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Wilton Park



Conference report

**EU programmes and action in fragile and conflict
states: next steps for the comprehensive approach**

Tuesday 18 – Thursday 20 February 2014 | WP1318



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In December 2013 the European External Action Service (EEAS) and the EU Commission published the Joint Communication on the 'EU's Comprehensive Approach to external conflict and crises'. The document offered important guidelines regarding the purpose and general way forward for the EU's Comprehensive Approach, and has helped better to internalise the concept within EU institutions and amongst the Member States. However, the Joint Communication very largely left undefined the specific implementation steps needed for the EU to use its instruments in a more coherent joined up way to enhance its actions in fragile and conflict states.

In December 2012 Wilton Park organised a first Comprehensive Approach conference that made an important contribution to the thinking reflected in the Joint Communication. The follow up conference, held in February 2014, was designed to consider next steps and initiatives in taking forward the principles set out in the Joint Communication.

Key conclusions and recommendations

- There is a need for some form of concrete follow-on document to the Joint Communication, setting out key change management priorities in order to continue translating the comprehensive approach into more effective comprehensive action.
- This follow-on document should stress the need for an orchestrated response to promote stability in fragile and conflict states as well as to address the full conflict cycle. It should set out concrete measures aimed at promoting a cultural step change in pooling analysis; developing a shared vision across EU institutions; coordinating delivery and bringing greater focus on how to implement transitions between different EU instruments. It should also create incentives at the personal level to support comprehensive action.
- Integration of different perspectives is critical; top-down management input that brings political realities into any strategy and action plan must be blended together with bottom-up expertise from both Brussels and the field.
- The comprehensive approach cannot be successful unless EU institutions and Member States are able to formulate a shared vision and strategy for implementation in the field. Analysis and objectives should determine the choice of instruments for deployment, not vice versa.
- In order to make a positive contribution to stability, peacebuilding and statebuilding in fragile and conflicts states it is important to provide a long-term commitment; setting

an end-state is preferable than an end-date.

- Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) crisis interventions can have a role in an EU response, but should be considered following a sound conflict analysis. To allow a more rapid response, this analysis and planning should, to a substantial degree, be carried out in advance, before the outbreak of a crisis. Scenario planning, to consider the likely objectives and policies to address them, should be undertaken.
- Joint analysis, planning and programming are essential processes for achieving comprehensive implementation. The EEAS geographic desks should play the key role in ensuring comprehensiveness in this process. EU Member States should contribute to defining the vision and evaluating outcomes, but should avoid micro-management of the implementation phase.
- CSDP constitutes an important instrument available to the EU. But it should be considered as one of a number of different levers and integrated as part of the overall comprehensive approach.
- Transitions between the CSDP mission and longer-term EU instruments must be a key consideration during the planning process. Thinking about transitions between different EU instruments must take place from the outset of the planning process, not when a mission or programme is nearing its end date. A specific fund that could ease the process of transition between CSDP missions and Commission programmes could be valuable.
- The Political Framework for Crisis Approach (PFCA) is designed to provide a holistic examination of a given crisis situation and provides a strategic analysis and details available options for EU action (including CSDP intervention). The EU should promote greater use of the PFCA into its processes for dealing with crisis situations.
- Long term sustainability of an EU response is an important consideration. To achieve this, host country government and civil society stakeholders should be involved from the planning phase onwards, to contribute to agreeing sustainable solutions that fully take into account local conditions. More clarity is needed on how EU actions should coordinate in practical terms with regional and international partner organisations.
- The 'New Deal for Engagement in Fragile States' contains important principles on working with host country stakeholders as well as on other aspects of engagement in fragile and conflict states. It should help inform thinking on the part of the broad range of EU actors and be better embedded into their analytical frameworks.
- Benchmarks should be established and used to assess progress of EU initiatives at regular intervals. Actions could then be adjusted according to progress made against these benchmarks.
- EU Delegations in fragile and conflict states should be reinforced in terms of staff and capabilities where necessary. A holistic vision should be assured; the point of view of the actors based in the peripheries should also be incorporated in planned actions;
- There is a need to achieve clarity around leadership and roles, both at headquarters and in the field, particularly where there is an EU Special Representative (EUSR) and CSDP mission in addition to an EU Head of Delegation (HoD).
- Where appropriate reinforced EU delegations and HoDs in fragile and conflict states could utilise their additional EU resource and serve as focal points for the coordination of EU activity on the ground.
- The EU needs to place greater emphasis on improving the training, skills and experience of its personnel for working on conflict related issues and in fragile and conflict environments. It also needs to examine how to create incentives for collaboration and comprehensiveness in staff working practices within EU institutions.

Background: the Comprehensive Approach

1. Following publication of the European Security Strategy in 2003, drafted under the authority of Javier Solana, then EU High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy, the European Union started discussing strategic objectives for achieving a secure Europe in a better world. The Lisbon Treaty and the creation of the European External Action Service (EEAS) represented important steps forward in ensuring better coordination and consistency in EU foreign policy.
2. The first Wilton Park Comprehensive Approach conference in December 2012 helped stimulate much of the thinking that has since guided the work of EU institutions and Member States. There is now wide agreement that the fundamental purpose of the Comprehensive Approach is to provide an orchestrated response to state fragility, failure and conflict. The Joint Communication also sets out that CSDP actions should slot into longer-term EU programmes and policies, that EU institutions and Member States should work in a joined-up way both at headquarters and field level, and that collectively they need to coordinate effectively with other key international actors.
3. However, important gaps in how to practically implement the Comprehensive Approach remain. These gaps are attributable to the very substantial, inherent complexities involved in joining up a broad range of capabilities as well as to the continuing historical legacy of the EU's "pillar" structure and to the difficulties of coordination with Member States that have their own national interests and priorities.

Prevention, preparedness, response, and management: analysis, vision, then instruments

4. The Joint Communication is the result of a collaborative effort involving not only the European Commission and EEAS, but also some of the Member States that contributed via non-papers. The pragmatic approach used to produce the document should be now implemented in effective practices.
5. While the Joint Communication establishes important principles for taking forward the comprehensive approach within the EU, it is vague on how to put those principles into practice. The EU must build the comprehensive approach into the DNA and culture of all of its relevant institutions, but it is difficult to see how this transformation can happen without the right processes and incentives. Institutional culture is unlikely to change sufficiently without the wiring in place to encourage it. Some form of implementation plan or document is consequently needed to follow up on the Joint Communication.
6. An implementation plan for the Joint Communication should not attempt to establish a bureaucratic straight jacket around the EU institutions. An implementation plan that is too prescriptive or complicated will not be applicable to the wide range of fragile and conflict state environments. An EU implementation plan for the comprehensive approach should meet three basic requirements.
7. First, it should provide for joint (cross EU institution) analysis of local fragile and conflict state contexts. The mainstreaming of joint analysis of the local context in fragile and conflict states could constitute a very powerful tool in overtly exhibiting and advancing a comprehensive approach across EU institutions.
8. Secondly, a process needs to be established to turn this fragile and conflict risk analysis into actionable tasks or objectives. The process must be evidence based, restraining any jumping to unsubstantiated conclusions about what needs to be done. This process could add value by reversing the sequence that currently takes place too frequently, whereby the EU decides on the instrument to use prior to deciding on the vision and objectives for EU intervention. Thirdly, the right kind of process will establish critical decision-making points so that when actions are decided people are

empowered and able to take responsibility and deliver.

9. A tangible indication that the comprehensive approach is taking hold within the EU will occur when the EU is able to formulate country and regional strategies that are prioritised and sequenced rather than simply listing all objectives and actions in a disjointed way. Every country and regional strategy should have measurable benchmarks attached to it.
10. The EU's approach to fragile and conflict state challenges should thus be driven by vision, policy and objectives, and not by the instruments available. The tools available to the EU to respond to fragility, crisis, and conflict are both short and long term. Currently available EU instruments can be applied to the full range of programmes and actions designed to promote stability in fragile and conflict states as well as cover the entire crisis cycle in terms of prevention, preparedness, response, and management.
11. A possible obstacle to further implementation of the comprehensive approach has been the differing priority focus between the EEAS and the European Commission. Focus within EEAS is on crisis and conflict management, while in DEVCO the focus is naturally on peace and state building. CSDP missions deployed for crisis and conflict management objectives have arguably been given disproportionate weight within EU consideration of how to move forward with the comprehensive approach. The key goal in this context is for the EU to use all of its instruments in the most appropriate way in response to the contextual analysis, vision, policy and objectives that have been established.
12. The principles embodied in the 'New Deal for Engagement in Fragile States' could make an important contribution to a common conceptual framework for EU engagement in fragile and conflict environments and help to improve the coordination of and transitions between different instruments. Its focus on peace and state building principles provides a strong link between the security and development agendas. The New Deal is both a set of principles and a process itself. It was endorsed by the EU along with 36 countries, including 18 fragile states and 6 international institutions during the Fourth High Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness held in Busan in December 2011.
13. In thinking about how to coordinate better the use of its different instruments, the EU could find it valuable to draw on the experience of other multilateral actors e.g. the United Nations experience with transition planning. The UN planning process is done in five phases, starting with analysing the conflict, framing achievable objectives, identifying the instruments available to reach them, agreeing on benchmarks, and incorporating transitions as the final step. Thinking about transitions should take place from the outset of the planning process. Moreover, transitions should be in line with the priorities of the host country government priorities and its national strategy.
14. EU country and regional strategies should be flexible and able to adjust based on activity hitting agreed benchmarks. These benchmarks should continuously assess progress and be amended as needed. A successful case in this respect is Liberia where the UNSC changed its policy, the result of the revision of benchmarks.
15. Within the UN level the Peacebuilding Commission (PBC), an intergovernmental advisory body that supports peace efforts in countries emerging from conflict, is responsible for ensuring the overall coherence of UN missions. The PBC brings together all of the relevant actors, streamlines resources and advises on and proposes integrated strategies for post-conflict peacebuilding and recovery; and highlights any gaps in planned actions.
16. At EU level the Conflict Prevention, Peacebuilding and Mediation Instruments Division has been tasked with developing a conflict analysis that should be mainstreamed among institutions and instruments. The main scope of the analysis is to support the creation of a common vision and strategy, both essential elements for

assuring coherence. A joint and shared analysis is the only way to have a common view and then a common response.

17. In order to develop the best possible analysis, experts with different backgrounds should examine together the same problem and agree a common understanding. Starting from a common understanding makes it easier to achieve jointly formulated objectives. In order to identify risks in the medium and long term, and to support resource allocation decisions, a common EU early warning system is under development. To be effective and to make the information actionable it is important that the analysis is evidence based, and should have short recommendations for actions. But there are too many variables in any situation and a one dimensional analysis is not enough.
18. The geographic desks are the main repository of context specific knowledge in Brussels and should be the institutional element that manages the process of generating analysis and implementation plans. A lessons learned process should be streamlined within the framework of the geographic desks.
19. The way in which Member States contribute to these processes should change as well. There are too many committees and discussions within them that too often end up attempting to micro-manage implementation activities. Member States should be focused on developing the vision and providing higher level political direction rather than micro-managing decision-making at lower levels and in the field.
20. It is vital to invest time to consult with the full range of local stakeholders, managing expectations of what the EU can do and to make best use of available resources. According to comments during the conference some good practice in this respect seems to be exemplified by the actions of the Netherlands to Burundi and that of the United Kingdom to Rwanda. A preliminary discussion with local partners has helped the definition of needs; these needs have become the objectives of the strategy. Discussion of local needs should start from a proper early warning analysis and should not be programme driven.

Joining up EU actions: the Horn of Africa experience

21. EU experience in the Horn of Africa provides many valuable lessons, but should not be viewed as a model for use in other environments. The EU Strategic Framework for the Horn of Africa was retrofitted to activities that were already taking place and so its impact was more to provide a unified narrative for them and give more visibility to the EU role rather than deliver comprehensive planning and action.
22. Between 2007 and 2011 the EU ran the Horn of Africa Initiative (HoAI) to foster regional cooperation by assisting the countries of the Horn to work together in addressing their common development challenges. The focus of this first phase was the inter-connectivity of infrastructure programmes in energy, transport and water resource management. In 2008 the CSDP mission 'Atalanta' began. Following the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty the EU began focusing on how to frame a more comprehensive strategy for the Horn of Africa.
23. The EU Council approved the EU Strategic Framework for the Horn of Africa in November 2011. Since then there has been greater effort to plan and implement actions in a more comprehensive way, but substantial problems remain. While the Strategic Framework has created a more effective coordination point for Member States' own bilateral activities, it has nonetheless been difficult for the EU to drive the process in a truly comprehensive way.
24. As a basis for moving forward comprehensively the EU Delegation should work together with Member State embassies and the EU Special Representative to ensure that behind any action there is a clear understanding of the needs on the ground and an agreement of the best way to fulfil them. Each phase of engagement in a fragile and conflict situation requires a single institution to be ultimately responsible for the

action, but all actions should be part of an overall strategy agreed during the planning phase by all actors involved.

Applying the Comprehensive Approach in practice: the cases of Mali and the Sahel, Kosovo, and Georgia and South Caucasus

25. All three of these case studies provide useful lessons and conclusions regarding best practice. EU strategy and chain of command were common focal points of discussion regarding all three theatres.
26. In Mali there was a heavy emphasis on training and equipping local security forces. 'Train and Equip' has frequently been a preferred approach of international actors because it is easy to quantify and benchmark. However, the risk that this kind of narrow focus can be counterproductive is quite high and long-term success far from guaranteed. In Mali as in many other conflict environments, a successful response should integrate 'Train and Equip' within a broader security sector reform (SSR) strategy, itself part of a larger peace and state building response in overall coordination with local and international actors.
27. Six EU institutions were on the ground in Kosovo. There was an overarching strategic framework but it was not strong enough to provide adequate guidance. The EU CSDP Rule of Law Mission in Kosovo (EULEX) early planning was very compartmentalised. The situation has subsequently improved but a lesson from this mission is that planning must be carefully considered to provide useful guidance but also to leave enough flexibility to the field for implementation. EU action in Georgia and the South Caucasus has also suffered from a lack of definition of clear objectives and what is needed to achieve them.
28. The EU is frequently represented by different actors. In Georgia, for example, there is an EUSR, a Head of Delegation and the CSDP monitoring mission EUMM Georgia. All are in different chains of command but with overlapping roles, and no dedicated budget for conflict resolution. This situation raises questions about agreed responsibility; and on how EU actors coordinate their work; and how this work feeds into that of others. Having a clear division of labour is also useful to avoid duplication of effort with other partners on the ground, like UN or OSCE in the case of Georgia.
29. In Mali and the Sahel there is similarly the question of exactly what kind of EUSR the EU wants to have. In this circumstance the EUSR could add value by playing a key role in overseeing the nexus between security and development policies, as well as providing the external face of EU engagement in the region.
30. If it is not possible to have a single chain of command, there should at least be an effort to establish a clear (sometimes informal) division of labour. For future initiatives in fragile and conflict states the EU should include the issue of the roles and chain of command of EU institutions and instruments in the planning phase.

Implementation in the field

31. The Joint Communication stresses the need for making better use of EU Delegations as the focal point of EU action in conflict states. However, it remains unclear exactly how the EU Delegation could play an enhanced role. The formulation of any effective strategy has to combine bottom-up knowledge and expertise with top-down management. The first inputs should come from the people deployed on the ground who have first-hand knowledge of the situation. But recommended actions from the field have to be politically viable.
32. Inputs from the field should not only support the definition of the vision and objectives at headquarter level, but must also encourage eventual changes in the vision or the situation changes on the ground. There is consequently a critical need to build in feedback loops to headquarter level from the ground where people have greater

knowledge of what is happening. A major role for EU Delegations could be to monitor implementation and identify where there are gaps.

33. The EU Delegations should travel more to the peripheries of host countries, as there is a general feeling that inputs from the field are often too capital-centric. To assure a holistic vision, the perspective of the actors based in the peripheries should also be considered into the approach, especially as the marginalised population groups may be located in such areas. The emergence of bottom-up solutions from local leadership should be reinforced. Many delegations are understaffed, particularly in countries at high-risk of conflict. The persistently high vacancy rates in delegations and the high staff turnover creates problems of preserving institutional memory and technical expertise.

The Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs) experience in Afghanistan: a good example of planning

34. Some interesting lessons learned can be drawn from the Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs) experience in Afghanistan. The Helmand PRT was led by the UK and included personnel from the United States, Denmark and Estonia. Its purpose was to work with local Afghan authorities in building capacity and delivering a provincial stabilisation and development implementation plan, agreed between the Government of Afghanistan and its international partners. The Helmand Plan covered in an effective manner a number of issues far wider in scope than just crisis management.
35. In terms of best practice, incoming PRT heads spent approximately four months preparing for the position before deploying to Helmand. The PRT Head of Mission, from the UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO), did not have authority over the different elements within the PRT, even those coming from other UK government departments. Deployed experts from USAID, DFID and elsewhere all had their own reporting lines. In this environment the only way that the PRT Head could make progress was to have a clear strategic vision. Making diversity work around such a vision can be a powerful tool.

The EEAS Crisis Response and Operational Coordination Department: the comprehensive approach in a time of crisis.

36. In order to implement a real Comprehensive Approach and be more responsive on the ground in time of crisis, HR/VP Ashton created the Crisis Response and Operational Coordination Department (CR&OC). In terms of Headquarter initiatives, the Crisis Platform serves as a coordination tool and brings together the geographic desks with the Commission and EEAS departments responsible for conflict prevention, crisis response, peace building, financial support including humanitarian aid where appropriate, security policy and CSDP, as well as the General Secretariat of the EU Council.
37. At field level the CR&OC Department is active in supporting EU Delegations in crisis prone countries, mainly by deploying personnel with the needed expertise in the right time (24 hours). In order to improve this support the CR&OC Department is now in the phase of establishing a roster of experts. Ideally, the deployed experts should support the Head of Delegation and be able to work with the other partners on the ground (UN, NGO and Member States). It is not just a matter of coordination but also a necessity to pool resources together.
38. The roster of experts should be the ideal follow up between decisions coming from Brussels and the Crisis Platform and the action on the ground, responding to the need to deploy people with the right skills. The success of this roster would highly depend on the capacity to overcome the problem of the availability of expertise, which so far marked the end of previous similar initiatives. A possibility would be to include experts coming from the Member States. Indeed in crisis countries, this could be a way forward that would also keep on the ground staff from embassies that decide to close up. On the other hand, it is undeniable that Member States also have

difficulties in meeting requests to fill CSDP missions.

39. In terms of reinforcing effectiveness on the ground, a key financial mechanism remains the Instrument contributing to Stability and Peace (IcSP). Increased use of intelligence and open-source information sharing should also take place.

Reinforcing the EU Delegation and supporting the Head of Delegation

40. The HoD could act as the EU focal point on the ground and champion the comprehensive approach in the field. Drawing on lessons from the Helmand PRT, the EU should consider allowing more lead time for any Head of Delegation (or Mission) to fragile and conflict affected environments to prepare deployment to build competence in this regard.

Coordination with EU member states

41. One of the identified current weaknesses of the HoD is the difficult nature of the relationship with Member States, which is reflected at the Brussels level. These difficulties are expressed in terms of communication and messages from Brussels to the field. Regarding communications between the HoD and Member States a good practice would be to share reports between the EU Delegation and Member States. The issue of communication seems to be vital for improving the effectiveness of the relationship.
42. The appropriate level of security classification and Information Technology should also be tackled. During the Aceh Monitoring Mission (AMM) the states involved decided not to have any classified communication, which allowed for easier more frequent communication that resulted in a better understanding of the initiatives undertaken by the partners involved. The lesson learnt is that over classification can unhelpfully slow down communications in certain environments. Also, the practice of holding regular meetings between the HoD and the EU Member State Ambassadors on the ground should be encouraged.

Budget flow

43. The Head of Delegation could also be empowered by administering a budget specifically assigned to the Delegation. Administering both a political and economic portfolio would help ensure that the right support is available to small projects run by the local population and build trust.

The right person at the right place

44. As for any key position, the HoD should be the right person at the right place. The Head of Delegation must have proven leadership skills and a strong ability to prioritise.
45. But it is not just about having the right skills at the outset. The selected candidate should be given sufficient lead time to understand the EU system and all the aspects of the role. The HoD should have ambassadorial equivalent rank and operate to the same criteria and code of conduct that EU Member States use.

The future of CSDP

46. CSDP missions and operations are one of the instruments available to the EU and as one of many elements that comprise the Comprehensive Approach. CSDP missions/operations should be part of the overall strategy from the beginning and therefore included in the planning phase. The mandate should be ambitious and of sufficient duration to ensure that its objectives are achieved. The approach should be to set an end-state rather than an end-date, but rigorous transition strategies should form a key part of mandates to discourage open-ended commitments and facilitate closure when appropriate.
47. The PFCA is a tool to underpin the debate on the political willingness to utilise CSDP.

The lack of trust issue that many Member States demonstrate regarding CSDP actions could be improved with a better reporting system to the Political and Security Committee (PSC) and a system of benchmarking and lessons learned conducted on regular basis by external experts.

48. The transition phase should avoid a drastic drawdown as occurred in Bosnia and Herzegovina. An overlap phase with the next instrument should be planned, in order to keep the network on the ground, assure continuity and preserve institutional memory. The IcSP is the ideal instrument to sustain the transition phase between the different EU instruments if it is given the flexibility to play this role.
49. Stronger synergies should be built between CSDP and other EU instruments, in particular in terms of training, information sharing, early warning systems and use of a common language. Synergies should also solve the issue of security for humanitarians, preserving the neutrality principle that governs humanitarian action. Synergies should also be reinforced with external partners, in particular NATO, the UN and the regional organisations.

Conclusions

50. The EU would benefit through stronger implementation of the Comprehensive Approach.
51. There is a need for a common vision on how to operationalise the Comprehensive Approach, but such a vision can only take shape through an incremental process. The treaties are still the repository of a culture that is not comprehensive and that still keeps the pillars approach. This framework makes it very difficult to resolve, inter alia, the important leadership issue – who is in control, at both headquarters and field level, particularly when there is a CSDP mission in addition to an EU Delegation.
52. The new leadership in the Council and Commission should therefore focus on a ‘make it work’ approach, using pragmatism and supporting the institutions and individuals that act pragmatically. Creating incentives at the personal level to support comprehensive action should be a high priority in such a pragmatic approach.

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