

# Peace – Europe’s Polyphonic Promise

Brussels determines the direction in many policy fields, but in European foreign, security and defense policy, it’s the member states that set the tone – not the EU. When it comes to international peace talks or emergency meetings, such as the one held recently over the crisis in Ukraine, it’s the national foreign ministers and not the EU foreign policy chief taking the lead. However, given the challenges for peace and security in Europe, our author holds that this is an outdated model: it’s time for the member states to act in concert.

TEXT **CAROLYN MOSER**

**T**he hostilities in Ukraine came as a shock to most European citizens, many of whom had lived their lives to date without the shadow of war looming over them. This stable and long-lasting period of peace in Europe, a continent formerly shaken by armed conflict, is largely the achievement of the European integration process, which has succeeded in reversing

sis and its devastating socio-economic effects have undermined the cohesion within the European Union, a war between EU member states is unthinkable.

In 2012, the European Union was awarded the Nobel Prize for Peace for this great accomplishment. The jury’s decision can also be read as a friendly reminder to Brussels to safeguard (social) peace in times of increasing internal friction. Accepting the prize, Herman van Rompuy, then President of the European Council, described Europe’s situation as follows: “Peace is now self-evident. War has become inconceivable.” He also added words of warning whose meaning is intensified in light of the ongoing crisis in Ukraine: “Yet ‘inconceivable’ does not mean ‘impossible’. And that is why we are gathered here today. Europe must keep its promise of peace.”

Keeping this promise is no easy task, as peace does not equate with the mere absence of war. Moreover, peace depends on both internal and external dynamics, which are often intertwined. In recent years, the impact on the European Union and its member states of external or externally influenced events has repeatedly become apparent. >

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## War between EU member states is unthinkable today

the centuries-old paradigm of peace as an interlude between wars. Today, peace has become the rule in Europe, while military violence is the exception.

It seems to have been forgotten in both public perception and public opinion that the European project has, despite its shortcomings, founded a peaceful entity made of democracies built on the rule of law and respect for human rights. Even if the financial cri-



The CHARLIE HEBDO attacks in Paris, in which transnationally acting terrorist groups were involved, are still fresh in our memories. We have also witnessed civil wars in Libya and Syria, leading to a considerable increase in asylum seekers in European countries. Currently, the Union is additionally faced with war in a country that shares a common border with several of its member states, namely Ukraine.

These events illustrate that peace in and around Europe can't be taken for granted, and that a variety of security challenges lie ahead. So the time has come for member states to reinforce unity in foreign policy, security and defense matters. While this might seem obvious to the reader, it doesn't correspond to reality.

Contrary to the motto of the Union, "United in diversity," there is a great deal more cacophony than unity among member states when it comes to issues with foreign affairs, security and defense implications. Concerted action in this area would certainly

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### 3,000 military staff are deployed in five military operations

help cope with existing and forthcoming threats to stability and peace in Europe, as would a strong international standing of the Union.

Member states have existing structures and expertise on which to build. The Union has progressively been equipped with a security and defense strand, which has already enabled the EU to launch a variety of civilian missions and military operations.

Since 2003, thousands of civilian experts and military staff – including judges, police officers, infantry and navy soldiers and officers, or monitors – have been sent out with the Union's flag on their uniforms and vehicles to contribute to the process of restoring stability in countries or regions shaken by crises. At the time of writing, some 3,000 civilians are working in twelve civilian missions, and another 3,000 military staff are deployed in five military operations.

One or two decades ago, only resolute optimists would have thought such united external efforts possible. After the failure of the European Defence Community – an ambitious project envisaging a European army – in 1954, member states adopted a slower

pace to move forward with integration with respect to security, defense and foreign affairs.

Informal consultations laid the foundations for the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) introduced in 1993 by the Treaty of Maastricht, as well as for the post of High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy that was established six years later by the Treaty of Amsterdam and that was first held by Javier Solana.

In the wake of the Kosovo crisis – when, after the Balkan wars, European nations were again unable to properly respond to the atrocities committed in their own backyard – a Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) was added to the CSFP in 1999. Its aim was to bundle resources, share expertise and increase coordination to allow for concerted action.

The CSDP went through its baptism of fire shortly thereafter when, in 2003, the Union sent its first civilian police mission to Bosnia and Herzegovina, and began its first military deployment in Macedonia. To date, the Union has launched more than thirty civilian missions and military operations, varying in geographic focus (Europe, Asia, Africa) and thematic span.

Civilian missions range from border assistance and monitoring to rule of law support, police training and police capacity building to security sector reform assistance and military capacity building. Military operations comprise training missions for armed forces, military advice and naval anti-piracy activities, as well as combat and humanitarian tasks. To enable the Union to undertake this wide array of activities, member states have progressively created Brussels-based structures vested with planning, decision-making and implementation capacities.

Yet, after brisk activity in the Solana era, the Common Security and Defence Policy almost came to a standstill in the wake of the financial crisis when member states accorded a lower profile to foreign affairs, security and defence policy questions at the EU level. The EU's international standing has declined as a result. But Brussels can't be blamed for this deterioration, given that decision-making in this policy area rests quasi-exclusively with member states and their representatives in Brussels.

The legal, institutional and procedural framework of the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) and of the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) are shaped predominantly by inter-



governmental features. Indicative hereof is the fact that the main actors and decision makers are the European Council (composed of heads of state and government) and the Council of the European Union (constituted by representatives of member states' governments). Unlike in other policy areas, the European Commission and the European Parliament play only a minor role in matters related to foreign affairs, security and defence, and the Court of Justice of the European Union generally has no jurisdiction in this field.

In addition, the principle of unanimity prevails here, with some minor exceptions, in contrast to other policy areas. All 28 member states need to be in consensus to define a common position or to launch a civilian mission or military operation. In the event of disagreement among member states, the EU's security and defense are paralyzed. This has repeatedly happened in crisis situations – the Arab Spring, the fall of the Gaddafi regime in Libya and the humanitarian crisis in Syria, for instance – when the European Union's lack of response was a disappointment to many.

Even the Treaty of Lisbon (2009) did nothing to change the fact that member states are strongly favored – and not the European Union. Most issues with foreign affairs, security and defense implications are still handled by national governments, and not by the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, a position currently held by Federica Mogherini. However, a Union with a low international profile, together with member states divided over security and defense issues, is not the most desirable message to convey to the world.

The path to more security and defense cohesion in the future is thus not without obstacles. The first difficulty to be tackled relates to defining a common European stance. Especially in crisis situations, national players are likely to fall back on national institutions and mechanisms. In addition, as questions of security and defense traditionally belong to the realm of the executive, governments are generally wary of renouncing their prerogatives and responsibilities in favor of common decision-making or implementation structures.

The UK's strong opposition to a change in the status quo and to further integration in foreign affairs, security and defense on the road to the Treaty of Lisbon is a case in point. Another example is

the European External Action Service (EEAS): in essence, the cryptic acronym stands for nothing less than the nucleus of an EU ministry of foreign affairs. And yet, appearances matter, so the seemingly neutral designation EEAS was eventually chosen

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## A security strategy that combines all elements of foreign policy

over a more political denomination (such as ministry of foreign affairs), potentially stirring up fears of losing sovereignty to Brussels.

Considering these underlying patterns, it is apparent that there is little leeway for the Union to react to external threats. Faced with civil wars across the Mediterranean, ongoing hostilities in Ukraine and the reemergence of Cold War rhetoric, it might be time to reverse this situation – and stand firm and united. This implies not only conceding to concerted action, but also providing the necessary means to carry out joint activities. In this context, EU member states might have to rethink Europe's security and defence apparatus and increasingly engage in pooling, sharing or better coordinating equipment and resources.

This leads to yet another challenge, namely the question of whether and under what conditions the Union should resort to military means to maintain or restore peace (provided there is a UN mandate). For most people, military activity is associated with member states deploying troops (mainly in the context of NATO operations), not the EU. The Union's international standing and self-image has, to a large extent, been coined by its non-belligerent nature. Consequently, the EU has adopted a security strategy that combines all elements of foreign policy (diplomacy, trade, aid and military and non-military instruments) and clearly prefers conflict prevention over armed intervention. In fact, civilian missions account for almost two-thirds of EU-led crisis management activities.

For some member states, including Scandinavian countries and Germany, the use of military force is not readily compatible with the Union's civilian character. For other member states, like France, military interventions are considered to be an essential aspect



of a Union that wants to affirm its international role. So to what end(s) should military force be employed? Should the Union intervene militarily to prevent atrocities from being committed? So far, member states have, for pragmatic reasons, opted to carry out humanitarian interventions, as in Libya, under the NATO framework, if at all, and not under the auspices of the Union.

Also, what about sending armed forces, not to maintain, but to restore peace? In several EU operations, the use of force has been authorized to curb internal conflicts and prevent regional instabilities – such as in the Central African Republic in 2014.

And yet, it is no simple task to gather military personnel and resources for these undertakings. Paris is often willing to send soldiers and contribute materials. Berlin, on the other hand, is known to be a more reluctant contributor to military operations, and has a clear preference for civilian missions. As for the EU operation in the Central African Republic, France accounted for the majority of troops, while Germany committed military transport aircraft to carry the wounded. The same division of labor for combat tasks and logistical support – “exemplary,” as some might say – has also been applied in other operations.

In different circumstances, member states have shown greater resolve to contribute armed forces. This has been the case with, for instance, Atalanta, the EU-led naval anti-piracy operation off the Somali coast. More than 20 member states (including Luxembourg, a landlocked country with no naval forces) and some non-EU countries are contributing to the operation. Apart from providing protection to vessels of the World Food Programme delivering food to Somalia, the operation is mandated to deter, prevent and repress acts of piracy and armed robbery at sea with a view to ensuring that international trade is not disrupted, and to use force if necessary.

The Gulf of Aden is indeed one of the most important international commercial maritime routes, not least because tankers loaded with crude oil are transiting through the Gulf to reach nations all over the world. Geo-strategic considerations and economic interests clearly played a role in member states’ decision to take part in the operation.

Against this backdrop, it is astonishing that, in 2010, the German public was outraged when the for-

mer Federal President Horst Köhler insinuated in an interview that military intervention could, under certain circumstances, be required to safeguard the country’s interests, including free trade routes and the prevention of regional instabilities. At the time he made his statement, German navy forces had already been patrolling the Gulf of Aden for two years – apparently unnoticed by the German public.

The episode reveals another stumbling block for European security and defense: the fact that member states can avoid blame under the cloak of the Union. By engaging in EU military operations relatively un-

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## A general tendency to blame Brussels

known to the wider public, member states reduce the risk of nasty questions or bad press at home. And if anything goes wrong in an operation, national capitals can blame the Union for the failure. Although this might sound cynical, it’s not a far-fetched scenario, bearing in mind the general tendency of national players to blame Brussels for all sorts of undesired policy outcomes. The Union should therefore make its external activities more accessible to the general public.

Ultimately, there is the challenge for the Union to live up to its own expectations, which in turn feeds into legitimacy questions. In the absence of proper scrutiny by the European Parliament in matters related to foreign affairs, security and defense policy, and given the lack of jurisdiction of the European Court of Justice over these same matters, the Union seems to fall short of the values it seeks to promote abroad, namely democracy and the rule of law. But applying double standards entails a considerable reputational risk.

This also holds true for transparency issues. Foreign affairs, as well as security and defense matters, are traditionally decided upon and conducted behind a veil of secrecy. While restricted disclosure of documents and access to information makes sense when it comes to military operations, it’s hard to understand why there is little information disseminated on the outcomes of military missions or, even

more so, on civilian missions that deal, for instance, with the rule of law or policing.

Furthermore, it would be important to establish accountability mechanisms with respect to matters of foreign, security and defense policy. The institutional and procedural setup of the Common Security and Defence Policy, subject to little parliamentary scrutiny and lacking judicial review at the European level, seems conducive to circumventing accountability. The corruption scandal that hit the Union's flagship last November, the rule of law mission EULEX Kosovo, is one pertinent example.

It was leaked to the press that high-ranking EU officials had allegedly been involved in corruption. Even more problematic was the fact that representatives of the mission and Brussels-based structures seem to have attempted to cover up the story instead of properly investigating the allegations brought forth by a seconded prosecutor. These entanglements prompted the High Representative Federica Mogherini, on one of her first days in office, to appoint an external expert to review and report on the incident. Still, the Union and the mission have already suffered reputational damage. The scandal has indeed caused much bad press for the good EU cop.

So, how to proceed? Jean-Claude Juncker, President of the European Commission, recently made a controversial suggestion as to how to react to external threats and to restore the Union's international standing: he resuscitated the ambitious project of a European army (in parallel with NATO structures).

Juncker's proposal was met with mixed reactions: foreseeably enough, the UK government rejected the plan in no uncertain terms, stating that defense was undeniably a matter of national responsibility, whereas the German minister of defense, Ursula von der Leyen, welcomed the prospect of a common army.

The interlude shows that, even more than six decades after the failure of the European Defence Community project, the time is still not ripe for a European army, even though member states have no choice but to rethink Europe's security and defense mechanisms in the long term. But it also shows that there is a political will among some member states to strive for greater unity in foreign policy, security and defense – a unity that is needed to keep the European promise of peace. ◀



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