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Multi-Layered Actions? Sustaining Partnerships in the EU Integrated Approach to Conflicts and Crises

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Abstract

The European Union's Foreign and Security Policy can be conceptualised as “multi-layered” action. Multi-layeredness refers to two interrelated ways of intervening in crises abroad, which the EU has articulated in the so-called Integrated Approach to crises and conflicts. First is the need for the EU and its member states to partner with diverse stakeholders acting at different levels (from the global and regional levels to interaction with national governments and civil society). Second comes the fact that EU involvement in conflict and crises must be sustained over a long period of time and must target all aspects of the conflict cycle, from prevention to sustainable peace. Yet despite these meaningful conceptual strides, the capacity of the EU to both “partner” and “prolong” remains severely limited.

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Introduction

Conflicts and crises appear increasingly intractable in a world marked by multipolar competition and regional fragmentation.¹ Competition between great powers is visible in a number of areas, spanning the economy, energy, climate and migration, in addition to various security challenges including “hybrid warfare”.² In some respects, the influence of China and Russia over conflict-affected areas in the Middle East, Africa or Latin America rivals that of the United States. Complicating matters further, in several regions state authority and regional rules of engagement have eroded, while local conflicts spill over into neighbouring states, adding more stress to regional insecurity and fragmentation.³

Multipolar competition and regional fragmentation complicate the resolution of increasingly diffuse and entangled crises and conflicts, which themselves affect different levels of governance and generate political and economic disruptions in addition to humanitarian and migration emergencies.⁴ For example, Russia can employ its influence over political, security and humanitarian dynamics in Syria to gain leverage in its rivalry with the West in the European theatre, simultaneously rendering the Ukrainian and Syrian conflicts harder to address. Moreover, regional-level crises such as the Western-backed removal of Muammar Gaddafi in Libya and the standoff over North Korean nuclear weapons have had an impact on global-level great power relations, resulting in the increased litigation of international political and security norms between Washington, Moscow and Beijing.⁵ These developments highlight how international challenges have become layered, affecting different regions and levels of governance in complicated ways.

¹ Pedro Seabra, “Falling Short or Rising above the Fray? Rising Powers and Security Force Assistance to Africa”, in *Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding*, Vol. 15, No. 5 (2021), p. 682-697; Assem Dandashly et al., “Multipolarity and EU Foreign and Security Policy: Divergent Approaches to Conflict and Crisis Response”, in *JOINT Research Papers*, No. 6 (December 2021), <https://www.jointproject.eu/?p=697>.

² Maria Mälksoo, “Countering Hybrid Warfare as Ontological Security Management: The Emerging Practices of the EU and NATO”, in *European Security*, Vol. 27, No. 3 (2018), p. 374-392.

³ Agnès Levallois et al., “Regional Fragmentation and EU Foreign and Security Policy”, in *JOINT Research Papers*, No. 3 (November 2021), <https://www.jointproject.eu/?p=639>.

⁴ Riccardo Alcaro, “The Constraints on the EU Foreign and Security Policy”, in *JOINT Briefs*, No. 1 (May 2021), <https://www.jointproject.eu/?p=180>.

⁵ Marcin Kaczmarski, *Russia–China Relations in the Post-Crisis International Order*, London/New York, Routledge, 2015.

Since the publication of the Global Strategy in 2016 and throughout her mandate, Federica Mogherini, the former High Representative of the EU for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and Vice-President of the European Commission (HRVP), diagnosed that EU Foreign and Security Policy (EUFSP) was operating in “an ever more connected, contested and complex world”.⁶ The covid-19 pandemic has accelerated these dynamics, revealing the fragilities of interdependence.⁷ In November 2021 the European Union External Action Service (EEAS) released a first draft of the Strategic Compass, a threat analysis report for EU security and defence. The draft states that “the overall security landscape has become more diverse, complex and fragmented than ever due to multi-layered threats”.⁸ Thus, the key challenge for the EU is whether, in this context, it can pursue an equally “multi-layered” approach to deal with such threats – in EU jargon, whether the EU can genuinely apply an Integrated Approach (IA) to conflicts and crises.

The concept of an “Integrated Approach” was introduced in the 2016 Global Strategy and subsequently developed into conclusions adopted by the Council on 22 January 2018. This framework expands the 2003 “co-ordination” mechanisms and the 2013 “Comprehensive Approach” and commits the EU to working on different levels of governance over extended periods of time. The IA is geared towards action at the local, national, regional and global levels and is applied throughout all phases of the conflict – prevention, crisis response, stabilisation and longer-term peacebuilding. The Global Strategy defines these elements of the IA as necessary mechanisms to cope with complexity: “The integrated approach captures the multiple ways – in time, space and policy sectors – in which the EU can tackle operationally the complexity of conflicts to promote human security”.⁹

⁶ European External Action Service (EEAS), *The European Union's Global Strategy. Three Years On, Looking Forward*, June 2019, p. 8, <https://europa.eu/!Qf88CQ>.

⁷ Sven Biscop, “No Peace from Corona: Defining EU Strategy for the 2020s”, in *Journal of European Integration*, Vol. 42, No. 8 (2020), p. 1009-1023, <https://doi.org/10.1080/07036337.2020.1852230>.

⁸ EEAS, *A Strategic Compass for Security and Defence. For a European Union That Protects Its Citizens, Values and Interests and Contributes to International Peace and Security*, 9 November 2021, p. 5, https://i2.res.24o.it/pdf2010/Editrice/ILSOLE24ORE/ILSOLE24ORE/Online/_Oggetti_Embedded/Documenti/2021/11/11/st13638_en21%20SC%20DRAFT%200.pdf.

⁹ EEAS, *The European Union's Global Strategy. Three Years On, Looking Forward*, cit., p. 22. The focus in this article is how the IA intervenes across “time” and “space”, while the third dimension, the “policy sectors”, the variety of instruments used to tackle the multiple dimensions of conflicts, “spanning the diplomatic, security, defence, financial, trade, development cooperation and humanitarian aid

However, both dimensions of the IA still suffer from certain deficiencies. These limitations range from challenges of coordination and an overly technocratic approach to the difficulties of maintaining a long-term mindset in a complex international order that features obstacles to the spread of liberal norms as understood in previous decades.¹⁰ Multipolar competition, regional fragmentation and intra-EU contestation have further constrained the cultivation of multi-layered action.¹¹

1. From a comprehensive to an integrated approach to conflicts and crises

In 2013, the European Commission and the HRVP released a Joint Communication on “the EU’s comprehensive approach to external conflicts and crises” (CA), which sought to coordinate the full range of instruments and resources in order to pursue a more consistent, effective and strategic external action.¹² In May 2014, the Council endorsed the comprehensive approach. The assumption underlying the CA’s inception was that it is a pre-requisite to a joined-up EUFSP, from vision and situational analysis to synergetic use of EU and member state foreign and security policy instruments.¹³

fields”, has been analysed in Kristi Raik et al., “Not Yet Fit for the World: Piecemeal Buildup of EU Military, Cyber and Intelligence Assets”, in *JOINT Research Papers*, No. 4 (November 2021), <https://www.jointproject.eu/?p=648>; and Kristina Kausch, “Collateral Damage: How EU Internal Policies Shape Crises and Conflict Abroad”, in *JOINT Research Papers*, No. 5 (December 2021), <https://www.jointproject.eu/?p=689>.

¹⁰ Trine Flockhart, “Is This the End? Resilience, Ontological Security, and the Crisis of the Liberal International Order”, in *Contemporary Security Policy*, Vol. 41, No. 2 (2020), p. 215-240; Zachary Paikin, “Russia, Rivalry and Resilience: Liberal Order in Crisis and International Society in Flux”, in Elena A. Korosteleva and Trine Flockhart (eds), *Resilience in EU and International Institutions. Redefining Local Ownership in a New Global Governance Agenda*, London/New York, Routledge, 2021, p. 215-235.

¹¹ With regard to the methodology, the article reviews the limitations of the IA identified in the literature (focusing particular attention on previous and current H2020 projects analysing how the EU intervenes in conflict-affected scenarios) and in interviews with EU and member state officials.

¹² European Commission and HRVP, *The EU’s Comprehensive Approach to External Conflict and Crises*, JOIN/2013/30, 11 December 2013, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/en/TXT/?uri=CELEX:52013JC0030>.

¹³ European Commission and HRVP, *Taking Forward the EU’s Comprehensive Approach to External Conflicts and Crises - Action Plan 2016-17*, SWD/2016/254, 18 July 2016, <https://ec.europa.eu/international-partnerships/system/files/joint-swd-taking-forward-the-eus-comprehensive->

The 2016 Global Strategy developed this idea further. The world had become “more connected, contested and complex”, the resolution of conflicts was ever more complicated and their effects were intertwined, featuring “multiple dimensions” to the extent that the EU was “under threat”.¹⁴ In response to this changing world, the Global Strategy introduced the Integrated Approach to Conflicts and Crises. This expanded the scope of the CA, which was primarily focused on enhancing internal EU coordination, emphasises a more ambitious, holistic engagement that makes the best use of existing instruments in a sustained way.¹⁵ The creation of the Directorate Integrated Approach for Security and Peace (ISP) furthered managerial and implementation capacities for conflict-cycle responses. Furthermore, the IA was embedded in a broader set of strategies aimed at enhancing resilience in the Union’s eastern and southern neighbourhood.¹⁶ It also brought the EU in closer alignment with other international crisis responders such as the United Nations (UN), the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) or the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE).¹⁷

Specifically, the Global Strategy frames the IA as follows:

The EU will act at *all stages of the conflict cycle*, acting promptly on prevention, responding responsibly and decisively to crises, investing in stabilisation, and avoiding premature disengagement when a new crisis erupts. The EU will act *at different levels of governance*: conflicts such as those in Syria and Libya have local, national, regional and global dimensions which must be addressed. Finally, none of these conflicts can be solved by

approach-to-external-conflicts-and-crises-action-plan-2016-2017_en.pdf.

¹⁴ EEAS, *Shared Vision, Common Action: A Stronger Europe. A Global Strategy for the European Union’s Foreign and Security Policy*, June 2016, <https://europa.eu/!Tr66qx>.

¹⁵ Giovanni Faleg, “The EU: from Comprehensive to Integrated Approach”, in *Global Affairs*, Vol. 4, No. 2-3 (2018), p. 171-183.

¹⁶ European Commission and HRVP, *A Strategic Approach to Resilience in the EU’s External Action*, JOIN/2017/21, 7 June 2017, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/en/TXT/?uri=celex:52017JC0021>. See, further, Nathalie Tocci, “Resilience and the Role of the European Union in the World”, in *Contemporary Security Policy*, Vol. 41, No. 2 (2020), p. 176-194.

¹⁷ Loes Debuysere and Steven Blockmans, “Crisis Responders: Comparing Policy Approaches of the EU, the UN, NATO and OSCE with Experiences in the Field”, in *European Foreign Affairs Review*, Vol. 24, No. 3 (2019), p. 243-264, https://www.ceps.eu/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/EERR_24_0302.pdf.

us alone. Sustainable peace can only be achieved through comprehensive agreements rooted in broad, deep and durable regional and international partnerships, which the EU will foster and support [emphasis added].¹⁸

This EU approach is conceptualised here as “multi-layered”. This is because the EU expands the degree of intervention in two dimensions: spatial layers, by partnering with multiple actors and operating at different levels of governance; and temporal layers, by sustaining interventions over time.

1.1 Multiple partnerships for efficient conflict responses

The idea of “work[ing] together with other international and regional actors” appeared already in the CA as one of the keys to “operate successfully in the field of long term structural conflict prevention”.¹⁹ However, as recognised in the IA, partnerships involving international, regional and local stakeholders and responses applied at the local, national, regional and global levels are even more urgent in a world marked by regional fragmentation and multipolar competition.²⁰ The covid-19 crisis has revealed the interdependence of the economy, energy and health systems and exemplifies the value of coordinated responses.²¹

The push for collective solutions to address complex crises is well developed in the Commission and EEAS’s Joint Communication “on strengthening the EU’s contribution to rules-based multilateralism”.²² Rules-based multilateral cooperation is understood as the most inclusive and sustainable means for solving problems in a mutually beneficial way. The EU thus facilitates “alliance-building” and promotes “multi-stakeholder partnerships between governments, the private sector, civil society, academia and the scientific community” in order to shape

¹⁸ EEAS, *Shared Vision, Common Action: A Stronger Europe*, cit., p. 9-10.

¹⁹ European Commission and HRVP, *The EU’s Comprehensive Approach to External Conflict and Crises*, cit., p. 11.

²⁰ Council of the European Union, *Council Conclusions on the Integrated Approach to External Conflicts and Crises*, 22 January 2018, <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-5413-2018-INIT/en/pdf>.

²¹ Sven Biscop, “No Peace from Corona”, cit.

²² European Commission and HRVP, *Strengthening the EU’s Contribution to Rules-based Multilateralism*, JOIN/2021/3, 17 February 2021, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:52021JC0003>.

“inclusive multilateralism and act as a catalyst for reform”.²³ The cooperation with third countries and with global, regional and local organisations is seen as a process, which needs to be constantly nurtured (including with “like-minded” countries like the United States, with whom tensions may periodically emerge).²⁴ The nesting of the EU’s approach to conflict and crisis within a multilateral framework further highlights the multi-layered character (and environment) of EUFSP.

The preference for solutions that include multiple and diverse actors can also be seen in the 2020 Council Conclusions on EU Peace Mediation:

Considering the complex nature of current conflicts, requiring a multi-track approach, the Council stresses the importance of supporting inclusive peace processes that comply with international law, pursue the buy-in of stakeholders at the international and regional levels and involve all levels and segments of society, ranging from political leaders to civil society and local communities, including young generations, taking into account the particularly vulnerable situation of children in armed conflict.²⁵

In peace mediation, as well as in the policies to strengthen multilateralism, state-level institutions are no longer the sole referent for engagement. The national level is made as important as the regional, societal, community and individual ones – on paper, at least. Peace mediation can encompass government-level negotiations, as in the facilitation of the dialogue to normalise the Kosovo–Serbia relations, but also multi-track diplomatic initiatives using innovative formats with the aim of bringing different actors together. Examples of the latter are the annual Brussels Conferences on “Supporting the Future of Syria and the Region” organised since 2017 to support the UN Geneva talks and fund post-war reconstruction in Syria or the “Iraq and its Neighbours: Enhancing Dialogue and Regional Integration in West Asia”, which promotes dialogue between officials, diverse civil society actors, and international, regional and local organisations. In sum, deepening cooperation

²³ Ibid., p. 14.

²⁴ Pol Morillas, “Afghanistan, AUKUS and European Strategic Autonomy”, in *JOINT Briefs*, No. 4 (October 2021), <https://www.jointproject.eu/?p=607>.

²⁵ Council of the European Union, *Council Conclusions on EU Peace Mediation*, 7 December 2020, point 8, <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-13573-2020-INIT/en/pdf>.

with partners (from global organisations to regional ones, to states and local level actors) has become an integral component of the EU's approach to multi-layered threats.

1.2 Prolonged interventions to shape all stages of conflict

The EU sees long-term and sustained interventions as important in managing conflicts and crises as cooperating with other actors at different levels of governance. As stated by the European Council: "The Integrated Approach concerns the need for an integrated effort at all stages of the EU response from planning to implementation and lesson learning".²⁶ The assumption is that in an increasingly complex and contested world, conflict appears diffuse and protracted and, therefore, solutions are seldom quick to find; instead, prolonged engagements are necessary to strive towards long-term peace.²⁷ In consonance with the concept of "sustaining peace", introduced by the UN General Assembly and Security Council's 2016 twin resolutions on peacebuilding, the EU believes that peace efforts demand long-term commitments and sustained engagement. Thus, it is crucial to be engaged well before the conflict erupts (conflict prevention), during the conflict (conflict management) and well after a peace agreement has been reached (peacekeeping, peacebuilding and sustaining peace).²⁸

The commitment to conflict prevention is enshrined in Article 42 of the Treaty of the European Union. As a result, the EU has sought to become a key contributor to global conflict prevention and preventive diplomacy.²⁹ Conflict prevention requires a first step of early warning, which consists of thorough risk scanning, prioritisation,

²⁶ Council of the European Union, *Council Conclusions on the Integrated Approach...*, cit., point 8.

²⁷ Thania Paffenholz, "Perpetual Peacebuilding: A New Paradigm to Move Beyond the Linearity of Liberal Peacebuilding", in *Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding*, Vol. 15, No. 3 (2021), p. 367-385, <https://doi.org/10.1080/17502977.2021.1925423>; Pol Bargués-Pedreny, *Deferring Peace in International Statebuilding. Difference, Resilience and Critique*, London/New York, Routledge, 2018.

²⁸ United Nations, *The Challenge of Sustaining Peace. Report of the Advisory Group of Experts for the 2015 Review of the United Nations Peacebuilding Architecture*, 29 June 2015, https://www.un.org/pga/wp-content/uploads/sites/3/2015/07/300615_The-Challenge-of-Sustaining-Peace.pdf. As this influential UN report suggests: "A change in mind-set is needed: rather than waiting until crisis breaks out and then making a default recourse to a crisis response, timely efforts to prevent conflict and then sustain peace need to be embedded across all sectors and phases of action" (point 123).

²⁹ UN Department of Political Affairs, *United Nations Conflict Prevention and Preventive Diplomacy in Action*, 2018, <https://dppa.un.org/en/node/184678>.

and shared third country assessments to identify the risks of escalation or re-escalation of violence.³⁰

Early action is the second step. The IA asserts that integrating a variety of instruments, from diplomatic tools to civilian missions, is of paramount importance to attain “a culture of early action to effectively address the risks of emerging, escalating violent conflicts”.³¹ While early action is difficult to operationalise *per se* (as it runs in parallel to early warning assessments and demands quick response mechanisms, coherence between instruments and genuine coordination between agencies), it is even more complicated in contemporary conflicts and crises, where the lines between violence and peace blur.³² As the Strategic Compass draft report explains, “a more dynamic approach to early warning and conflict prevention” is required when facing interconnected and diffused challenges, such as hybrid threats, disruptive technologies and organised crime. This should involve improved information-sharing, joint horizon scanning and constant conflict analyses in tandem with other international organisations.³³

Conflict management and peacebuilding efforts include both military and civilian missions under the EU's Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) as well as instruments that are not explicitly geared toward crises and conflicts. Even tools that pertain to internal policies, such as those belonging to the energy, agriculture or climate sectors, may prevent (or exacerbate) conflict, as much as help address its consequences.³⁴ The cycle of conflicts is uncertain and requires long-term time frames, even long after the levels of violence have decreased. As stated in the Council Conclusions on EU Peace Mediation, “The Council recognises that mediation and peace building can be lengthy, non-linear and iterative processes,

³⁰ European Commission and HRVP, *EU Conflict Early Warning System: Objectives, Process and Guidance for Implementation - 2020*, SWD/2021/59, 11 March 2021, <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-6978-2021-INIT/en/pdf>.

³¹ Council of the European Union, *Council Conclusions on the Integrated Approach...*, cit., point 12.

³² Sarah Bressan and Aurora Bergmaier, “From Conflict Early Warning to Fostering Resilience? Chasing Convergence in EU Foreign Policy”, in *Democratization*, Vol. 28, No. 7 (2021), p. 1357-1374, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13510347.2021.1918108>; see also, Roger Mac Ginty, “Conflict Disruption: Reassessing the Peaceandconflict System”, in *Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding*, 13 April 2021, <https://doi.org/10.1080/17502977.2021.1889167>.

³³ EEAS, *A Strategic Compass for Security and Defence*, cit., p. 24.

³⁴ Kristina Kausch, “Collateral Damage: How EU Internal Policies Shape Crises and Conflict Abroad”, cit.

and that risks associated with involvement should not preclude engagement”.³⁵

This dimension of addressing conflicts and crises by prolonging interventions resonates with policy frameworks to foster resilience in the regions surrounding the EU,³⁶ as much as with wider concerns on development and cooperation. For example, the Council’s report on the European Consensus on Development reads that “peacebuilding and state-building are essential for sustainable development and should take place at all levels, from global to local, and at all stages of the conflict cycle”.³⁷ Long-term perspectives are helpful to consolidate alliances, build on opportunities for sustainable development, and manage unpredictable crises and threats whenever they appear. Actions are sustained against the assumption that conflicts can be solved, security can be achieved, and crises will disappear for all time.³⁸

2. Limitations of the integrated approach

Even though the IA has not yet been fully operationalised, several limitations are already apparent. Internal contestation, regional fragmentation and multipolar competition, and their mutual interactions with one another, inhibit the full deployment of the IA. The EU faces these constraints at all levels of governance as well as during different phases of the conflict and crisis cycle.

2.1 In pursuit of global and regional partnerships

The IA is founded upon the assumption that the EU can enhance the impact of its external action through inclusive, multi-stakeholder coordination and partnership with a plurality of actors, including multilateral and regional partners such as the UN, NATO, OSCE or the African Union, as well as bilateral partners across the

³⁵ Council of the European Union, *Council Conclusions on EU Peace Mediation*, cit., point 5.

³⁶ Nathalie Tocci, “Resilience and the Role of the European Union in the World”, cit.

³⁷ Council of the European Union, *The New European Consensus on Development: Out World, Our Dignity, Our Future*, 19 May 2017, point 66, <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-9459-2017-INIT/en/pdf>.

³⁸ Jan Pospisil, *Peace in Political Unsettledness. Beyond Solving Conflict*, Cham, Palgrave Macmillan, 2019.

Americas, Africa and Asia. Some partnerships are more inclusive and established, including those with like-minded countries such as the United States and Canada, while others are more fragmented and interest-based such as selective cooperation with China and Russia. The perceived added value of partnerships for the IA was most recently underscored in the draft of the Strategic Compass: “[The EU] will bolster partnerships where they are mutually beneficial and serve EU values and interests, particularly when there is a shared commitment to an integrated approach to crises and capacity building.”³⁹

Findings from the literature and interviews paint a variegated picture of partnerships at the global and regional levels. On the one hand, the EU has been “proficient” in coordinating with and complementing the funding programmes established via the UN and the World Bank.⁴⁰ For example, the EU and its member states have provided the funding for UN programming in Iraq, and both the EU and NATO coordinate their respective advisory missions with the Iraqi Ministries of the Interior and Defence. The recent case of Mozambique has also revealed the merits of upstream conflict prevention mechanisms, such as the EU’s involvement in the World Bank-led Recovery and Peacebuilding Assessment via an inter-service task force, in facilitating coordination amongst different actors and laying the basis for better EU responsiveness.⁴¹

On the other hand, partnerships usually are less efficient at the operational level. That is, while the EU largely works in parallel with partners, cooperation occurs at a superficial level and there is a lack of material support in terms of personnel and equipment exchanges.⁴² Furthermore, coordination with international partners is more arduous during transitional phases in the conflict and crisis management cycle. These phases may require fundamental changes in the balance of the different tools that the EU employs through its IA and may therefore engender

³⁹ EEAS, *A Strategic Compass for Security and Defence*, cit., p. 23.

⁴⁰ Interviews 2 and 5.

⁴¹ Interview 2; Giovanni Faleg, “Conflict Prevention in Mozambique. Can There Be Peace after the Storm?”, in *EUSS Briefs*, No. 5 (April 2019), <https://www.iss.europa.eu/node/2327>.

⁴² Hylke Dijkstra, Petar Petrov and Ewa Mahr, “Learning to Deploy Civilian Capabilities: How the United Nations, Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe and European Union Have Changed Their Crisis Management Institutions”, in *Cooperation and Conflict*, Vol. 54, No. 4 (December 2019), p. 524-543, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0010836718823814>.

resistance to these changes. For example, the EU's sustained approach to stabilisation and peacebuilding may be undermined if partners aim to scale down their peacekeeping operations, thereby generating discord between the EU and its partners.⁴³

There are other constraints to engaging and coordinating with global and regional partners in conflict settings. For example, it is politically difficult for the EU to share the results of its early warning exercises with the UN, members of which are the very countries the EU has identified as being fragile and potentially conflict- or crisis-affected.⁴⁴ This lack of coordination is seen to hinder the EU's ability to implement its conflict prevention and peacebuilding policies fully.⁴⁵ In other words, while the EU prizes engagement with global and regional partners as part of its multi-layered IA, aligning these partnerships with the quest for multilateral crisis and conflict management remains a challenge.

The tripartite conceptual framing comprising internal contestation / regional fragmentation / multipolar competition can help distil key constraints to a fluid multi-layered IA. Regarding internal contestation, a broader and non-Brussels-centric understanding of EUFSP may ask what role EU member states play in building, complementing/obstructing, and implementing the IA.⁴⁶ In structuring its IA, EU headquarters and delegations on the ground recognise that member states are a fundamental piece of the puzzle, particularly when faced with the treaty constraint of unanimity in foreign, security and defence policy areas.⁴⁷ The EU's recent emphasis on adopting a wider "Team Europe" approach to external action that is complemented by that of member states extends to policy areas within

⁴³ Interview 7.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ana E. Juncos, "EU Security Sector Reform in Bosnia and Herzegovina: Reform or Resist?", in *Contemporary Security Policy*, Vol. 39, No. 1 (2018), p. 95-118, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13523260.2017.1391625>. See also Nicoletta Pirozzi, Bernardo Venturi and Alessandro Marrone, "EU Member States' Capabilities in Conflict Prevention and Peacebuilding: Personnel and Technology", in *Global Affairs*, Vol. 4, No. 2-3 (2018), p. 141-155; Thierry Tardy, "The EU: From Comprehensive Vision to Integrated Action", in *EUISS Briefs*, No. 5 (February 2017), <https://www.iss.europa.eu/node/1297>.

⁴⁶ Pernille Rieker and Mathilde Tomine Eriksdatter Giske, "Conceptualising the Multi-Actor Character of EU(rope)'s Foreign Policy", in *JOINT Research Papers*, No. 2 (October 2021), <https://www.jointproject.eu/?p=538>.

⁴⁷ Interview 7.

the purview of the IA.⁴⁸ For example, this translates into the new requirement that Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI) programming indicate how member states intend to support the EU external action through their own national actions and associated appropriations as well.⁴⁹ On the political level, member states are more likely to accept the guidance put forward by the EU if the institutions previously engaged meaningfully with the member states and rallied them behind said guidance.⁵⁰ This realisation has been the impetus for ramped up efforts to produce options papers for member state consumption during the strategic planning phase of conflict response and crisis management.⁵¹

In some instances, member states may prefer to act through the EU rather than go it alone. This may be true in order to continue engagement in a particular conflict or crisis while simultaneously seeking to avoid growing public scrutiny, such as in the case of the Sahel (with France repeatedly attempting to add EU assets to its counter-terrorism efforts there),⁵² or to avoid the perceived constraint of national parliamentary budget approval and oversight.⁵³ Furthermore, member states recognise that coordination with or recourse to EU assets may be necessary if they lack certain skillsets present in the EU's IA toolbox (i.e., mediation) or if the EU's presence on the ground is more significant than the national one. In certain cases, member states might push for EU action as a means of pursuing their own foreign policy objectives. This is not only true for larger member states seeking greater burden-sharing (as France has done in Mali).⁵⁴ The recent case of Mozambique could prove to be a model for smaller member states if they are able to form a core group and face insignificant resistance from others (i.e., Portugal's successful rallying of a core group of member states in favour of intervention).⁵⁵

⁴⁸ Alexei Jones and Chloe Teevan, "Team Europe: Up to the Challenge?", in *ECDPM Briefs*, No. 128 (January 2021), <https://ecdpm.org/?p=41787>.

⁴⁹ Interview 7. See also, European Parliament and Council of the European Union, *Regulation (EU) 2021/947 of 9 June 2021 establishing the Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument – Global Europe*, <http://data.europa.eu/eli/reg/2021/947/oj>.

⁵⁰ Interview 4.

⁵¹ Interviews 2 and 5.

⁵² Interview 7.

⁵³ Interview 6.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Interview 2.

In other instances, EU member states prefer to pursue their foreign policy objectives through national structures rather than EU frameworks. Member states may take up the role of laggard or disruptor and impede foreign policy decisions at the EU level,⁵⁶ including those inherent to the IA, because of domestic factors such as public opinion, campaigns by civil society organisations and support from political parties.⁵⁷ Additionally, there could be national perceptions that EU action is not a worthwhile investment in terms of political attention and resources because it provides little added value to responsiveness and effectiveness.⁵⁸ It may also be the case that different threat perceptions underlie a different ranking of priorities⁵⁹ or that pressures from third countries at the member state level encourage those member states act as “Trojan horses” on behalf of such third countries.⁶⁰ Intra-EU contestation could also hinder the EU’s full deployment of its IA in cases where bureaucratic processes complicate coordination (for instance, the poor coordination of development aid delivered by national development agencies)⁶¹ or when conflicting member state priorities undermine stated EU policy or lead to a limited mandate (as has been the case with Libya due to diverging French and Italian interests).⁶² These differences may stem from a lack of trust, particularly that all gathered intelligence is duly shared, that local counterparts are reliable interlocutors, and that confidentiality of communications is respected.⁶³

The success of this coordination is heavily context-dependent and subject to the pressures of regional fragmentation and multipolar competition. The EU recognises

⁵⁶ Pernille Rieker, “Differentiated Integration and Europe’s Global Role: A Conceptual Framework”, in *European Foreign Affairs Review*, Vol. 26, Special Issue (August 2021), p. 1-14; Marianne Riddervold and Ruxandra-Laura Bosilca, “Crisis and Differentiation in the CFSP: Leaders, Laggards and Critical Junctures”, in *European Foreign Affairs Review*, Vol. 26, Special Issue (August 2021), p. 47-62.

⁵⁷ Marianna Lovato et al., “The Internal Contestation of EU Foreign and Security Policy”, in *JOINT Research Papers*, No. 1 (September 2021), <https://www.jointproject.eu/?p=516>.

⁵⁸ Interview 4.

⁵⁹ Interview 6.

⁶⁰ Interviews 1 and 2.

⁶¹ Interview 4.

⁶² Interviews 2, 4, 5 and 7.

⁶³ Interview 4. For more about the challenges and ways of overcoming them, see Christophe Hillion and Steven Blockmans, *From Self-Doubt to Self-Assurance. The European External Action Service as the Indispensable Support for a Geopolitical EU*, Brussels, CEPS/SIEPS/FES, January 2021, <https://www.sieps.se/en/publications/2021/from-self-doubt-to-self-assurance>.

the need to regionalise its response to conflicts and crises, operationalised in the Sahel, for example, with the establishment of a Regional Advisory and Coordination Cell within the EUCAP Sahel Mali mission in Nouakchott, Mauritania, in order to monitor the spillover effects of instability, coordinate the activities of CSDP missions *in loco* alongside those of national authorities, and support the structures of the G5 Sahel (an institutional framework for regional development and security cooperation). Yet, these efforts are complicated by the presence of many actors, including international organisations, EU member states and third countries, pursuing different priorities across several countries through a variety of actions.

In some cases, multipolar competition leads to the EU proving unable to implement its own policies.⁶⁴ The Lessons Learned process has motivated the EU to take a wider perspective from the start in Mozambique.⁶⁵ In fact, the EU's IA to Mozambique is not only oriented towards "narrow" crisis management and stabilisation purposes, but also towards broader, regional conflict prevention.⁶⁶ Its approach takes account of intra-Mozambican dynamics as well as regional spillover effects that might undermine stability and produce wider fragmentation. This has involved engagement with the Southern African Development Community's Mission in Mozambique (SAMIM), bilateral contacts with EU member states, the United States, and neighbouring Tanzania and Malawi, as well as civil society actors such as the International Committee of the Red Cross.⁶⁷

In Libya, too, a number of regional and larger powers have intervened, actively pursuing strategies that have limited the EU's action to north-western Libya (regarding the EU's border assistance mission) and the Mediterranean Sea beyond Libyan territorial waters (the remit of Operation Irini).⁶⁸ Third countries take decisions predicated on their own interests that may or may not be conducive to the implementation of the IA. Parallel to intra-EU differences, such as those between France and Italy, Russia is the primary third country responsible for

⁶⁴ Interview 4.

⁶⁵ Interview 5.

⁶⁶ Giovanni Faleg, "Conflict Prevention in Mozambique", cit.

⁶⁷ Interviews 2 and 5.

⁶⁸ Interview 3.

thwarting the successful implementation of the IA by way of its mercenary Wagner Group. While the extraction of the Wagner Group (perhaps due to mounting casualties) facilitated the EU's intervention in Mozambique,⁶⁹ difficulties in implementing the IA due to Wagner Group involvement have been significant in Libya. Central African Republic authorities, too, have recently preferred Russia's short-term security support to the EU's sustained and comprehensive view of crisis response and conflict prevention. This has been described as a misalignment in how the EU understands and seeks to build peace through its IA *versus* the short-term financial, political and security support that may be preferred by other intervening actors and local authorities alike.⁷⁰ The fact that third countries may tend to intervene more quickly is attributed to the EU's consensus-based decision-making machine.⁷¹ Regardless, member states view a decision in CFSP, and CSDP in particular, as lending greater credence to the EU's external action given that it reflects unanimous consensus.⁷²

From this overview, it emerges that internal contestation, regional spillover and multipolar competition hinder the EU's full implementation of its multi-layered, integrated approach to conflicts and crises. The identification of partners is more difficult to attain due to the context-specific complexities of each theatre. The diagnosis of the Strategic Compass draft that "multipolar dynamics [lead] an increasing number of actors [to] seek to expand their political space"⁷³ reinforces an international order that increasingly prioritises security over cooperation.⁷⁴ Therefore, the strategic challenge for the development of an IA to conflicts and crises in the neighbourhood and beyond is to adapt the IA according to the new realities of a competitive and increasingly complex world.⁷⁵

⁶⁹ Interview 2.

⁷⁰ Interviews 4 and 5.

⁷¹ Interview 7.

⁷² Interview 6.

⁷³ EEAS, A Strategic Compass for Security and Defence, cit., p. 7.

⁷⁴ Pernille Rieker and Kristian L. Gjerde, "The Potential and Limits of EU Crisis Response", in Roger Mac Ginty, Sandra Pogodda and Oliver P. Richmond (eds), *The EU and Crisis Response*, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2021, p. 60-85, <https://doi.org/10.7765/9781526148346.00010>.

⁷⁵ EEAS, A Strategic Compass for Security and Defence, cit., p. 7; see also, Trine Flockhart, "The Coming Multi-Order World", in *Contemporary Security Policy*, Vol. 37, No. 1 (2016), p. 3-30, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13523260.2016.1150053>.

2.2 Local ownership and conflict sensitivity

Another core tenet of the IA is that conflicts and crises must be addressed by engaging with actors beyond the international level to include those at the national and local levels. The EU therefore pursues “more tailor-made and differentiated relationships with partners”,⁷⁶ thereby reinforcing the EU Global Strategy’s intent to bolster local ownership and “pursue locally owned rights-based approaches”.⁷⁷ Indeed, the preference at the EU level is for risk-averse and low-key partnerships at the grassroots level.⁷⁸

However, a widespread observation in the literature on the EU’s engagement in conflict scenarios is that the response has been too often technocratic and top-down, therefore undermining the purpose of having local governments and societies lead and own peacebuilding processes.⁷⁹ The literature finds that programmes with the intent of transferring ownership to local authorities tend to be operationalised in order to meet externally designed objectives, thereby contradicting local interests and priorities and generating local resistance.⁸⁰ For example, Tartir and Ejodus illustrate that, in the Palestinian territories, CSDP mission EUPOL COPPS has developed a narrow technocratic perspective that has reduced security to policing practices and failed to counter the everyday insecurity of ordinary Palestinians.⁸¹ In sum, this excessive technocratisation and lack of real local ownership is an obstacle to the successful implementation of the

⁷⁶ European Commission and HRVP, *A Strategic Approach to Resilience in the EU's External Action*, cit., p. 15.

⁷⁷ EEAS, *Shared Vision, Common Action: A Stronger Europe*, cit., p. 26-27.

⁷⁸ Interview 6.

⁷⁹ Filip Ejodus, “‘Here Is Your Mission, Now Own It!’ The Rhetoric and Practice of Local Ownership in EU Interventions”, in *European Security*, Vol. 26, No. 4 (2017), p. 461-484, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09662839.2017.1333495>; Filip Ejodus and Ana E. Juncos, “Reclaiming the Local in EU Peacebuilding: Effectiveness, Ownership, and Resistance”, in *Contemporary Security Policy*, Vol. 39, No. 1 (2018), p. 4-27, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13523260.2017.1407176>.

⁸⁰ Filip Ejodus, “Local Ownership as International Governmentality: Evidence from the EU Mission in the Horn of Africa”, in *Contemporary Security Policy*, Vol. 39, No. 1 (2018), p. 28-50, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13523260.2017.1384231>; Roger Mac Ginty, “The Limits of Technocracy and Local Encounters: The European Union and Peacebuilding”, in *Contemporary Security Policy*, Vol. 39, No. 1 (2018), p. 166-179.

⁸¹ Alaa Tartir and Filip Ejodus, “Effective? Locally Owned? Beyond the Technocratic Perspective on the European Union Police Mission for the Palestinian Territories”, in *Contemporary Security Policy*, Vol. 39, No. 1 (2018), p. 142-165.

IA coordination processes.⁸²

Other scholars have complemented these views by observing that processes of transferring responsibilities to local stakeholders tend to fail when divergences between external actors and local actors are deep-seated. Bargués and Morillas argue that, in Bosnia and Herzegovina, a key obstacle to the design of open, inclusive, fair and transparent (state and non-state) institutions is the local authorities' lack of commitment to undertaking governance reforms.⁸³ Ana Juncos observes how local elites involved in Bosnia and Herzegovina's security sector reform processes have employed "subtle" and "hidden" forms of resistance such as simulating progress or lowering the bar of reform implementation, thereby undermining the EU's efforts.⁸⁴

There are also shortcomings in the EU's conflict sensitivity. For example, the literature has highlighted the contradictory approaches taken by the legal and political frameworks in Kosovo. Osland and Peter highlight how Kosovo's political representatives, whom the general public may believe should be prosecuted with the support of EULEX Kosovo, are the very same that the EU interacts with while facilitating Serbia-Kosovo dialogue.⁸⁵ Other critical studies have noted that local resistance may constrain the full deployment of the EU's IA. For instance, Mahr observes a high degree of local contestation against the EULEX mission in Kosovo by local actors.⁸⁶ Her findings are that contestation results from local dissatisfaction with the mission's effectiveness and the fact that it may undermine sovereignty claims by both Albanians and Serbs in Kosovo.

⁸² Loes Debuysere and Steven Blockmans, "Crisis Responders", cit.

⁸³ Pol Bargués and Pol Morillas, "From Democratization to Fostering Resilience: EU Intervention and the Challenges of Building Institutions, Social Trust, and Legitimacy in Bosnia and Herzegovina", in *Democratization*, Vol. 28, No. 7 (2021), p. 1319-1337, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13510347.2021.1900120>.

⁸⁴ Ana E. Juncos, "EU Security Sector Reform in Bosnia and Herzegovina: Reform or Resist?", cit.

⁸⁵ Kari M. Osland and Mateja Peter, "The Double Proximity Paradox in Peacebuilding: Implementation and Perception of the EU Rule of Law Mission in Kosovo", in *European Security*, Vol. 28, No. 4 (2019), p. 493-512, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09662839.2019.1649658>.

⁸⁶ Ewa Mahr, "Local Contestation against the European Union Rule of Law Mission in Kosovo", in *Contemporary Security Policy*, Vol. 39, No. 1 (2018), p. 72-94, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13523260.2017.1407060>.

Similarly, Gippert identifies a number of tensions in the interactions between the EU's civilian CSDP police mission and the local police in Bosnia and Herzegovina, thereby weakening the legitimacy of the EU mission as well as the success of security sector reforms in the country.⁸⁷ For their part, Ehrhart and Petretto argue that, in Somalia, external engagement has ignored the intrinsic features of Somali society and failed to leave space for local concepts, ideas and efforts.⁸⁸ In short, Rieker and Blockmans conclude that:

Although the EU has managed (at least partly) to close “the intentions–implementation gap” in crisis response, the “implementation–reception/perceptions gap” remains to be plugged. This will require better implementation of a conflict-sensitive approach based on greater local ownership and in-depth understanding of the nature of the crises to which the EU seeks to respond.⁸⁹

The EU is increasingly undertaking context and conflict sensitivity evaluations to develop tailor-made policies. However, there are several constraints facing engagement with the local level for the implementation of IA. Analyses of the Libyan case underline that “localisation agendas” are constrained by exogenous factors that fall outside of the EU's control. First, Libya's interim Government of National Unity has insisted on a Libyan-led and -owned process of national reconciliation and state-building. Second, the EU's ability to fulfil the mandates of existing CSDP operations are also only limited geographically (cf. section 2.1), as well as in terms of the mandate itself (for instance, Operation Irini, designed to enforce the UN arms embargo on Libya, is unable to activate the Coast Guard and Navy training task).⁹⁰ EU efforts have been negatively affected by third countries exerting pressure on Libya not to open up to greater EU involvement.⁹¹ Furthermore, not only might local authorities contest EU engagement (cf. section 2.1), but they may also lack

⁸⁷ Birte Julia Gippert, “The Interaction between Local and International Power in EU Police Reform in Bosnia and Herzegovina”, in *Contemporary Security Policy*, Vol. 39, No. 1 (2018), p. 51-71.

⁸⁸ Hans-Georg Ehrhart and Kerstin Petretto, “Stabilizing Somalia: Can the EU's Comprehensive Approach Work?”, in *European Security*, Vol. 23, No. 2 (2014), p. 179-194.

⁸⁹ Pernille Rieker and Steven Blockmans, “Plugging the Capability-Expectations Gap: Towards Effective, Comprehensive and Conflict-Sensitive EU Crisis Response?”, in *European Security*, Vol. 28, No. 1 (2019), p. 1-21 at p. 16.

⁹⁰ Interview 3.

⁹¹ Interviews 3 and 5.

sufficient capacity to implement an IA. In Libya, local actors pursue different agendas, further complicating EU efforts.⁹²

The conflict sensitivity of EU action has been significantly enhanced by the inclusion of local EU delegations in regular meetings at the EEAS headquarters via a dedicated Consular Affairs Division (ISP.4).⁹³ This has led to greater involvement of delegations during crisis response and conflict management phases, when they can provide input to the EEAS on how different elements of the IA toolbox may be effectively balanced and utilised.⁹⁴ Another positive factor is the capacity of delegations to identify relevant local counterparts, include their views during the formulation of policy options, and soften the (persisting) perception of the EU as a siloed, disjointed actor lacking a clearly defined interlocutor.⁹⁵

Yet there remain limits to the EU's efforts to taking conflict sensitivity into account. In a growing number of cases, in Libya and beyond, interlocutors are non-traditional, radicalised authorities, thereby challenging the EU's ability to engage in meaningful mediation activities.⁹⁶ By the same token, the EU also struggles to formally involve EU-based and/or -funded civil society organisations in conflict and crisis theatres. While progress has been made in conflict sensitivity along thematic lines, including on the humanitarian-development-peace nexus,⁹⁷ there is still work to be done to mainstream cultural heritage, climate change, and disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration into the IA.⁹⁸

A positive case of IA implementation has thus far been exemplified by the case of Mozambique, where there was explicit recognition by national and local authorities that a humanitarian-development-peace nexus, along the lines of the EU's IA, is necessary to mitigate the threats of an Islamist insurgency in Mozambique's

⁹² Interviews 3 and 7.

⁹³ Interview 3.

⁹⁴ Interviews 3 and 5.

⁹⁵ Interviews 1, 2, 6 and 7.

⁹⁶ Interviews 5 and 7.

⁹⁷ Interviews 1 and 5.

⁹⁸ Interview 5.

north-eastern Cabo Delgado province and strengthen peacebuilding efforts.⁹⁹ It has been contended that host country openness to EU intervention may be driven by their pursuit of greater political visibility.¹⁰⁰

In sum, the IA is a step away from the top-down and technocratic approach towards more bottom-up, context-sensitive and locally owned courses of action in partnership with international and regional actors.¹⁰¹ Yet bottom-up solutions are not a panacea in situations where local actors are not willing to facilitate or implement reforms or engage in peace and reconciliation talks. It is also a challenge in situations where intervening third countries and local actors have radically different perspectives of the form peace should take, resist EU involvement or merely prefer other powers' assistance. The dilemma is that a top-down technocratic approach to conflict-management is no longer an option, while support for a bottom-up project for peace is also not possible at times, due to intra-EU contestation, regional fragmentation, multipolar competition *and* local resistance to policies seen as not sufficiently inclusive or conflict/crisis sensitive.¹⁰² Addressing these dilemmas must involve strengthening a cornerstone of the IA's implementation, namely, the clear articulation of long-term and sustained action.

2.3 Efforts to sustain engagement

A multi-layered IA presupposes sustained engagement at all stages of the conflict and/or crisis cycle. The non-linearity, unpredictability and recurrence of conflicts and crises have driven a policy shift towards incorporating sustained crisis management efforts, in particular those regarding conflict prevention.¹⁰³ The effects of prevention, conflict-management and peacebuilding extend across time and intersect with each other. As the EEAS evaluation report of the state of progress of the Global Strategy puts it, “today’s fragilities and protracted conflicts

⁹⁹ Interview 2.

¹⁰⁰ Tyyne Karjalainen and Ville Savoranta, “The EU’s Strategic Approach to CSDP Interventions: Building a Tenet from Praxis”, in *FIIA Analysis*, No. 11 (October 2021), <https://www.fia.fi/en/publication/the-eus-strategic-approach-to-csdp-interventions>.

¹⁰¹ Filip Ejodus and Ana E. Juncos, “Reclaiming the Local in EU Peacebuilding”, cit.

¹⁰² Pol Bargués and Pol Morillas, “From Democratization to Fostering Resilience”, cit.

¹⁰³ Cedric de Coning, “Adaptive Peacebuilding”, in *International Affairs*, Vol. 94, No. 2 (March 2018), p. 301-317, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ia/iix251>.

have no quick fix solutions. Only constant investment and engagement over time can deliver results, either in terms of preventing further deterioration and/or producing positive developments”.¹⁰⁴ The EU further recognises that phases of the conflict cycle may overlap, necessitating the simultaneous deployment of tools associated with conflict prevention, mediation and stabilisation.¹⁰⁵

The operationalisation of IA is guided by a three-dimensional matrix defining the vertical layers of partnership, thematic pillars of engagement and the timelines associated with specific actions. The recent implementation of the IA in Mozambique has been depicted as a success story in bringing together these three dimensions.¹⁰⁶ The EU has identified a range of actions from the short- to long-term in order to address the insurgency in Cabo Delgado and prevent the recurrence of conflict. These include a CSDP training mission, development aid, advice on natural resource governance and confidence-building exercises. The NDICI-based merger of funding instruments as well as the existence of an IA-informed Political Framework for Crisis Approach also enabled a better definition of required actions across several time horizons. Finally, the EU remained involved in upstream conflict prevention coordination with partners such as the UN and the World Bank.¹⁰⁷

However, once again the literature and interviews suggest the existence of a “rhetoric-practice” gap regarding the long-term implementation of the IA. This gap may engender a tension between the necessity of rapid response in the short-term with the stated goal of a broader, “integrated” and sustained approach over the long term. The cases of the EUTM and EUCAP Mali missions demonstrate that regardless of “well-intended responses from Brussels-based policy-makers concerned with terrorism, trafficking and irregular migration”, the results of these missions have been mixed due to “massive staff turnover, generically defined operation plans unsuited to the local context, and the superficial, technocratic and

¹⁰⁴ EEAS, *The European Union's Global Strategy. Three Years On, Looking Forward*, cit., p. 22-23. Two years on from this 2019 document, these views were reiterated in an interview with an EU official, 16 November 2021 (Interview 5).

¹⁰⁵ Interview 5.

¹⁰⁶ Interviews 2 and 5.

¹⁰⁷ Interview 2.

short-term 'solutions' offered".¹⁰⁸ Research on Iraq¹⁰⁹ and into EUPOL Afghanistan have underscored this point as well. For example, the Afghanistan mission's short-term training and advisory mandate did not sufficiently address civilian policing standards, reducing the impact of a mission that may have benefitted from more sustained engagement.¹¹⁰

A capabilities-expectations gap is visible here as well. The EU does not have the necessary rapid response capabilities or nimble decision-making procedures to tackle emergency situations or immediate threats. While early warning efforts have improved, the warning-response gap still persists.¹¹¹ The timing of EU action – the capacity to be responsive and well-informed – is key to the successful implementation of the IA but tends only to be activated when political unity and political attention is high, such as in Mozambique and Afghanistan.¹¹² It is also the case that the EU is leaving the potential for longer-term thinking and action untapped. In fields where the EU has exclusive competences and capacity and could provide greater value-added for peace consolidation or resilience-building purposes, such as development cooperation or climate change, long-term commitment by member states wanes as more urgent concerns are prioritised.¹¹³

The sustained deployment of the IA is constrained by exogenous considerations as well. As Bøås and Rieker explain, "the current geopolitical context seems to reinforce the trend towards a greater focus on short-term security measures

¹⁰⁸ Morten Bøås and Pernille Rieker, *Executive Summary of the Final Report & Selected Policy Recommendations*, EUNPACK project, March 2019, p. 13, <http://www.eunpack.eu/node/133>.

¹⁰⁹ See for example Khogir Wirya, "The EU Crisis Response in Iraq: Awareness, Local Perception and Reception", in *EUNPACK Working Papers*, Deliverable 7.2 (January 2018), <http://www.eunpack.eu/node/109>.

¹¹⁰ Ingo Peters et al, *Lessons to be Learned from the EU Crisis Response in the Extended Neighbourhood: EU Security Sector Reform in Afghanistan, Iraq and Mali*, EUNPACK Deliverable 7.9, October 2018, <http://www.eunpack.eu/node/121>. See also Qayoom Suroosh, "The Assessment EU Conflict Response in Afghanistan: Assessing EUPOL Impact on Afghan Police Reform (2007 – 2016)", in *EUNPACK Working Papers*, Deliverable 7.3 (January 2018), <http://www.eunpack.eu/node/110>.

¹¹¹ Interview 7; Ana E. Juncos and Steven Blockmans, "The EU's Role in Conflict Prevention and Peacebuilding: Four Key Challenges", in *Global Affairs*, Vol. 4, No. 2-3 (2018), p. 131-140, <https://doi.org/10.1080/23340460.2018.1502619>.

¹¹² Interviews 1, 2 and 5.

¹¹³ Interviews 6 and 7; Pernille Rieker and Steven Blockmans, "Plugging the Capability-Expectations Gap", cit.

rather than long term-stability”.¹¹⁴ Both regional fragmentation and multipolar competition seemingly push the EU to take impulsive and short-term actions.¹¹⁵ While the EU preaches long-term solutions and claims that it seeks to build resilience and sustainable peace in its neighbourhood (particularly in the southern neighbourhood), in practice it emphasises a “stabilisation” oriented approach that often boils down to short-term conflict containment or managing the effects of conflicts such as migration emergencies. The EU’s focus in Syria and Libya has been regional “refugee containment” in partnership with states adjacent to the conflicts such as Lebanon, Jordan, Egypt, Iraq and especially Turkey.¹¹⁶ This narrow focus not only results in missed opportunities for strengthening the resilience of crises-affected societies, but also jeopardises the stability of refugee-hosting states.¹¹⁷ The EU has been unable to factor in long-time horizons and in-depth local knowledge in neighbouring countries, particularly those of the southern neighbourhood. The result is a failure to consolidate effective institutions, legitimacy and trust or instigate peaceful change because the tools in question have been mostly deployed to help build state stability or prioritise security threats such as terrorism.

Although long-term and sustained action is important, there is a sense of urgency in a world of multipolar competition that forces the EU to act as soon as possible. This “hostile security environment”, reports the Strategic Compass draft, “requires us to act with a far greater sense of urgency and determination. The moment for decisive steps is now.”¹¹⁸ Indeed, in the Strategic Compass draft, references to long-term efforts for sustaining peace are largely absent. Instead, the priority is given

¹¹⁴ Morten Bøås and Pernille Rieker, *Executive Summary of the Final Report...*, cit., p. 15.

¹¹⁵ Interview 7. Especially in response to the EU external border management crisis, see Steven Blockmans and Giovanni Faleg, “EU Naval Force EUNAVFOR MED Sets Sail in Troubled Waters”, in *CEPS Commentaries*, 26 June 2015, <https://www.ceps.eu/?p=8969>.

¹¹⁶ Rosanne Anholt and Giulia Sinatti, “Under the Guise of Resilience: The EU Approach to Migration and Forced Displacement in Jordan and Lebanon”, in *Contemporary Security Policy*, Vol. 41, No. 2 (2020), p. 311-335, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13523260.2019.1698182>; Pol Bargués and Jessica Schmidt, “Resilience and the Rise of Speculative Humanitarianism: Thinking Difference through the Syrian Refugee Crisis”, in *Millennium*, Vol. 49, No. 2 (January 2021), p. 197-223, <https://doi.org/10.1177/03058298211031297>; Martina Tazzioli, “Governing Migrant Mobility through Mobility: Containment and Dispersal at the Internal Frontiers of Europe”, in *Environment and Planning C: Politics and Space*, Vol. 38, No. 1 (February 2020), p. 3-19, <https://doi.org/10.1177/2399654419839065>.

¹¹⁷ Similar conclusions have been reached by the EU-LISTCO project (<https://www.eu-listco.net>); see also Eric Stollenwerk, Tanja A. Börzel and Thomas Risse, “Theorizing Resilience-Building in the EU’s Neighbourhood: Introduction to the Special Issue”, in *Democratization*, Vol. 28, No. 7 (2021), p. 1219-1238, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13510347.2021.1957839>.

¹¹⁸ EEAS, *A Strategic Compass for Security and Defence*, cit., p. 2, 8.

to reinforcing the Union's resilience and policy coherence and develop situational awareness and strategic foresight for enacting rapid response mechanisms.¹¹⁹ Unsurprisingly, the Strategic Compass draft reiterates the need to develop an EU rapid reaction force, this time under the name of EU Rapid Deployment Capacity.¹²⁰

Lastly, while much attention has been paid to early warning and improving responsiveness, the EU's IA Lessons Learned processes have been left by the wayside. Not only do personnel shortages hinder the EU's ability to conduct an in-depth analysis of strengths and best practices,¹²¹ but member states are not involved in the process either, thereby undermining their sense of IA ownership and reducing their accountability to EU actors.¹²² The consequence is a lag in knowledge management.¹²³ This may undermine the EU's ability to build upon previous experience and improve its capacity to address existing challenges concerning global and regional partnerships, local ownership and conflict sensitivity, and the need for more sustained and timely intervention in future conflict and crisis situations.

Conclusions

The EU has taken strides towards undertaking multi-layered actions when addressing conflicts and crises, in line with the conceptualisation of its crisis/conflict response as an "Integrated Approach". The challenge concerns how the EU can partner with multiple actors at different levels of governance (global, regional, and local), while prolonging and sustaining actions across the conflict and crisis cycle. Lack of or superficial coordination with other international and regional donors complicates the full deployment of EU assets. Another challenge concerns constructive and inclusive interactions with local players. Solutions to crises and conflicts necessitate partnership with local actors as well as greater conflict sensitivity. However, an embrace of the "local" also implies accepting heterogeneity


¹¹⁹ Interview 7.

¹²⁰ EEAS, *A Strategic Compass for Security and Defence*, cit., p. 9.

¹²¹ Interviews 1 and 5.

¹²² Interview 1.

¹²³ Interview 5.



and complexity, sometimes leading to the reality that local leadership may adopt an approach that runs counter to EU values and interests. Further tensions are encapsulated in the simultaneous need for the EU to act according to both short- and long-term logics, which may present seemingly contradictory dynamics. The EU is taking gradual steps towards multi-layeredness but still faces the challenge of reconciling the seemingly different imperatives that this task requires in a world shaped and complicated by multipolar competition, regional fragmentation and persistent EU internal contestation.

List of interviews¹²⁴

Interview 1: EEAS policy officer, 21 October 2021

Interview 2: EEAS policy officer, 26 October 2021

Interview 3: EEAS official, 28 October 2021

Interview 4: member state official, 29 October 2021

Interview 5: EU official, 16 November 2021

Interview 6: Italian official, 30 November 2021

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Pol Bargués-Pedreny, *Deferring Peace in International Statebuilding. Difference, Resilience and Critique*, London/New York, Routledge, 2018

Pol Bargués and Pol Morillas, “From Democratization to Fostering Resilience: EU Intervention and the Challenges of Building Institutions, Social Trust, and Legitimacy in Bosnia and Herzegovina”, in *Democratization*, Vol. 28, No. 7 (2021), p. 1319-1337, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13510347.2021.1900120>

Pol Bargués and Jessica Schmidt, “Resilience and the Rise of Speculative Humanitarianism: Thinking Difference through the Syrian Refugee Crisis”, in *Millennium*, Vol. 49, No. 2 (January 2021), p. 197-223, <https://doi.org/10.1177/03058298211031297>

¹²⁴ The references are formulated differently based on the degree of anonymity selected by each interviewee.

Sven Biscop, “No Peace from Corona: Defining EU Strategy for the 2020s”, in *Journal of European Integration*, Vol. 42, No. 8 (2020), p. 1009-1023, <https://doi.org/10.1080/07036337.2020.1852230>

Steven Blockmans and Giovanni Faleg, “EU Naval Force EUNAVFOR MED Sets Sail in Troubled Waters”, in *CEPS Commentaries*, 26 June 2015, <https://www.ceps.eu/?p=8969>

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