, it will have to carry a considerable part of the burden of the current crises that surround it, e.g. from the Sahel and North Africa to the Middle East and Afghanistan. In the East there are Ukraine, Bosnia and Kosovo.
- **The EU can help to arrange for concerted European capacity to respond, but it needs to look beyond doctrines, mandates and policies to think smart about how a more holistic approach to conflict sensitivity can establish institutional procedures that are flexible, pragmatic and as well-tuned as possible to realities on the ground. This will improve the quality of the deliverance of EU crisis response.**
- Setting something like the Northern Mali-Sahel periphery onto a more positive trajectory is all about deliverance – of basic public goods such as security, access to water and health, meaningful education, jobs and employment. If the EU and the international community writ large are to deliver on this, then it must be much more wholeheartedly present on the ground, with “boots”, but even more in a way that makes the EU and its international partners seem not as just actors competing for influence, but as a congruent and relevant supporter to improve people’s daily livelihoods.
- These are the fundamental challenges that the EU’s Global Strategy - in its part on ‘pre-emptive peace’ (conflict prevention, crisis response and peacebuilding) must try to tackle.

A need for improved crisis response capacity

- The Global Strategy builds on what the EU has tried to do for some time.

- It has been concerned with its capacity for crisis response since the mid-1990s
- A lot has been achieved: 33 CSDP missions + important actor in humanitarian aid and development assistance.
- Still, it is not sufficient in the face of today's challenges.
- The EU has to be better at crisis response, but how?

EU capacity is dependent on:

- A capacity to formulate clear objectives and the capacity to take decisions accordingly.
- A legal framework that regulates the role of different institutions, at global, EU, national and local levels.
- Necessary resources (financial, staff, instruments and equipment).
- Knowledge and capacity of learning.
- Organisational skills.

How does the EU score on each of these indicators?

- The capacity to formulate clear objectives exists, but the EU suffers from slow and sometimes weak decision-making.
- The EU has a well-developed legal framework to engage in crisis response.
- But Europe suffers from limited resources, both at the EU level and in the member states (financial, staff, instruments and equipment).
- Procedures exist for lessons learnt, but there is uncertainty whether and how such lessons are applied.
- Internal coordination is largely achieved, but external coordination seems to be weaker.

In sum:

- The EU is perceived to be doing too little too late, due to slow decision-making and a relative lack of resources.
- What can be done?
 - A new contract between the EU and the member state?
 - Towards a new division of labour?
- The issue of conflict sensitivity has to be taken seriously:
 - The EU needs to find the right balance between best practices, lessons learnt and deep knowledge about the specificities of a crisis.
- These issues will form elements for EUNPACK's future research agenda.