

Planning Ahead: EU crisis management interventions require local ownership at the earliest stage

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About the research

Since 2003, the EU has launched 35 crisis management interventions in Europe, Africa and Asia as part of its Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP). According to EU policy, one of the guiding principles of these interventions is 'local ownership', that is, appropriation by local stakeholders of commonly agreed objectives. According to the recently adopted EU Global Strategy the Union is determined to work on "locally owned" Security Sector Reforms (SSR) in partner countries.

In practice, however, the majority of CSDP interventions have been externally designed and supply-driven with little local traction. The EU has been concentrating its efforts to achieve ownership in advanced stages of an intervention, as part of the exit strategy. Consequently, the EU has not been able to take advantage of its impressive peacebuilding potential and has continually punched below its weight in international crisis management. This policy briefing outlines the obstacles to national ownership in past and ongoing CSDP interventions, and highlights the importance of planning ahead and incorporating the principle of local ownership from the very outset.

The EU's crisis management interventions would be more effective if national ownership was part of the entry strategy, rather than the exit strategy.

Policy implications

- The EU needs to integrate local ownership into its "entry strategy" for CSDP interventions. This requires EU and local stakeholders to negotiate the mandates of EU interventions upfront. They should agree Memoranda of Understanding outlining the political and long-term outcomes sought by all parties concerned.
- CSDP interventions need to be demand-driven in terms of the capabilities deployed. The EU and its member states should address the obstacles to this, including time constraints and high turnover rates, by making necessary legal and policy changes. Pre-deployment training should put more focus on local context and pay special attention to ownership. Host governments must also show their commitment by bearing part of the financial burden of common actions.
- The EU and host governments should engage in dialogue with opposition and civil-society actors early on. Timely input of non-state actors will increase the effectiveness and legitimacy of CSDP interventions.
- Member states should maintain their role in drafting strategic documents. However, they should delegate the drafting of more operational documents to the EU institutions and services. Once launched, member states should avoid interfering in day-to-day activities within interventions.

Key findings

CSDP interventions are conceived, planned and launched by the EU while the role of the local authorities has been reduced to issuing a formal invitation and gradually taking over responsibilities, so that the EU can eventually plan its withdrawal from the theatre of operation. Fact-finding missions are often rushed and cursory exercises that result in mission mandates that are divorced from realities on the ground.

There is a strong tendency of member states to micromanage CSDP interventions both during the planning process and once they are launched. This hampers local ownership, by undermining the operational autonomy of CSDP staff and rendering them less able to adjust to quickly changing conditions on the ground.

CSDP interventions are supply-driven: the EU and its member states have been more eager to offer the assistance they want to provide rather than the capacities needed by host countries to enable their long-term and bottom-up peaceful transformation. Time constraints and high turnover rates push CSDP interventions to focus on ready-made tools and quick impact projects.

Ownership efforts in CSDP have focused on ensuring a buy-in of powerful gatekeepers within host governments, while sidelining wider governance structures and local communities. Contacts with civil society have been ad hoc and haphazard. As a result, local populations are often either unaware of CSDP interventions or distrustful of them.



Image source: EUPOL COPPS

Further information

1. For an overview of completed and on-going CSDP operations, see: <http://www.eeas.europa.eu/csdp/missions-and-operations/>
2. EU (2005) 'EU Concept for ESDP Support to Security Sector Reform (SSR),' Brussels: <http://register.consilium.europa.eu/doc/srv?!=EN&f=ST%2012566%202005%20REV%204>
3. EU (2016) Shared Vision, Common Action: A Stronger Europe, A Global Strategy for the European Union's Foreign and Security Policy, Brussels: https://eeas.europa.eu/top_stories/pdf/eugs_review_web.pdf
4. EU (2016) 'Elements for an EU-wide Strategic Framework for supporting Security Sector Reform (SSR),' Brussels. http://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/sites/devco/files/joint-communication-ssr-20160705-p1-854572_en.pdf

More information about the project is available at: www.euandssr.eu

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