

DGAP POLICY BRIEF

Upgrading Europe's Civilian Crisis Management

A Strategic Planning Process in Ten Steps



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The European Union sees civilian CSDP missions as a hallmark of its foreign policy. But these missions are implemented ad hoc, without any kind of systematic or strategic planning. As a result, the EU does not have the right capabilities to address essential challenges. Capability-based planning organized into a ten-step process offers a much better way. Existing EU initiatives can be used to kick-start a new approach.

– The way the EU and its member states define, plan, and generate capabilities for civilian crisis missions is highly ineffective and inefficient. As a result, Europe is frequently unable to implement political objectives.

– Introducing capability-based planning offers many benefits: Based on the EU's Global Strategy, it would combine foresight exercises with a tangible and realistic level of ambition.

– A robust ten-step planning process can be used to kick-start this new approach to civilian capability planning. EU initiatives like the Strategic Compass can play an enabling role.

– The EU could highlight this new start by calling it the Feira II initiative. This would be a highly symbolic reference to the Portuguese city of Feira, where the EU in 2000 first agreed headline goals for its Common Security and Defense Policy (CSDP).

THE CHANGING SUPPLY AND DEMAND SIDES OF SECURITY

If the EU is serious about playing a significant role in international security and protecting its citizens from newly emerging threats, it needs to dramatically increase its efforts in civilian crisis management. Giving European crisis management more clout means boosting the supply side to meet the increased demand for security.

Demand Side: A Deteriorating Security Environment

Europe's security environment has changed dramatically. Since the Arab spring of 2011, an arc of crises has developed outside the EU's borders, stretching from Northern and Central Africa to the Middle East and further to Ukraine. As a result of growing international tensions, the EU faces cyber-attacks and acts of terrorism, which sometimes even originate from within its own borders. The security within the Union is significantly influenced by the security outside the Union.¹ But the danger is not just one of instability and violence spilling over into the EU. Core values of the EU – which is committed to the rule of law and to open and democratic societies which respect individual rights and responsibilities – are being openly and violently challenged.

Supply Side: Member States Remain Ambivalent

When EU member states decided to develop a common foreign and security policy (CFSP) in 1993, one key motivation was to make a significant contribution to international security. Civilian crisis management (CCM), using instruments such as mediation, policing, and support for political reforms, is a hallmark of an active European foreign policy.

Beginning with the Global Strategy of 2016, the EU discourse has focused on the concept of strategic autonomy. While this entails a wide scope of definitions, a sufficient capacity to manage the most urgent crises clearly is key. The current level of EU engagement does not reflect the political level of ambition.

Missions for the EU's Common Security and Defense Policy (CSDP) largely depend on the member states for their implementation and effectiveness as they own the bulk of all capabilities. On paper, the EU and its member states are committed to strategic aims

which call for more and more effective capabilities. But this is matched neither by the current level of engagement in missions nor by the rhetorical level of ambition. As a result, it is unclear which crises the EU is able and willing to deal with.

If the EU truly wishes to deliver security, it needs to concentrate on those crises that pose serious risks to Europe and plan for a possible response in terms of quality and quantity. The Strategic Compass (SC) process is a first step in that direction, as the EU Council confirmed in its recent conclusions on the Civilian CSDP Compact.²

More generally, the EU needs to focus on the threats it will have to respond to in the future. Without a coherent and forward-looking EU approach, member states can neither decide on their ambitions nor determine the capabilities and equipment needed to live up to those ambitions.

THE NEED FOR STRATEGIC CAPABILITY PLANNING

Current Shortfalls in Capability Planning

For the success of CSDP, capabilities play a crucial role. This is true not just for military missions but also for civilian crisis management. Capabilities should be defined in accordance with the EU's strategic objectives and the challenges on the ground. A clear analysis is needed to provide instruments that can support the implementation of EU policy objectives.

To this end, the EU first needs to assess future challenges in terms of crisis as well as crisis management. Second, it must define its level of ambition: Which types of conflict or crisis should the EU respond to, and what are the goals of those missions in terms of protecting European interests and values?

WHAT IS A CAPABILITY?

Capability refers to the ability to implement a given task. In concrete terms, a capability relies on skilled professionals who operate under a common goal within an organizational frame and who are supported by material resources such as equipment, IT infrastructure, or logistics.

¹ See also: Hannah Neumann, Carina Böttcher, Christian Mölling, Marie Wolf: "EU Civilian Crisis Management: How the Union Can Live up to Its Ambitions – or Stumble into Irrelevance", DGAPkompakt No. 15, German Council on Foreign Relations (DGAP) (July 2018).

² Council of the European Union, "Council Conclusions on Civilian CSDP Compact", Outcome of Proceedings, 7.12.2020, 13571/20. <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/47185/st13571-en20.pdf> (accessed December 15, 2020)

However, the EU currently operates on an entirely different basis. It tends to design CCM missions by what is ad hoc available. There is no systematic evaluation of what may be needed for future missions. As a result, missions are defined more by what capabilities are available than by what may be needed.

Planning for the Past or the Future?

Anticipating future changes in the security environment is key to ensuring that CCM missions will achieve their strategic objectives. Any plan based on today's parameters will be outdated by the time it is implemented. It takes years to generate special capabilities or even to expand existing ones. Fielding a capability can easily take six to eight years from taking the decision to budgeting, generating, and training. Over this stretch of time, the parameters are certain to have changed.

What is needed, then, is a more systematic planning process based on a forward-looking capability profile which allows for gap analysis and sets priorities for capability generation. Such a systematic approach also brings an additional benefit: It creates a powerful tool for national budget negotiations as it shows exactly what each EU member state needs to do to contribute a fair share to the EU's missions. It thus legitimizes spending on civilian capabilities.

There is nothing revolutionary about capability-based approaches. They are widely employed in areas such as public administration and business³, and they have even been used in civilian CSDP before. The so-called Feira headline goal, the very first CCM capability goals set by the EU, were qualified and quantified according to a capability-based approach. Naturally, this undertaking would be most fruitful if embedded in an overall reconfiguration of the EU's comprehensive approach to prevention, crisis management, and stabilization while including the civilian developments.

THE EU'S CURRENT APPROACH TO CIVILIAN CAPABILITIES

Three mutually reinforcing deficits mark the current approach to civilian capabilities:

- There is no effective strategic guidance to inform planning and match capabilities to strategic objectives.
- There is also no systematic capability planning process to translate the strategic guidance into capability generation. Instead, capability demand is largely shaped by individual missions.
- The existing civilian capability profile mostly represents a terra incognita: Neither the EU nor its member states have a clear overview of the quality and quantity of EU's civilian capabilities – neither in term of demand nor of supply.

Lack of an Effective Strategic Guidance

While the EU and its member states have drawn up crisis management strategies and developed some elements of long-term conflict assessment and horizon scanning, these do not inform capability planning in any systematic way. It is the past which guides EU civilian capabilities. The only exception is the Feira headline goal agreed back in the year 2000. Even though the reality of missions has changed significantly since then, the Feira goal remains a central point of reference in debates about improving capabilities, especially regarding the SC.⁴ But even then, member states have not permanently made the capabilities available that they agreed to in Feira.

No Systematic Capability Planning

Currently, Europe relies on mission-based planning, meaning that every mission is dealt with individually. It is only in the run-up to a mission that the EU begins to think about the capabilities needed. The closer the starting date of the mission approaches, the more institutions (e.g. the Political and Security Committee, the Crisis Management Planning Directorate, etc.) and planning instruments (Crisis Management Concept, Operations Plan, etc.) get involved. They sketch out the individual, mission-based capability needs.

There is no systematic capability planning process that would assess capability needs beyond current or past missions. Moreover, at this pre-mission stage, the time pressure to begin the engagement is high. The focus is most probably not on capability gaps and how to close them for future missions, especially not as there are no relevant procedures for translat-

³ Strategic capability planning is a standard in many areas, for example public administration, business and the military. For example: Strategic Management in Public Administration, John Bryson and Bert George, in: The Oxford Encyclopedia of Public Administration, Oxford University Press, January 2020, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/337472823_Strategic_Management_in_Public_Administration (accessed December 15, 2020); Zahra, Shaker A. and Sapienza, Harry J. and Davidsson, Per (2006) Entrepreneurship and Dynamic Capabilities: A Review, Model and Research Agenda. Journal of Management Studies 43(4):pp. 917-955, <https://eprints.qut.edu.au/5850/1/5850a.pdf> (accessed December 15, 2020).

⁴ For suggestions on the concrete topics to be addressed, see: Christian Mölling and Torben Schütz, "The EU's Strategic Compass and Its Four Baskets Recommendations to Make the Most of It", DGAP Report No. 13, German Council on Foreign Relations (DGAP) (November 2020).

ing such information into capability planning. Rarely do new impulses make the capability profile evolve.

Past experiences shape capabilities not just because of the focus on individual missions and the experiences resulting from them but also due to institutional path dependencies. People who are proud of having developed and found support for the existing approach find change difficult.

However, when drivers mainly look at the rear-view mirror, they become unable to account for changes during an operation (medium-term perspective) or the challenges of future conflicts (long-term perspective). Yet most missions are of long duration, and mission environments – what or who fuels the conflict that the mission is meant to address – change. The EU and its member states need to understand that such change will continue. Future missions will demand capabilities that are quantitatively and qualitatively different from what is needed today. They cannot be identified through the current approach.

Missing Taxonomy and Inventory of Capabilities

The European Union and its member states have little information about the quality and quantity of existing CCM capabilities. This also means that it is difficult for national governments to justify the demand for additional capabilities in their domestic budget negotiations. In most cases, they cannot argue that what they ask for represents a fair share of the burden and is necessary because of the strategic importance of the instrument.

Gaps remain unknown

As there is no systematic inventory of capabilities, it is impossible to know to what extent the EU and its member states are currently implementing a given headline goal. Assessing the existing missions and the personnel pools which exist in some member states only gives a very raw indication of what might be available. As a consequence, gaps can neither be measured nor eliminated.

No standard definitions

The EU also lacks a taxonomy of CCM capabilities which could serve as a foundation for planning processes. There is no agreement on how to define and monitor capabilities and how to operationalize the level of ambition, i.e. what is needed when at what quality and quantity.

Fragmentation across nations

With an EU guidance based on a common capability planning process, planning at the national level tends to be shaped by domestic dynamics. From an EU perspective, it becomes fragmented, inconsistent, and incoherent. Also, capabilities needed for CCM are generally developed for domestic functions. It is only later and on an ad hoc basis that they get repurposed for the EU's civilian crisis management missions.

A few member states (e.g. Germany, Sweden, Latvia) have started to keep a register of professionals with particular skills to be better prepared for calls for contributions. But these registers do not include more unorthodox skill sets, and there is little or no coordination between those member states.

A CAPABILITY-BASED APPROACH: GETTING AHEAD OF THE CURVE

A capability-based approach can help address all three shortfalls of the current system: It can provide strategic level guidance, a forward-looking and timely planning process, and a taxonomy and inventory for monitoring capabilities. Such an approach is routine in other areas of politics and resource or capacity development. But it still requires political support from the member states.

Elements of a capability-based approach

A capability-based approach will operate under the assumption that actors must prepare capabilities well in advance to ensure quality and readiness. As it is impossible to know the exact nature of the next mission, actors have to prepare for a spectrum of possible scenarios. The resulting capability profile will not be perfect for any one scenario, but it will deliver satisfactory results across the entire spectrum.

Capability based planning needs to consider three elements:

- Conflict trends can be used to define the known elements of any future security environment. The EU needs to prepare for them under any circumstances.
- An analysis of the uncertainties in future conflicts can help to shed light on contingencies that might otherwise catch the EU unprepared.
- Lessons learnt from past missions and their applicability to current and future capability planning should be considered in order to develop standard capabilities and routines.

The EU and its member states will need to provide political guidance on the goals of future engagements. Planning tools can then help to define the required capabilities as well as the time frame and investment involved. They can also provide feedback if the desired level of ambition is not achievable.

In addition, any use of CCM tools needs to be assessed in comparison to the many other instruments the EU and its member states have available. For example, the EU delegation in Kosovo has implemented rule of law projects funded and staffed by the Commission. Though CSDP capabilities are to be made available by member states through secondment, this need not exclude cooptation on the ground. Different combinations and scenarios should be examined to find out where capabilities overlap. Thus, potential choices on capabilities and instruments can be identified. Similarly, factoring in potential contributions by partners like the United Nations or individual countries such as the UK or Norway allows to test many variations and offer more sophisticated scenarios.

Naturally, past practices and experiences will remain relevant to some extent. But to avoid preparing for the past, i.e. allowing past experiences to rule future capabilities, it is essential to use scientific foresight methods to explore scenarios for the future. It is possible to anticipate many elements which will be important to the definition of future missions and their environment. Strategic foresight exercises can transform some aspects of an unknown future into known contingencies. For these conflict contingencies, hypothetical missions can then be planned.

A better understanding of known trends as well as what remains unknowable will help actors to meet the challenges of tomorrow: Which issues are likely to occur, which developments may turn out to be particularly disruptive, and which capabilities are needed to address the situation? Moreover, with this approach, a larger variety of mission objectives and their impact on the need for capabilities can be analyzed.

Finally, a systematic process of capability development, which stretches into the future and brings together several countries, will need to define categories and benchmarks for capabilities. This will allow the EU to draw up an inventory of capabilities already available. Once this capability profile exists, gaps as well as superfluous resources can be easily identified. Member states can then plan how to address such inefficiencies.

THE TEN STEPS OF A CAPABILITY PLANNING CYCLE

Future CCM planning could be based on a process following the following ten steps:

- 1** Explain the EU's conflict strategy: How, why, and when does the EU need to engage in conflict?
- 2** Explain the role of civilian crisis management and CSDP in that conflict strategy as well as the link to other instruments: Among the different instruments, what value can civilian CSDP add?
- 3** Define the level of ambition in crisis management and stabilization: What does the EU want to be able to do and to achieve?
- 4** Analyze the challenges posed by future crises and subsequent mission environments by using scenario-based planning: What do missions need to be equipped for?
- 5** Define the missions the EU wishes to engage in: Is the EU's committed to the full range of missions, or would it prefer to specialize on particular aspects, possibly cooperating with other actors (e.g. UN, UK) when needed?
- 6** Develop the EU capability profile: Which tasks and resulting capabilities are needed for these missions, both quantitatively and qualitatively?
- 7** Assess the baseline: Which capabilities are available today?
- 8** Estimate capability gaps and excess capabilities today and in ten years' time: Which capabilities need to be developed and expanded, both quantitatively and qualitatively? Which will not be needed?
- 9** Define priority areas for capability development and sustainment, areas of cooperation, specialization, and division of labor between member states: Who will contribute and sustain which capabilities?
- 10** Compare the result with the resources available, revisit steps 1 to 3 regularly, and adapt aims and means accordingly: How does the EU's capability plan need to be amended to keep strategic planning in line with current and anticipated challenges?

More realistically, this procedure should be seen as a cycle. New impulses come in at different entry points, especially at steps 1 to 3. The cycle also contains routine elements like 8 and 9, and there can be changes in sequence among steps 1 to 5.

This approach would need to be established in an iterative process to synchronize the three core elements: strategic level guidance, the planning process, and finally the taxonomy and inventory for monitoring capabilities.

TOWARD A CIVILIAN CAPABILITY PROFILE

When reforming its civilian capability planning, the EU can avoid mistakes made in other areas, especially the military. It is an advantage that little structure exists so far – the landscape can be built up from nearly nothing in accordance with the underlying requirements. This avoids the slow evolution of a mix of institutions that overlap in competencies and frequently miscommunicate.

In general, forward-looking planning must not end up turning projections into self-fulfilling prophecies. Threats and crisis environments undergo constant change. Therefore, planning needs to include a continuous assessment of present and future needs of missions in order to prepare efficiently and effectively. The goal is to be ready for a large bandwidth of crises.

Set Up Appropriate Institutions

Capability planning needs to be anchored in appropriate institutions. Initially, a civil capability planning cell will do, but its tasks should eventually be transferred into a HQ level entity which can deliver capability planning, mission planning, and mission command and control as a one stop shop. This should be separate but not isolated from its military counterpart.

The institutions involved will need to put a massive effort into compiling the lessons learnt from missions, developing foresight sessions and scenarios, and drawing up a baseline capability assessment. These efforts need to be complemented by processes at the national level.

Depending on the political level of ambition, the structures need to encourage more interaction with other European and national institutions. Civilian

CSDP represents only one component of an integrated approach and therefore should not be isolated from other efforts to improve the EU's capacity to act.

Build a Culture of Ownership

The process leading to the civilian CSDP Compact can serve as a model for the first steps toward creating a civilian capability profile. The Compact started out with an organized dialogue with stakeholders to hear their suggestions for improving the current system. A similar effort here could help to increase awareness and ownership of civilian CSDP as an instrument.

Furthermore, the so-called mini concepts have a forward-looking impetus. As part of the Compact's operationalization, they explore what CCM can potentially contribute to addressing security challenges such as improving cyber security or preventing and countering violent extremism. It is a promising endeavour to assess the prospective possibilities of civilian missions that have been strengthened in accordance with the Compact. However, efforts should not be limited to possible new areas but regularly reevaluate existing ones, too, as change is constant.

To build a culture of ownership and to spread awareness of the logic of capability planning to national and EU institutions, some of the HQ posts could be staffed by member state officials who would eventually rotate back into national positions for civilian capability planning. Other posts should be staffed by EU institutions and possibly later on by partners like the UN or the African Union.

Make Use of the Strategic Compass

The Strategic Compass process is designed to produce political agreement on an up-to-date level of ambition. At the same time, it provides an interpretation of the EU Global Strategy, which can be used for Step 1 of the planning process. In a next stage, the SC can be used to give indications or even answers for steps 2 to 5. It also includes a forward-looking threat analysis.

The SC was primarily set up to deliver inputs to military capability planning. However, from the perspective of the EU's integrated approach, it makes sense to use the SC for civilian capability planning as well. In the best case, civilian planning would be added as an explicit goal to the Strategic Dialogue, which has been initiated as part of the SC.

Move Toward a Feira II

Symbols are important. If the European Union introduces a civilian capability planning mechanism based on the SC, the process could be kicked off in the Portuguese city of Feira where in 2000, the first CSDP headline goals were agreed. A Feira II proposal could be agreed during the Portuguese EU presidency in 2021. This – and a robust plan to quickly initiate the capability planning process – could put civilian CSDP back on the strategic agenda.

Three other innovations should also become part of such a Feira II agreement. First, the progress made on the Compact process should be consolidated. Second, the link between the Compact and capability planning needs to be defined and spelled out in detail. Third, the EU should revamp its comprehensive approach to prevention, crisis management, and stabilization while including the civilian developments. Civilian crisis management, in addition to the existing military tools and instruments of the Commission, should be treated as an essential part of Europe's security toolbox.

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