

Workshop Note: CSDP Missions and the Protection of Cultural Heritage Lessons from EUAM Iraq and the Way Forward

On 1 October 2020, ZIF and DGAP convened ten experts to discuss lessons from EUAM Iraq and the way forward for the issue of Protection of Cultural Heritage and CSDP, guided by these questions:

Experiences and Lessons on PCH in Iraq

- Which issues were identified as most pressing on PCH in Iraq, and was this assessment shared by local and international actors?
- What were the biggest gaps in Iraqi structures and expertise on PCH, and how much of a priority was it for the government to address them?
- Which international activities and instruments have proven most effective on PCH in Iraq, and why?
- What is your assessment of EUAM Iraq with regard to its PCH activities, and what lessons could be applicable to other missions and operations?

What role for CSDP in PCH?

- Should PCH become a core function or just a cross-cutting issue in some CSDP missions and operations, and which European stakeholders would need convincing?
- Which aspects of PCH could prove most beneficial for CSDP to tackle, and how would these relate to other existing and future CSDP missions and tasks?
- What issues should be left to (which) other actors/organizations, including EU bodies like the Commission and Europol, and who should decide this?
- What could an integrated EU-UN approach to PCH look like, and would this allow a full-spectrum approach from physical protection of sites to prosecution?

Background

At the EU level, the Protection of Cultural Heritage (PCH) was first mentioned in 2016, in the EU strategy on international cultural relations.¹ During discussions on the Civilian CSDP Compact in 2017 a new task was duly introduced for CSDP Missions and Operations: the “Preservation and Protection of Cultural Heritage”.² According to the Compact, civilian CSDP missions should now contribute to the EU’s wider response to tackling new security challenges – including those linked to the preservation and protection of cultural heritage.

The EU Advisory Mission (EUAM) Iraq was the first to gain a mandate for PCH. The destruction of cultural heritage by ISIS had drawn multiple international and local actors to the task of PCH in Iraq and, in spring 2017, the Italian government convened Culture Ministers under its G7 Presidency. This resulted in a joint letter by Italy, Germany and France to the EU HRVP and European Commission and secured first political awareness for the issue of PCH, and then finally also the EUAM Iraq PCH mandate.

The Council conclusions of June 2019 (“On an EU Strategic Approach to International Cultural Relations,”)³ advocate “strengthening the role of culture in policies and programs within the framework of external relations, including under the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP).” But this is not just a matter for CSDP. It is important to recognize the role of the EU Commission’s DG Education and

¹ Joint Communication “Towards an EU strategy in international cultural relations” of June 2016 that was endorsed by the EU Council in May 2017 and supported by the European Parliament.

² EEAS Issue Paper (2017) 977 REV 1 “Preservation and Protection of Cultural Heritage in CSDP Missions and Operations”.

³ EU Council Conclusion 2019/C 192/04.

Culture in Iraq, galvanized by the 2018 European Year of Cultural Heritage to broach the international dimension of PCH.

Experiences and Lessons on PCH in Iraq

For EUAM Iraq, PCH was a secondary aspect and featured in the portfolio only of one member of the mission. Nevertheless, this one PCH expert in the mission achieved far more than police training alone could have, because of the importance of high-level political lobbying. Such a political approach has drawbacks of course: it is somewhat removed from the people (an important aspect of cultural protection) and progress can quickly be undermined in countries with high political turnover.⁴ Ideally, training and political advisory functions should go hand in hand.

EUAM Iraq's successes include: supporting the development of an Iraqi database on PCH and helping get the Iraqi discussion on PCH started. Political contacts of the mission were key as these helped to raise awareness for the issue at the Iraqi Ministry of the Interior, which in turn reached out to the Ministry of Culture. This too reveals a lesson: Ministries of the Interior tend to have higher status than Ministries of Culture, and their engagement can be decisive for a sustainable and prioritized PCH in post-conflict settings.

The Italian Carabinieri were a considerable asset to the work of the EU mission when it came both to advising and to training Iraqi counterparts. But this in itself reveals a problem. Missions rely on national contributions. If EU Member States have no relevant capabilities, clearly they have nothing to offer CSDP missions. That said, Iraq has also shown that PCH needs to be more comprehensively approached, and the EU's need to combine scarce and various capabilities may encourage it to be more innovative.

What Role for CSDP in PCH?

Both civilian and military elements are necessary, thus CSDP civilian missions and military operations should have the expertise and capabilities to act in this area. In the case of the military, much of the training that exists is about „do no harm” (that is: making sure members of the military do not destroy or negatively affect heritage). Training counts as a low-hanging fruit (and the Carabinieri are currently drafting relevant guidelines for EU training on PCH). In the case of civilian missions, the current approach of mainstreaming PCH throughout all missions, especially those working on SSR seems reasonable given needs in places like Mali or Niger.

CSDP missions typically provide support on multiple issues related to PCH: uniform-to-uniform dialogue, cooperation with international law enforcement agencies,⁵ and political awareness-raising. So, in general, it would be beneficial if all CSDP missions and operations had either a dedicated advisor or focal point on PCH. As for personnel, CSDP missions could usefully house experts to facilitate dialogue particularly between communities, cultural managers, architects, and archaeologists – perhaps in the form of a kind of cultural attaché.

One could even imagine a CSDP mission solely dedicated to PCH, if there was a clear link to peace and security. However, there are still doubts about the comparative contribution of CSDP, especially in comparison to UNESCO programmes and activities and even those of the EU Commission.

⁴ The task of PCH in Iraq has been complicated by the fragmentation of the political landscape – something which is also reflected in the cultural heritage of the country. Each minority has its own heritage to protect. That means PCH is not seen as a neutral and uniting task, and may even prove divisive.

⁵ The law enforcement dimension of PCH is not just about trafficking. There are obvious links also to human rights issues such as freedom of expression – a point vividly illustrated by the killing of writers and artists in Iraq.

Division of Labour and New Actors/Initiatives

Even though UNESCO is not on the ground everywhere (e.g. Georgia), it does enjoy a quite comprehensive range of networks and good relationships with both civil society and government. Its mechanism for mobilizing actors beyond PCH communities (“Unite for Heritage”) will be an important instrument in the future even though only Italy (Carabinieri) provides personnel so far. Perhaps CSDP could offer support in this area.

In general, a modular approach of EU and UN peace operations could be favourable maybe with the EU providing experts or units for PCH within the framework of a UN peace operation. Worldwide, new units dedicated to PCH have recently been established. The US have notably recruited as PCH officers 30 reservists (all with relevant degrees and civilian plus military expertise, trained by the Smithsonian Institute). The UK has a similar unit, and the French army is scaling up efforts (albeit with a very different approach). In addition, the German Archaeological Institute (DAI) plans to build a rapid reaction team of experts called Cultural Heritage Rescue Unit (CHRU) which will be aligned to the German Federal Agency for Technical Relief (THW).

To ensure this growing range of actors engages in a complimentary way, one obvious option would be to have a joint international roster for experts on PCH and units to be deployed within UN, CSDP or other missions or operations.

Conclusions

The EU has made considerable progress in the field of PCH in just five short years, and according to the usual metrics it looks set to consolidate this. These metrics include:

- a clear policy framework for foreign and security and international cooperation;⁶
- funding lines within the EU’s external action instruments;
- a framework for fostering personnel and an active community of practice for PCH

As regards the policy framework, currently both the EEAS and European Commission are locked in discussion about the EU’s role in this field, including the potential for an integrated European approach, and an EU concept on PCH within CSDP structures, i.e. SECDEFPOL/ISP. On the funding side, a new EU instrument (NDICI) could spawn opportunities for PCH, and there is currently a political window for novel proposals. With a view to the EU’s pool of personnel, member states (e. g. France, Spain, and the Netherlands) have already or are building up PCH units.

But the EU’s progress in fact rests on somewhat delicate foundations, and it risks losing even its small *acquis* in this field. The remarkable progress made under the last European Commission/HRVP was driven heavily by a small group of EU officials from a tiny number of member states. They happened to be in the right place to seize political opportunities in the EU (for instance securing funding from DG Development Cooperation) and at the international level (linking to the UN and G7 levels). Many of these individuals have moved on.

At this delicate stage there is a risk that cheerleaders for an EU role in PCH now achieve a pyrrhic victory, securing the EU’s future role in PCH but only by appealing to expedient political rationales. International demand for PCH is huge, the EU both can make a significant contribution across all facets - law-enforcement, physical protection, reconstruction, peace and security, cultural protection amongst mobile and displaced communities etc. But it needs to tread carefully. Politically speaking, PCH is both low on the agenda but also highly divisive.

Even amongst security specialists, especially in the military sphere, cultural heritage is mostly viewed as peripheral, an inanimate thing and, if there is a need for the military to choose between saving a person and saving a statue, the choice is obvious. But an integrated EU crisis management needs to have

⁶ The military dimension should remain apart from the civilian for now; but up-coming conferences should foster the discussions between both components.

the capacities (human, financial, logistical) to save both individual human lives and their social infrastructure.

Meanwhile at the highest levels of international politics, governments are drawn to the task of PCH by its association with crime and trafficking. The UN Security Council has repeatedly discussed how the trafficking of cultural heritage is linked to terrorism and conflict, the one angle which they all agree is important, thus ignoring the elements of the issue which divide them or might require a major shift in their own behaviour (how artefacts stolen from post-colonial settings fuel the “culture wars” in the West, for instance, or the purposeful destruction of Uyghur heritage in the East).

As a result, CSDP missions are naturally drawn to the relatively narrow and technical SSR focus. Currently, most civilian CSDP missions focus on SSR, and many work closely with law-enforcement units officials as police and customs. Yet, the fit between PCH and SSR is seldom perfect. Moreover, PCH could also provide an opportunity for the EU in the framework of civil-military cooperation between CSDP missions and operations – both on training and mainstreaming of PCH but also of its joint implementation in the field (for example in the area of physical protection).

Knowledge management and training are key to building up the both the EU’s internal capabilities and embedding them in an international framework. Thus UNESCO should be instrumental in training CSDP personnel. And CSDP knowledge management needs an update, too, not only on PCH. Maybe the newly established Center of Excellence for European Civilian Crisis Management (CoE) could provide a platform for lessons identified and good practices.

PCH has been a task in Europe for at least 70 years, but progress in this field has been stop-start, and has passed from one actor to another (from the Monument Men, via NATO’s Kosovo mandate and Italy in Iraq to today’s EUAM Iraq). The EU finds itself at a vital point when it comes to finally ensuring some continuity and a more comprehensive approach to the protection of cultural heritage.