

AN INTEGRATED APPROACH TO CONFLICTS AND CRISES IN THE OVERALL STRATEGY FOR THE EUROPEAN UNION'S FOREIGN AND SECURITY POLICY

Ph.D. Student, Corneliu-George IACOB

University of Economic Studies, Bucharest, Romania

E-mail: iacobcorneliu2022@gmail.com

Lecturer, Ph.D. Emilia IORDACHE

"Constantin Brâncoveanu" University of Pitești, Romania

E-mail: emi66vl@yahoo.fr

Abstract: *The Comprehensive Strategy for the European Union's Foreign and Security Policy, adopted in 2016, states that the European Union will engage in a principled and practical way in peace-building and promote human security through an integrated approach. It is essential that all policies at the disposal of the European Union are used coherently to implement the 'comprehensive approach to conflicts and crises', but the meaning and scope of the 'comprehensive approach' will be further expanded. The European Union will act at all stages of the conflict cycle, acting promptly in the prevention phase, reacting responsibly and decisively to crises, investing in stabilisation and avoiding premature disengagement when a new crisis erupts. Sustainable peace can only be achieved through comprehensive agreements anchored in broad, deep and lasting regional and international partnerships, which the European Union will promote and support.*

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1. Introduction

The European Union has brought stability and security to the European continent through its creation and enlargement. Predictably, however, over a fairly long period - almost 80 years since the end of the Second World War - the geostrategic, political and institutional context has changed substantially, both regionally and globally, accompanied by diverse (sometimes unpredictable, unforeseen) developments in the motivations, interests and actions of various regional or global actors. There have been fundamental changes in the power paradigm itself: state and non-state actors now evolve in an (often) asymmetric logic and in a fluid context; the nature of war/conflict has changed fundamentally: modern conflict has gone beyond the conventional and takes on hybrid forms of manifestation. Against the background of these developments, we will try to highlight some aspects of the European Union's position as a security provider in the regional and global context.

2. Comprehensive Strategy for the Foreign and Security Policy of the European Union

At the end of 2013, on the border of the European Union, one of the most serious politico-military crises since the end of the wars that led to the break-up of Yugoslavia began to escalate. The idealistic and constructivist rhetoric of the European Union's vision of security was confronted by actions that were underpinned by the Russian Federation's profoundly realist logic. The Ukrainian crisis carries with it the risk of destabilising not only the Wider Black Sea Area (WNBA) or Eastern Europe or the whole of the European continent, but even a major risk with global manifestations. Overall, the EU's approach to these situations (frozen conflicts in the BSEC, Serbia-Kosovo, Cyprus) has varied. Thus, while the European Union has been able to make use of the conditions imposed by its enlargement policy in the case of relations between Serbia and Kosovo or the issue of Cypriot separatism, the context is different in the case of the former communist states, both

in terms of the characteristics and factors relating to these conflicts and in terms of the interests of the Union and the strategies and policies it can adopt in this regard. When the current frozen conflicts in the NMSA were at their most intense, the European community was completely absent. This is because, on the one hand, the European community lacked the political framework for involvement in such situations (the CFSP came into being with the Maastricht Treaty in 1992 and the European Security and Defence Policy only began to be seriously grounded in the late 1990s). On the other hand, the crises that led to the break-up of Yugoslavia posed a greater security challenge in the immediate vicinity and focused the attention of European leaders more sharply. Successive waves of enlargement have seen the European Union share direct borders with the Russian Federation, the Republic of Moldova and maritime borders with Georgia (in the Black Sea), putting the Eastern European and South Caucasus area high on Brussels' foreign policy agenda. The stability and security of the Black Sea region is relevant to the EU for the following reasons: a) geographical proximity; b) energy relevance, in particular as an alternative route for transporting hydrocarbons from Central Asia to Europe; c) cross-border security issues - illegal immigration and organised crime; d) structural instability issues that favour the maintenance of frozen conflicts.

In the European Security Strategy (2003) "building security in our neighbourhood" was mentioned as a strategic objective of the European Union. The European Neighbourhood Policy is considered to have strengthened individual bilateral relations with the European Union, contributing to the evolution of the regional integration process. The Eastern Partnership provides for a real change in relations with the European Union's neighbours to the east, including significant progress in political, economic and trade relations. The objective is to strengthen the prosperity and stability of these countries and thus the security of the European Union, covering a wide range of bilateral and multilateral cooperation areas, including energy security and mobility of people. The stability of the states on the EU's borders is in the interests of the Union for at least two major reasons. A first reason for the European Union's major interest in stability and security in its neighbourhood, particularly in the eastern part, lies in the geo-economic value of this area, especially from an energy security perspective. The Black Sea Basin includes countries with energy relevance, but also for the transit of hydrocarbons from Central Asia to Europe. Security developments in the Black Sea Basin have therefore often been influenced by energy geopolitics, the European Union's attempts to reduce its dependence on Russian hydrocarbons, and Moscow's counter-attacks in this regard. Decisions to develop pipeline projects such as Nabucco, South Stream, Nord Stream are demonstrative of this. A second reason is the existence of economically underdeveloped, poorly governed, unstable actors close to the EU's borders, subject to ethnic secessionist conflicts, which makes the EU more vulnerable to transnational risks and threats such as various forms of organised crime, international terrorism, etc. The map of the European Union shows that such environments exist both in the east (the Black Sea basin) and in the south (the Euro-Mediterranean area, including the Western Balkans). The value of the Black Sea area from an energy perspective is not so much in the resources it contains, given that it is not in itself a region rich in energy resources, but in the fact that it provides a measure of the exploitation near the Caspian Sea, constituting an alternative route for transporting hydrocarbons from Central Asia to Europe, and thus having value in the strategy for identifying alternatives to importing Russian hydrocarbons. Overall, the European Union sees the Black Sea region as an area of considerable challenges and opportunities. The Communication from the European Commission to the Council proposing the creation of the Black Sea Synergy contains a significant summary of both the strategic value and the interests of the Union in this regard: "The Black Sea region is a distinct geographical area,

rich in natural resources and strategically located at the junction of Europe, Central Asia and the Middle East. With a large population, the region faces a number of opportunities and challenges for its citizens. The region is an expanding market with considerable growth potential and a major focus for energy and transport flows. It is, however, a region with unresolved conflicts, many environmental problems and insufficient border controls, which encourage illegal migration and organised crime."

As regards the role of the European Union as a supporter of regional stability and an active provider of stability, a number of issues can be highlighted:

- the geostrategic context;
- the European Union's approach, i.e. its stance towards different types of conflicts inside or outside the European Union;
- analysis of the Union's actions to manage conflicts (including those in the Eastern Neighbourhood), and examination of the effectiveness of these actions;
- the complexity and difficulty of the process of resolving these conflicts, which involves harmonising the often antagonistic interests of major regional powers.

As a general characteristic, a significant part of the European Union's actions are of a soft nature, acting more as a normative power, generating primarily long-term results.

Many of today's challenges to peace, security and prosperity originate from instability in the immediate neighbourhood of the European Union and evolving forms of threats. In the 2014 political guidelines, European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker stressed that we must "strive to make Europe stronger in security and defence" and that European and national instruments must be linked more effectively than in the past. To the extent that countering hybrid threats falls within the scope of national security and defence and law and order policies, the main responsibility lies with the Member States, as most national vulnerabilities are country-specific. However, many EU Member States face common threats, which may also target cross-border networks or infrastructure. Such threats can be addressed more effectively through coordinated action at EU level, using EU policies and instruments, building on European solidarity, mutual assistance and the full potential of the Lisbon Treaty. The Global Approach enables the European Union, in coordination with Member States, to counter hybrid threats in a targeted way by creating synergies between all relevant instruments and by encouraging close cooperation between all relevant actors. Actions build on existing sectoral strategies and policies that contribute to achieving a higher degree of security. The European Security Agenda, the European Union's Global Strategy on Foreign and Security Policy, the European Defence Action Plan, the European Union's Cyber Security Strategy, the Energy Security Strategy, the European Union's Maritime Security Strategy are instruments that can contribute to countering hybrid threats. Given that NATO is also working to counter hybrid threats, and the Foreign Affairs Council has proposed increased cooperation and coordination in this area, some of the proposals aim to strengthen EU-NATO cooperation on countering hybrid threats. The proposed response focuses on the following elements: raising awareness, building resilience, prevention, crisis response and recovery.

With regard to the security of the European Union, the Global Strategy for the Foreign and Security Policy of the European Union states that: The European Union's overall strategy starts from within the Union. The Union has enabled citizens to enjoy unprecedented security, democracy and prosperity. Today, however, terrorism, hybrid threats, economic volatility, climate change and energy insecurity put citizens and territory at risk. An appropriate level of ambition and strategic autonomy is important for Europe's ability to promote peace and security within and beyond its borders. Efforts on defence, cyber security, counter-terrorism, energy and strategic communications will therefore be strengthened. Member States must put into practice their commitments to mutual

assistance and solidarity enshrined in the Treaties. The European Union will step up its contribution to Europe's collective security, in close cooperation with its partners, starting with NATO. (https://eeas.europa.eu/topics/common-foreignsecuritypolicy/cfsp_en?page=3)

The overarching strategy for the European Union's foreign and security policy (EUSG) emphasises security, its ambition of strategic autonomy and its principled but pragmatic approach to the European environment. The European Union's overall strategy indicates an important change in philosophy compared to the 2003 European Security Strategy. Thus, the European Union's Comprehensive Strategy identifies five priorities for the European Union's foreign policy:

- EU security;
- resilience of states and societies in the Eastern and Southern neighbourhood;
- an integrated approach to conflicts;
- regional cooperation actions;
- global governance for the 21st century.

To make the EUSG's vision on defence and security issues operational, in November 2016, VP/HR Mogherini presented to the Foreign Affairs Council a plan for the implementation of the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP), which identified three sets of priorities: responding to external conflicts and crises, strengthening partners' capabilities and protecting the Union and its citizens. The plan put forward 13 proposals for security and defence to operationalise the vision set out in the EUSG. Since then, a wide range of instruments have been designed to develop and harmonise defence cooperation between EU Member States. VP/HR Borrell has also put the strengthening of CSDP at the heart of the EU's work and continues to follow up on initiatives launched by former VP/HR Mogherini.

To give a new impetus to its security and defence agenda, the European Union is currently working on a Strategic Compass, which aims to provide improved political and strategic direction for the security and defence of the European Union. The first phase, which was completed in November 2020, was a comprehensive analysis of threats and challenges. The second phase consisted of informal discussions between Member States on threat analysis and its main implications, capability gap analysis and Member States' priorities. This phase of dialogue enabled Member States to improve their common understanding of the security threats they collectively face and to strengthen the European security and defence culture. The process was designed to respond to the growing need for the European Union to be able to act as a provider of security. On 21 March 2022, the Council of the European Union approved the document setting out the Strategic Security and Defence Roadmap - for a European Union that protects its citizens, values and interests and contributes to international peace and security.

Crisis management missions and operations are the most visible and tangible expression of CSDP. According to VP/HR Josep Borrell, increased engagement through CSDP missions and operations with stronger but flexible mandates is essential. The strategic compass aims to fill the gaps in the EUSG's crisis management instruments and institutions and provide coherent guidance for other relevant initiatives and processes (including PESCO, FEA and CARD), setting clear goals and objectives.

3. The European Union's integrated approach to conflicts and crises

Crisis and conflict management is conducted under the aegis of the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP)/Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP), the framework for both external affairs and security and defence-related actions.

According to the EUSG, an integrated approach to conflicts and crises means that the European Union will engage in a practical and principled way in the peace-building

process, concentrating its efforts in the surrounding regions to the east and south, with consideration of involvement in more distant areas on a case-by-case basis. The European Union will protect human security through an integrated approach.

All these conflicts have multiple dimensions, from security issues to gender issues, from governance to economics. It is essential to implement a multidimensional approach, using all available policies and instruments aimed at conflict prevention, management and resolution. But the scope of the "comprehensive approach" will be further extended. There are no quick solutions to any of these conflicts. Experiences in Somalia, Mali, Afghanistan and elsewhere highlight their long-lasting nature. The European Union will therefore pursue a multi-phased approach, acting at all stages of the conflict cycle. The European Union will invest in prevention, resolution and stabilisation and avoid premature disengagement when a new crisis erupts elsewhere. The European Union will therefore remain engaged in the resolution of protracted conflicts in the Eastern Partnership countries. None of these conflicts is a single level of governance. Conflicts such as those in Syria and Libya often start at the local level, but take on national, regional and global dimensions, which makes them so complex. The European Union will therefore pursue a multi-level approach to conflicts, acting at local, national, regional and global levels. Ultimately, none of these conflicts can be resolved by the European Union alone. The European Union will pursue a multilateral approach, involving all actors present in a conflict and necessary for its resolution. Partnerships will be systematically established on the ground with regional and international organisations, bilateral donors and civil societies. Greater regional and international cooperation will also be pursued. Sustainable peace can only be achieved through comprehensive agreements anchored in broad, deep and lasting regional and international partnerships.

Preventive measures for peace

It has long been known that conflict prevention is more efficient and effective than attempts to resolve crises that have already started. Usually, once a conflict breaks out, it becomes increasingly difficult to resolve over time. The European Union has always had a good track record in carrying out preventive diplomatic and peace-building action. It will therefore redouble its prevention efforts, monitoring root causes such as human rights violations, inequalities, pressures on resources and climate change, which are a multiplying threat, catalysing water and food shortages, pandemics and forced population displacement.

The European Union's Early Warning System is of no use unless it is followed by rapid action. This involves regular reporting and proposals to the Council, preventive diplomatic and mediation action through the mobilisation of EU delegations and special representatives, and strengthened partnerships with civil society. The European Union needs to develop a political culture of acting more rapidly in response to the risk of violent conflict.

Security and stabilisation

The European Union will engage more systematically on the security dimension of these conflicts. With full respect for international law, European security and defence must become better equipped to consolidate peace, guarantee security and protect human lives, especially civilians. The European Union must be able to respond rapidly, responsibly and decisively to crises, in particular to help combat terrorism. The European Union must be able to provide security when peace agreements are concluded and transitional governments are established or in the process of being formed. Otherwise, the European Union should be ready to support local ceasefire agreements and help to consolidate them, paving the way for capacity building. At the same time, through a coherent use of internal

and external policies, the European Union must combat the spill-over effects of insecurity that could result from such conflicts, from trafficking and smuggling to terrorism. [3]

Where prospects for stabilisation emerge, the European Union must facilitate the rapid provision by legitimate institutions of basic services and security for local populations, reducing the risk of recurrence of violence and allowing displaced persons to return. The aim will therefore be to bridge the existing gaps in the EU response between the cessation of violence and long-term recovery, and to develop a two-pronged approach - security and development - to EU engagement.

Conflict resolution

Every country in conflict will have to rebuild its own social contract between the state and its citizens. The Union will support these efforts, promoting inclusive governance at all levels. Where the 'centre' is in trouble, a top-down approach has limited impact. A comprehensive policy solution requires action at all levels. Through CSDP, development and dedicated financial instruments, bottom-up and top-down efforts will be combined to support the building blocks of sustainable statehood, based on action at the local level. Work at local level - for example with local authorities and municipalities - can help deliver basic services to citizens and enable deeper engagement with the strengthened civil society. Actions in this direction will also contribute to improving our local knowledge, helping us to distinguish between groups with whom we will engage without supporting them and those we will actively support as champions of human security and reconciliation.

The European Union will also promote inclusive governance at all levels through mediation and facilitation. At the same time, we will develop more creative approaches to diplomacy. This also means promoting the role of women in peace efforts - from implementing the UNSC resolution on women, peace and security to improving gender balance within the European Union. This means making more systematic use of cultural, interfaith, scientific and economic diplomacy in conflict resolution.

The political economy of peace

The European Union will promote the space in which the licit economy takes root and strengthens. During violent conflict, this means ensuring access for humanitarian aid to enable the provision of basic goods and services, as well as action to halt the political economy of war and create opportunities for licit livelihoods. This means stronger synergies between humanitarian and development assistance, targeting support to health, education, protection, provision of basic goods and licit employment. When prospects for stabilisation emerge, trade and development, in synergy, can underpin long-term peace-building.

Restrictive measures, accompanied by diplomacy, are essential tools to bring about peaceful change. They can play a key role in deterring, preventing and resolving conflict. Smart sanctions, in line with international and EU law, will be carefully tailored and monitored to support the licit economy and avoid possible damage to local societies. To combat the war criminal economy, the European Union must also modernise its policy on export control of dual-use goods and fight illicit trafficking in cultural goods and natural resources.

4. EU-NATO Partnership for Peacekeeping

In May 2021, at the meeting of the EU Military Committee (in Chiefs of Defence configuration), VP/HR Borrell discussed the Strategic Busola, in particular issues related to the EU's operational engagement, and also stressed that cooperation with partners, in particular the UN and NATO, should be strengthened. VP/HR Borrell stressed that EU-NATO cooperation remains a key element of the European Union's security and defence

agenda and is particularly relevant as both organisations move forward in their respective reflection processes - the Strategic Busola and NATO 2030.

The NATO-EU partnership has become a central component of the overall security governance architecture for several reasons. These relate to the nature of the institutions and the threats they face, as well as to some form of implicit division of labour in relation to (i) geography; (ii) the link between defence and security; and (iii) the link between internal and external security. To begin with, the two sides are often presented as sharing the same set of values. To a large extent, they face similar security threats, from the Russian resurgence to terrorism, cyber threats and general instability on their southern periphery. As a result, both organisations have an objective interest in working together to leverage their comparative advantages, create synergies and maximise impact. On this basis, there is some complementarity. Theoretically, and referring to its original mandate of collective defence of its member states against external aggression, NATO can only operate in the North Atlantic area, north of the Tropic of Cancer, yet the post-1990s debates and operations in Afghanistan and Iraq have de facto called this geographical restriction into question. As far as the European Union is concerned, the focus on the periphery or 'neighbours of neighbours' needs to be balanced by the aspiration to be what the 2016 EU Global Strategy calls a 'global security provider'. These potentially global ambitions and overlapping areas of responsibility have, however, led to a certain division of labour between the two institutions, which is partly geographically oriented. The most obvious examples are NATO's presence in the three Baltic states and in Poland in response to Russia's activities in Ukraine. This contrasts with the absence of the European Union as a defence actor on the territory of its own member states, at least through the Common Security and Defence Policy (and to the extent that the European Union does not 'do' collective defence). Instead, there are various EU-led missions and operations deployed in sub-Saharan Africa, while apart from the NATO training mission in Iraq, the Alliance is absent from the Middle East and North Africa. The European Union is also conducting civilian missions in the Palestinian territories and Georgia, while a NATO mission there would prove more challenging because of political sensitivities.

Against the backdrop of NATO's revised strategic concept, the Alliance could beneficially renew its European pillar through a deepened and complementary approach with the European Union. At a time when recent and new factors - both internal and external - are challenging the Alliance (e.g. Brexit, the question of Europe's strategic ambitions, Presidents Trump and Macron's critical views of the Alliance, the repositioning of the UK in its environment), these changes require a revised analysis of the transatlantic link and the role of its European pillar. In this context, the issues of how Allies share the defence burden and the various European initiatives to develop more robust and autonomous European defence capabilities have become highly sensitive, calling into question the possible degree of cooperation between NATO and the European Union. The European pillar can be analysed through a twofold approach: first, as part of the European Union and NATO; and second, as a result of the possible interactions between these two global actors. In light of these considerations, there is a need to identify the goals, ways and means that would benefit both organisations through a renewed robust European Pillar, while supporting the future NATO strategic concept.

5. Conclusions

The European Union's Global Strategy is the guiding framework for the Union's external action in the medium and long term. The Strategy starts from the premise that the European Union is currently facing a number of major crises, both within and beyond the Union. Threats to the Union have different origins, some originating in the neighbourhood,

but others of a global nature. The structure of the Global Strategy focuses on five main priorities: the security of the Union, the resilience of states and societies to the east and south of the Union, an integrated approach to conflict, a cooperative regional order and global governance for the 21st century.

Since September 2016, under the coordination of the High Representative/Vice-President of the European Commission, the EEAS, COM and EU Member States have been working closely together to implement the Global Strategy in all its areas of application. Most progress has been made in the implementation processes of the Strategy in the area of Neighbourhood Policy and Security and Defence Policy.

The EU Global Strategy has become a true collective compass guiding coherent and coordinated EU external action. Notable achievements in the implementation of the Comprehensive Strategy concern: the security and defence package in all its dimensions, state and societal resilience in the Neighbourhood, integrated approach to external crises and conflicts, cooperative regional order, governance and rules-based multilateralism. Going forward, the stakes are to ensure coherence in the implementation process and resource allocation decisions, in order to provide the means for the European Union's ambition as a global security actor.

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