



Exit strategies: what's in a name?

by Eva Gross

The December 2013 European Council identified 'increasing the effectiveness, visibility and impact of CSDP' as a priority. Ensuring adequate follow-up of CSDP missions through other EU instruments and/or external partners constitutes a key component in ensuring the long-term sustainability of peace-building actions.

The imminent adjustments to the mandate of EUPOL Afghanistan, as a result of US withdrawal plans, highlight the challenges facing the EU in this domain, as do other missions – such as EUFOR RCA – the operation launched in Central African Republic (CAR) earlier this year – where the handing over of responsibilities to external partners was an explicit goal from the outset. Conceptually, the adoption of the 'comprehensive approach' as a guiding paradigm re-opens the discussion over CSDP and how it fits into the broader EU toolbox, which has resurfaced in the context of institutional developments over the past five years.

What's in an exit?

In essence, the discussion over 'exit strategies' concerns the degree to – and the way in – which CSDP actions are embedded in the ongoing

and complementary activities of the EU and its member states. This debate also reflects current EU orthodoxy: the 2013 Joint Communication on the Union's 'comprehensive approach', in particular, draws attention to the security-development nexus and the need for the EU and its member states to pool all instruments in pursuit of long-term, structural change towards stability and peace. Work on exit strategies, however defined, may begin with CSDP – but eventually draws on, and takes to task, all other connected components of EU foreign policy.

While the term 'exit strategy' may capture the essence of the task at hand as far as CSDP proper is concerned, it is somewhat misleading in that it covers merely one component of overall EU action – and could be taken to imply a deadline (or even a pre-determined end) to EU investment in a particular country.

'Transition strategy', which has been proposed as an alternative term, also has an operational meaning, namely the change taking place between the end of a mission and the beginning of the activation phase of other instruments.

'Follow-up action', although perhaps the most suitable term, neglects the preparatory and



sometimes long-term function of other EU instruments on which a CSDP mission builds (and with which it interacts) that are already in place on the ground.

A textbook case of sequencing EU instruments and transitioning from military to civilian CSDP operations and, eventually, EU assistance has so far materialised only on one occasion. In the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, following the adoption of the Ohrid Peace Agreement in 2001 and the EU takeover of the NATO mission in 2003, the EU conducted three CSDP missions: Concordia, a military deterrence operation; Proxima, a civilian police mission; and EUPAT, a civilian planning mission – prior to the Commission taking over the task of police reform. Importantly, such engagement took place in preparation of a larger and agreed upon goal: the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia's eventual EU membership.

In the increasingly complex and protracted conflict settings and situations of fragility in which the EU currently engages, such sequencing (or even an immediate end of security assistance) is often neither possible nor desirable. What is more, the creation of the EEAS has also changed the utility of CSDP as well as its place in the broader EU 'system': the aim now is to have CSDP integrated in the overall EU policy loop and also for it to constitute part of a political engagement process. CSDP's role as a signal of interest and investment on the part of the member states (in addition to operational contributions) is now shared or partially subsumed in the broader EU approach.

Comparing missions

Given the wide range of tasks and geographical spread of CSDP operations, a neat classification of CSDP – and, therefore, quick and easy answers as to when and how missions can and should end – is difficult: to some extent, each mission is *sui generis*. Between its first CSDP mission (EUPM Bosnia) and its latest operation (in the CAR), the EU has launched 30 missions and operations varying in duration, geographical location, and tasks. Some serve as a political signal of EU engagement in addition to operational contributions (such as EUBAM Rafah or

EUMM Georgia); others fulfil complex civilian functions (EULEX Kosovo, EUPOL Afghanistan) or build capacity in third countries (EUTM Mali, EUCAP Nestor); and others provide deterrence and/or combat crimes such as piracy (EUFOR Althea and EUNAVFOR Atalanta).

While the tasks and duration of individual missions vary considerably, some generalisations can be made. Provisions for enhancing the sustainability of CSDP fall into two broad categories: the planning of CSDP missions; and the way in which their activities can be absorbed or taken over by other instruments – by either the EU itself or external partners – upon termination.

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The focus on how to start and end operations is partially the result of lessons learnt from CSDP missions, in particular those where suitable follow-up activities could not be ensured. EUJUST LEX Iraq is one example where the decision to end the mission was

taken because (or before) mission activities could be continued or enveloped in Commission programmes. The operation in Guinea-Bissau was a similar case, and sparked not only discussion among member states over when and how to end missions, but also over the conceptualisation of missions and their place in EU structures.

Planning missions

Such examples show that, in many ways, getting the ‘entry’ of a mission right means getting also its ‘exit’ right – or at least determines the impact and success of its performance *vis-à-vis* an envisioned end state for it. This requires setting achievable objectives, formulating realistic mandates, and ensuring a degree of flexibility when it comes to planning timelines so that other actors can take over.

Two variables in particular come into play during the planning phase which present a challenge for CSDP: the timeline of a mission, in terms of its expected mandate and any need to adjust to changes in its operational environment; and the range of EU actors that should be involved in the planning process – ideally reflecting those actors that are already on the ground and with which a CSDP mission will cooperate.



Beyond crisis management in the sense of short-term, quick-impact activities, CSDP often engages in long-term projects (although planning cycles do not necessarily reflect this fact). The EU's anti-piracy Operation EUNAVFOR Atalanta, for instance, has a planning cycle of twelve months, but is now entering its sixth year of operation. This reinforces the sense that the planning cycle does not match operational realities as to the likely duration of a mission. Rather than (or in addition to) an annual revision of missions and activities, a longer-term – the possibility of four years is currently under discussion – planning cycle would allow for persistent engagement with greater foresight. While there is a political imperative to continue annual reviews, mission planning also has to consider a realistic life-span for such operations – which regularly exceed one year.

Adopting a longer-term view would also help to align the very different planning and operational cycles among EU actors and avoid 'gaps' between CSDP and Commission instruments. As the Commission relies on seven-year planning cycles, accommodating a CSDP mission (or its termination) becomes difficult if decisions to launch or end a mission are taken at short notice or without any Commission involvement from the outset. In many cases, this is exacerbated by the fact that the Commission may not undertake security-related programmes or lack relevant expertise. A collaborative planning process, particularly between CSDP and DEVCO, could prevent such discrepancies. If CSDP is to be a part of a broader approach, in other words, planning and coordination with different aspects of the EU institutional 'family' should proceed accordingly.

The success and sustainability of mission objectives also depend on the overall political framework and the 'absorption capacity' on the part of a host state. In the case of Mali, for instance, framework conditions were favourable in that EU contributions were welcome and requested by the government in Bamako, and in that EU training could be put to use. In other cases, incomplete knowledge of a host country and/or programmes already in place and undertaken by others may lead to the duplication of efforts or the setting of unrealistic goals – potentially causing the need to adjust mandate and tasks once the mission has already started, as happened in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) and Afghanistan.

Planning documents, therefore, should factor in and draw from what is in place already and,

on this basis, display familiarity with the conflict setting so as to identify what tasks a mission can realistically fulfil. This can then also be used to define a tentative end-state for the mission. The adoption of a Political Framework for Crisis Approach (PFCA) entails combining political and operational elements – but also civilian and military expertise and input – to define common objectives.

This methodology, which is currently being put to the test with regard to the future mission in Ukraine, would help ensure consistency with overall EU objectives and coordination with all relevant EU actors (and sometimes also non-EU actors) from the start.

Ending missions

While this new system promises greater coherence at the source, the challenge of ending 'old' missions is there to stay.

The 2012 closure of EUPM Bosnia, the EU's longest running police mission, after nearly a decade of operation illustrated the intricacies of ending missions and handing over tasks to other actors. It also raised the question of the extent to which elements of the Bosnian experience can be replicated elsewhere – either because staffing structures and regulations are not sufficiently flexible to allow hiring appropriate (and often external) personnel; or because activities undertaken by other parties are not sufficiently aligned so as to be able to take over mission tasks and objectives.

In BiH, follow-up activities were ensured by reinforcing the office of the EU Special Representative (EUSR) with a small team of strategic advisors for the rule of law area – an approach that has worked well. A similar approach is currently being envisaged in Afghanistan: with the US decision to withdraw having been taken, the EU is moving the direction of phasing out EUPOL Afghanistan starting in 2015 (the mission is to end in 2016) and gradually transferring tasks previously undertaken by EUPOL to a strengthened team in the EUSR office. This will affect, first of all, the rule of law component, although police training and mentoring could still be carried out through the final phases of EUPOL's mandate.

Coordination with the Commission could be relatively easy. In Kabul, the European Commission already supports the work of

EUPOL by contributing to the UNDP-managed Law and Order Trust Fund Afghanistan (LOTFA) that funds police salaries and engages in some capacity-building activities. It is now being considered whether such activities could be expanded and absorb those that have so far been undertaken by EUPOL. As for the EUSR's office, depending on the size of the reinforcement in the area of rule of law, work could either substitute that of EUPOL – or be confined to follow-up on the mission's achievements to date so as to ensure the legacy of the mission.

Such mission follow-up, however, is not universally applicable to all EU Delegations. Due to financial rules, reinforcing existing structures – except where there already is an EUSR, such as in BiH and Afghanistan – is administratively difficult unless the Union resorts to Seconded National Experts (SNEs), which would have to be paid for mainly by member states.

Handing over missions

Last but not least, there is a third (and increasingly common) element to 'exiting' CSDP missions: the handing over to partner organisations. This often means that the CSDP contribution acts in a 'bridging' capacity (explicit from the beginning), with partners then eventually taking over or absorbing CSDP activities.

To date, this has happened with military operations, including Artemis and EUFOR RD Congo, which contributed to peace-keeping operations carried out by the UN. In the past, however, handovers have also worked the other way round: the EU missions in BiH were taken over from the UN in the first instance and then NATO, and there is, in principle, no reason why that should not happen also in the future.

Beyond the UN, other potential handover partners include NATO, the African Union (AU), or even member states who may wish to 'Europeanise' previously bilateral activities (as occurred in Afghanistan when Italy and Germany transferred respective efforts in the fields of justice and police reform).

The lessons to be drawn when handing over to other actors closely resemble those related to intra-EU coordination, and entail interlocking co-operation with institutions on timing of handover and agreements over what tasks are to be continued (and how). Past experience has shown that such prior coordination is crucial for both

the handover process itself and for the smooth functioning of any EU follow-on mission.

Fitting missions

Differing perceptions of exit strategies and the length of envisaged CSDP missions are often linked the purpose of each and every CSDP operation – and, sometimes, the purpose of CSDP itself. Fundamentally, this debate is about the best 'fit' between the instruments and the organisational cultures behind them, and about how member states and their resources – money and personnel – 'fit' with (and trust) the broader EU policy machinery. Some of this is procedural, some strategic, and some broadly related to the challenge – that is not uniquely European – of making instruments and levels of operations (strategic/political/operational) more compatible.

As partnerships in CSDP become ever more important, and building up the capacities of partners moves into sharper focus, making sure CSDP 'fits' within and beyond EU activities has become an overarching priority in the already thick in-tray of the new EU institutional teams.

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