



HIGH REPRESENTATIVE OF THE  
EUROPEAN UNION FOR  
FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND  
SECURITY POLICY

Brussels, 11.12.2013  
JOIN(2013) 30 final

**JOINT COMMUNICATION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND THE  
COUNCIL**

**The EU's comprehensive approach to external conflict and crises**

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## **The EU's comprehensive approach to external conflicts and crises**

### **I. The case for a comprehensive approach**

The Treaty of Lisbon sets out the principles, aims and objectives of the external action of the European Union. In the pursuit of these objectives, the Treaty calls for consistency between the different areas of EU external action and between these and its other policies.

Following the entry into force of the Treaty and the new institutional context it created, including the creation of the post of High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security who is also Vice-President of the Commission as well as the establishment of the European External Action Service (EEAS), the EU has both the increased potential and the ambition – by drawing on the full range of its instruments and resources – to make its external action more consistent, more effective and more strategic.

The concept of such a comprehensive approach is not new as such. It has already been successfully applied as the organizing principle for EU action in many cases in recent years, for example, in the Horn of Africa, the Sahel and the Great Lakes. However, the ideas and principles governing the comprehensive approach have yet to become, systematically, the guiding principles for EU external action across all areas, in particular in relation to conflict prevention and crisis resolution.

This Joint Communication sets out a number of concrete steps that the EU, collectively, is taking towards an increasingly comprehensive approach in its external relations policies and action. More specifically the High Representative and the Commission are - with this Joint Communication – setting out their common understanding of the EU's comprehensive approach to external conflict and crises and fully committing to its joint application in the EU's external policy and action. This understanding covers all stages of the cycle of conflict or other external crises; through early warning and preparedness, conflict prevention, crisis response and management to early recovery, stabilisation and peace-building in order to help countries getting back on track towards sustainable long-term development.

The EU has a vital interest to prevent, prepare for, respond to, address and help recovery from conflicts, crises and other security threats outside its borders – this is a permanent task and responsibility, already recognised in both the European Security Strategy and the EU Internal Security Strategy. This is the case not only because the EU is widely considered as an example of peace and stability in its neighbourhood and in other parts of the world, but also because it is in the EU's global interest. The Union has a wide array of policies, tools and instruments at its disposal to respond to these challenges – spanning the diplomatic, security, defence, financial, trade, development cooperation and humanitarian aid fields. It is the world's largest trading block and, collectively, the world's biggest donor of official development assistance (ODA) and humanitarian aid.

Comprehensiveness refers not only to the joined-up deployment of EU instruments and resources, but also to the shared responsibility of EU-level actors and Member States. The EU has a unique network of 139 in-country EU Delegations, diplomatic expertise in the EEAS including through EU Special Representatives, and operational engagement through Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) missions and operations. By bringing all these together, with the European Commission and the 28 Member States, to work in a joined-up and strategic manner, the EU can better define and defend its fundamental interests and values, promote its key political objectives and prevent crises or help to restore stability. In this way, it will help to improve the lives of those threatened by conflict and prevent or mitigate the negative effects – for the EU, its citizens and its internal security – of insecurity and conflict elsewhere. The EU is stronger, more coherent, more visible and more effective in its external relations when all EU institutions and the Member States work together on the basis of a common strategic analysis and vision. This is what the comprehensive approach is about.

As global challenges continue to rise in number and increase in complexity (effects of climate change and degradation of natural resources, population pressures and migratory flows, illicit trafficking, energy security, natural disasters, cyber security, maritime security, regional conflicts, radicalisation and terrorism, et cetera) and as economic and financial resources remain under pressure, the case for a comprehensive approach, making optimal use of all relevant instruments - be they external or internal policy instruments - is now stronger than ever.

Sustainable development and poverty eradication require peace and security, and the reverse is equally true: fragile or conflict-affected countries still remain the furthest away from meeting the Millennium Development Goals. The connection between security and development is therefore a key underlying principle in the application of an EU comprehensive approach. Other important principles underpin this approach. Firstly, our responses must be context-specific and driven by the reality and logic of real life situations encountered: there are no blue-prints or off-the-shelf solutions. Secondly, the EU's comprehensive approach is a common and shared responsibility of all EU actors in Brussels, in Member States and on the ground in third countries. Collective political will, transparency, trust and the pro-active engagement of Member States are pre-requisites for success. Finally, the approach is based on the full respect of the different competences and respective added value of the EU's institutions and services, as well as of the Member States, as set out in the Treaties:

- humanitarian aid shall be provided in accordance with its specific *modus operandi*, respectful of the principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence, solely on the basis of the needs of affected populations, in line with the European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid;
- for development assistance, the EU and its Member States act in line with the development policy as defined in the 2005 European Consensus on Development and the 2012 Agenda for Change as well as the guidelines of the Organisation for Economic Development's (OECD) Development Assistance Committee (DAC).
- EU Member States exercise political control over, and provide strategic direction for, CSDP missions and operations through the Political and Security Committee (PSC).

## **II. The way forward for a comprehensive approach to conflict or crisis situations**

The following measures will further enhance the coherence and effectiveness of EU external policy and action in conflict or crisis situations.

### **1. Develop a shared analysis**

A coherent political strategy for conflict prevention, preparedness and response starts with all relevant players sharing a common understanding of the situation or the challenge. A shared analysis should set out the EU's understanding about the causes of a potential conflict or crisis, identify the key people and groups involved, review the dynamics of the situation and assess the potential risks of action, or non-action. It must also identify the EU interests and objectives and our potential role to contribute to peace, security, development, human rights and the rule of law, taking into account existing EU resources and action in the country or region in question. To further improve a shared analysis, the following should be promoted:

Actions:

- Improve combined situational awareness and analysis capacity in particular by better linking up the dedicated facilities in the various EU institutions and services, including the Emergency Response Coordination Centre and the EU Situation Room (EU SitRoom). Facilitate access by EU institutions to information and intelligence including from Member States in order to prevent crises and prepare, mitigate, and accelerate the response to crisis situations.
- Strengthen early, pro-active, transparent and regular information-sharing, co-ordination and team-work among all those responsible in the EU's Brussels headquarters and in the field (including EU Delegations, CSDP missions and operations, Member States and EU Special Representatives, EU agencies as appropriate).
- Further develop and systematically implement a common methodology to conflict and crisis analysis, including development, humanitarian, political, security and defence perspectives from both the field and HQ, by all relevant available knowledge and analysis, including from Member States.
- Building on these analyses, systematically prepare proposals and options for discussion with Member States in the relevant Council bodies, including the Political and Security Committee. When a CSDP action is envisaged, this would generally follow the Political

Framework for Crisis Approach (PFCA) approach, articulating what the problem is, explain why the EU should act (based on interests, values, objectives and mandates), and identify what instruments could be available, and best suited, to act.

## **2. Define a common strategic vision**

Building on this shared analysis, the EU should, whenever possible work across institutions and with Member States to develop a single, common strategic vision for a conflict or crisis situation and for future EU engagement across policy areas. This should then set the overall direction for EU engagement.

Actions:

- The EU's strategic vision for a country or a region should whenever possible be set out in an overarching EU Strategy document. Recent examples include the Horn of Africa Strategic Framework and the EU Strategy for security and development in the Sahel, and the proposed elements for an EU Strategy towards the Great Lakes region.
- Joint framework documents<sup>1</sup> should set out the EU's and Member States' objectives and priorities for particular countries, as appropriate.

## **3. Focus on prevention**

Whenever possible the EU must seek to prevent conflict before a crisis emerges or violence erupts – this is a constant and high priority for all EU diplomatic engagement. In the long run, prevention is far less costly than addressing conflicts which have erupted. Prevention contributes to peace, security and sustainable development. It saves lives and reduces suffering, avoids the destruction of homes, businesses, infrastructure and the economy, and makes it easier to resolve underlying tensions, disputes and conditions conducive to violent radicalisation and terrorism. It also helps protect EU interests and prevent adverse consequences on EU security and prosperity.

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<sup>1</sup> Joint Communication by the High Representative and the Commission. Global Europe: A New Approach to financing EU External Action (COM (2011) 865 final).

Actions:

- Early warning/early action: Use new and existing EU early warning systems<sup>2</sup>, including those of EU Member States, to identify emerging conflict and crisis risks, and identify possible mitigating actions.
- Work across EU institutions and with Member States to translate conflict and crisis risk analyses into specific conflict prevention measures, drawing on lessons learned from previous conflicts and crises.

#### **4. Mobilise the different strengths and capacities of the EU**

Effective and proactive EU policy responses to conflict and crises should draw on the different strengths, capacities, competencies and relationships of EU institutions and Member States, in support of a shared vision and common objectives.

Actions:

- Use the Crisis Platform mechanism, chaired by the EEAS with the participation of Commission services, in a more systematic way to facilitate coordination, share information and contribute to the identification and intelligent sequencing of available EU instruments as required. These mechanisms proved their value during the Arab Spring and in the EU's response to the Horn of Africa.
- Ensure that all relevant EU actors are informed and engaged in the analysis and assessment of conflict and crisis situations and at all stages of the conflict cycle – comprehensive engagement and action build on joined-up preparatory work. The EEAS informs and brings together other services on a regular basis for such analytical and preparatory work.
- Further strengthen operational cooperation among the various emergency response functions of the EU, using their complementary expertise. To this end, a Memorandum of Understanding between the EEAS and the Commission services is being prepared.
- Make best use of EU Delegations to ensure local coherence between EU and Member States actions.

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<sup>2</sup> Also including the EEAS conflict early warning system (currently being piloted).

- Strengthen the capacity of EU Delegations to contribute to conflict risk analysis. Identify appropriate tools and respond to conflict and crisis by rapid temporary reinforcement through the deployment of additional staff or other experts, where possible, drawing on existing EU resources capacity at the Brussels headquarter or in the region and on Member States' resources.
- Develop procedures and capacities for rapid deployment of joint (EEAS, Commission services, Member States) field missions where appropriate to conflict or crisis situations.<sup>3</sup>

## 5. Commit to the long term

*“It took the 20 fastest reforming countries on average 17 years to reduce military in politics and 41 years to reform rule of law to a minimum level necessary for development.”*

World Development Report, World Bank, 2011

Long term engagement in peace and state building and long-term sustainable development are essential to address the underlying causes of conflict and to build peaceful, resilient societies. The overall objectives of sustainable peace and development must be at the core of the EU's response from the outset – the EU must also have a long-term vision for its short-term engagements and actions.

For instance, CSDP crisis management instruments and crisis response measures under the Instrument for Stability (IfS) pursue mostly short-term objectives, whereas development instruments by nature are oriented towards the long term. Although objectives and decision-making procedures are different, natural synergies and complementarities should be ensured by an early, inclusive and intense dialogue between the respective stakeholders, in order to have a greater impact and achieve better results. The EU can use, in a coherent manner, different tools and instruments within their own mandates and decision-making processes to deliver on the shared objectives.

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<sup>3</sup> Such actions shall be financed within the limits of existing administrative and operational resources of the corresponding services/DGs and taking into consideration the scope and objectives of the External Action Instruments involved.



#### Actions:

- Establish co-ordination systems between long-term and short-term objectives through dialogue among EU stakeholders including on the ground.
- Strengthen mechanisms for pooling and sharing European capacities and expertise (e.g. pool of experts for CSDP missions).
- Coordinate and where possible combine the use of a full range of EU tools and instruments (e.g. political dialogue, conflict prevention, reconciliation, programming of development assistance and joint programming, CSDP missions and operations, conflict prevention and stabilisation under the Instrument for Stability, support to disarmament, demobilization reintegration and support to justice and security sector reform processes, etc.) to craft a flexible and effective response during and after the stabilisation phase and in case of risks of conflict. The programming of aid in fragile and conflict-affected countries should integrate conflict analysis from the very beginning as well as the necessary flexibilities for re-programming to respond to new developments on the ground where appropriate.
- Take stock of lessons learned, including within the EU institutions, with Member States and external actors, and feed them back into the comprehensive approach cycle starting from early warning and including prevention efforts, training and exercises.

## **6. Linking policies and internal and external action**

EU internal policies and actions can have significant external effects on conflict and crisis situations. Likewise, external action and policy can also impact on EU internal dynamics. For example, EU maritime transport policy in the Red Sea and the Indian Ocean is inextricably linked to the situation in Somalia and the Horn of Africa region. Similar impacts may arise in other situations from for example fisheries or energy policy. Conversely, the emergence beyond Europe's borders of organised crime, terrorism, or mass migration associated with violent conflict can have a direct impact on the security, stability and interests of the EU, its Member States and EU citizens.

Terrorist organisations will strive to exploit post-conflict or fragile states. In particular, poorly governed areas can prove to be a breeding ground for terrorist recruitment. For example, the activities of Al-Shabaab – which is formally aligned with Al Qaeda – have destabilised Somalia, and severely hindered regional development. Terrorist organisations can act to transmit the terrorist threat directly back into the EU.

Close cooperation, in particular between the High Representative and the Commission, is also vital on the various global issues where the external aspects of internal EU policies have a growing foreign and security policy dimension. This includes areas such as energy security, environmental protection and climate change, migration issues, counter-terrorism and countering violent extremism, organised crime and global economic governance.

"Climate change is a decisive global challenge which, if not urgently managed, will put at risk not only the environment but also world economic prosperity, development and, more broadly, stability and security. The transition towards safe and sustainable low-carbon economy and society as well as climate resilient and resource efficient growth patterns worldwide are of paramount importance. Addressing the risk-multiplying threats of a changing climate, including potential conflict and instability, related to reliable access to food, water and energy, requires effective foreign policy responses at the global and EU level, as recognised in the European Security Strategy".

Council Conclusions on climate change diplomacy, June 2013

Finally, and as the recent breakthrough in the EU-facilitated Belgrade-Pristina dialogue has demonstrated, the pull factor of the EU through the perspective of joining the Union - in combination with intense diplomatic engagement - continues to play a vital role in conflict prevention and longer-term stabilization.

Actions:

- The High Representative/Vice President, working closely with the President of the European Commission, to ensure strategic and operational coherence in external relations policy and strategy, including as regards the external impact of internal policies.
- Make better use of the diplomatic and external relations means at the disposal of the EU project and defend its interests linked to internal policies and global issues.
- Seek to identify and raise awareness of policies and instruments that have both an internal and external dimension and highlight potential in both directions.
- Internal policies should be part of the analytical crisis framework, the strategic thinking and policy documents on external action whenever possible and relevant.

## 7. Make better use of EU Delegations

The EU Delegation, and the Head of Delegation in particular, is the focal point of the EU presence in third countries and should – at that level - play a central role in delivering and co-ordinating EU dialogue, action and support.

Actions:

- Take full advantage of the role of the Head of Delegation to bring together the EU and Member States present on the ground across the full spectrum of relevant actions (political dialogue, development co-operation and joint programming, input to security-related strategies, local cooperation with CSDP missions and operations, consular protection, as appropriate, etc.).
- The Head of Delegation to co-ordinate joint reporting, where appropriate, enhancing co-operation with EU Member States on the ground, and sharing information and analysis, in particular at all stages of conflicts or crises.
- Ensure an appropriate breadth of expertise in Delegations, including on security issues.
- If appropriate, enable the co-location of EU actors in EU Delegations to build operational synergies.

Joint Programming has now started or is scheduled to start in more than 40 countries in the coming years. With this initiative, the EU and its Member States aim to increase their impact in partner countries and make their development cooperation more effective. At the same time, they will present a united package of support that significantly increases the EU's leverage and political weight as a donor. Joint Programming exercises are in-country, led by the EU Delegations and Member States Embassies.

## 8. Work in partnership

In facing complex global challenges, the EU needs to engage and work together with other international and regional actors. The role of the EU is linked - to a greater or lesser extent – to the action (or non-action), resources and expertise of others (e.g. the UN in most crisis situations, NATO in Kosovo and Afghanistan, the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank on macro-financial issues, et cetera).

“[M]utually reinforcing, beneficial and sustainable partnerships with ... the UN, OSCE, NATO, World Bank, African Union and other international actors ... need to be further strengthened to enable the European Union to operate successfully in the field of long term structural conflict prevention”

Actions:

- When developing EU position and responses, engage with and take full account of the role of other international actors: the United Nations, international and regional organisations, strategic partners, International Financial Institutions.
- Engage more closely with major international NGOs, civil society, think-tanks, academia and public and private actors.

### **III. Conclusion**

The EU has in recent years taken important steps towards a more coherent external relations policy and action, not least in its response to conflict and crisis situations. Significant progress has been made in the development of common EU policies and strategies and whole-of-Union responses. But the work is not over. The EU now needs to make further improvements and more consistently apply the comprehensive approach as a guiding principle to EU external policy and action.

The comprehensive approach, as outlined above, is a joint undertaking and its success a shared responsibility for the EU institutions as well as for Member States, whose policies, actions and support significantly contribute to more coherent and more effective EU responses.

In the coming months and years, the High Representative and the Commission will, in cooperation with Member States, implement these proposals and this approach and, through them, make determined progress towards better, stronger and faster EU external action. The High Representative and the Commission call on EU Member States to provide their full support for this approach and to fully engage in order to ensure that this vision and these objectives are fully implemented.