

CSDP Missions: Addressing their Limited Reform Impact

The CSDP missions in Ukraine, Kosovo, and Iraq operate from the right diagnosis of the need to strengthen the security sectors and the rule of law. However, their limited impact so far raises questions as to whether the EU is able to increase the missions' leverage in the host countries and thereby facilitate the desired reforms.

By Henrik Larsen

The development of the EU's Common Security and Defense Policy (CSDP) started in the early 2000s with peace and police missions in Africa and the Western Balkans, under what was then known as the European Security and Defense Policy (ESDP). To date, the EU has deployed 36 CSDP/ESDP missions around the world, of which 17 are still active (6 military and 11 civilian, see map). Non-members such as Switzerland also have the possibility of seconding personnel. The CSDP missions function as crisis response tools with the purpose of fostering stability in Europe's immediate or wider periphery. Their functional range spans military training, naval operations, peacekeeping, and capacity building of security sectors, including borders, as well as monitoring.

The CSDP missions that focus on security sector reform (SSR) and the rule of law are the most ambitious because they have a transformative agenda aimed at consolidating democratic governance structures. The EU currently runs three such missions in Ukraine, Kosovo, and Iraq, mandated to help the countries increase efficiency and public trust. However, despite the fact that over the past decade the EU and its Member States have deployed thousands of advisers, they have thus far been unable to affect lasting change in the host countries. In short, reforming the core functions of a



EUAM Iraq Head of Mission Markus Ritter speaks during the inauguration of the Joint Coordination Centre for the EU Advisory Mission at the Ministry of Interior in Baghdad, July 2019. *Thaier Al-Sudani / Reuters*

state requires a decisive political push that advisory and technical assistance fail to provide. The limited impact of the CSDP reform missions raises the issue of how to improve their effectiveness and the image of the EU more broadly.

Missions in Ukraine, Kosovo, and Iraq

The EU Advisory Mission in Ukraine (EUAM Ukraine) was deployed in 2014 in

response to the country's domestic turmoil following the Euromaidan, Russian aggression against Ukraine, and its annexation of Crimea. The EU recognized the deficits and the politicization of the domestic security institutions as a major reason for Ukraine's lack of resilience. Consequently, it deployed a strategic advisory mission for civilian SSR to rebuild trust and to improve the efficiency and accountability of Ukraine's service

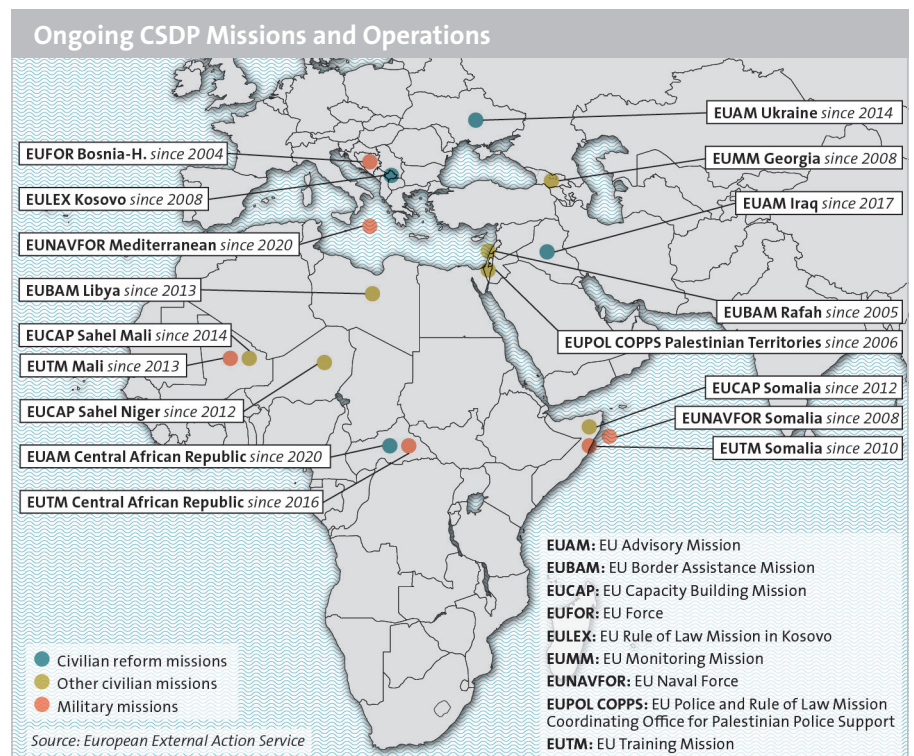
delivery. The mission focuses on reforming the police, the prosecution service, and other law-enforcement agencies to reduce widespread corruption, as well as to strengthen their independence from external political or financial influence. Today, EUAM Ukraine employs around 350 international and local personnel. It cooperates with NATO in areas where civilian and military SSR overlap: reforming the Security Service of Ukraine to reduce its extensive law-enforcement powers and strengthening general parliamentary oversight over all security agencies.

The EU Rule of Law Mission in Kosovo (EULEX Kosovo) was deployed in 2008 with an executive mandate, meaning that prosecutors and judges from EU Member States were embedded in Kosovo's legal system to adjudicate selected cases such as war crimes, organized crime, and high-level corruption in accordance with national law. With as many as 2,600 staff employed at the outset of the mission, the EU intended to give Kosovo a decisive push to establish the rule of law after its declaration of independence. In parallel, EULEX worked to strengthen the independence and effectiveness of Kosovo's judiciary in accordance with European practices. EULEX phased out its executive mandate by 2018. Reduced to around 200 people, the mission now focuses on mentoring selected cases handed over to Kosovo's judiciary, and other cases of significance for the country's European path, as well as mentoring Kosovo's prison service.

The EU Advisory Mission in Iraq (EUAM Iraq) was deployed in 2017 to contribute to the country's post-conflict stabilization following the suppression of Islamic State. The mission, staffed with 113 employees,

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assists the implementation of civilian security-related aspects of the Iraqi National Security Strategy adopted in 2015, which outlines violent political conflict, corruption, and terrorism as weakening the country's social structure. The mission focuses on counter-terrorism, including countering violent extremism, and organized crime, with particular attention to border management and money laundering. Its main interlocutors are the National Security



Adviser and the Ministry of Interior but it also conducts visits at the provincial levels to strengthen countrywide coordination. EUAM Iraq complements the NATO Mission Iraq in areas that cut across the civilian and military SSR, notably the fight against corruption and integrity building.

Right Diagnoses, Insufficient Progress

In choosing to deploy CSDP reform missions to Ukraine, Kosovo, and Iraq, the EU made, in principle, the right diagnoses. The Union is surrounded by countries on its eastern and southern peripheries that suffer from rule of law shortcomings and the failure to guarantee the state's monopoly on the exertion of power. In offering its assistance to reform the countries' security sectors, the EU devises the right solution. States must fix problems related to domestic security and the rule of law, if they wish other sectors such as the economy to function without undue interference.

However, it seems clear that the EU remains unable to create the right incentives for such fundamental change to occur in practice. Once deployed, the advisory missions enjoy little or negligible political sway in their host countries. Governments often accept the missions to show official

commitment to reform but do not necessarily translate the strategic advice provided into policies. And if adopted, other vested interests, whether those of oligarchs, criminal networks, or sectarian groups, typically stand in the way of their implementation. The EU emphasizes the importance of 'national ownership' but in practice this often means the preservation of the *status quo*.

In Ukraine, EUAM's advice to develop a coherent approach to civilian SSR never crystallized. The politicization of law enforcement, including at the level of ministers and heads of agencies, continues to impede efficiency and accountability. Years of working-level engagement with the Security Service of Ukraine failed to receive presidential endorsement and the necessary legislative backing for a European-style intelligence agency. Furthermore, the Public Prosecution Office, one of Ukraine's most powerful institutions, never managed to re-vet its staff or to strengthen its independence from external influence. While EUAM has provided extensive training and advisory support at the regional and central levels for the last seven years, it has remained unable to translate this into the delivery of strategic impact.

In Kosovo, EULEX was unable to break widespread impunity relating to high-level

and local-level political corruption. Thirteen years of rule-of-law promotion failed to dismantle criminal networks and their ties to political actors and to counteract political interference in the judiciary. Some degree of success was achieved in the promotion of lower-level policing such as riot control and community policing. However, EULEX was reluctant to proceed with court cases that would have involved its own high-level interlocutors as this would have been politically too sensitive. Moreover, mission prosecutors and judges lacked sufficient knowledge of the local law codes and the high turnover of personnel made the adjudication of cases extremely slow. In 2012, the European Court of Auditors concluded that EULEX had not been sufficiently effective, a perception that was reinforced by subsequent corruption allegations among the mission's own staff.

In Iraq, the absence of a domestic pro-European orientation makes it even more difficult to affect change. The current Iraqi government's good intentions and realistic assessments of the problems at hand are conducive to strategy making at the central level. However, this is hardly enough for countrywide implementation. Iraq's sectarian politics are characterized by provincial power consolidation, the strengthening of militias, and mutual distrust rather than good governance and services delivery. Under these circumstances, SSR inevitably deteriorates into a competition for control over the state apparatus and the allocation of resources. Iranian influence throughout the Shiite-majority provinces is a particularly strong impediment to the mission's mandate to strengthen border control and to prevent illicit financial flows from the sale of oil and weapons.

Staffing and Coordination Deficits

Part of the CSDP's missing reform sway can be attributed to its operational design. In terms of staffing, the missions for most positions rely on seconded personnel from EU Member States and on occasion from third countries such as Switzerland. However, it can be hard to attract specialists to work in remote and sometimes hostile environments, including Iraq, and EU Member States and third countries often do not want to send experts (i.e. cyber security specialists, experienced judges) that are in high demand at home. Furthermore, the one-year secondments are too short for the longer-term nature of work related to the rule of law and SSR. As a result, CSDP missions regularly lose detailed knowledge and need to renew contacts with their local counterparts.

CSDP missions would benefit from two-year commitments in order to perform their advisory role properly. The employment of local staff is indispensable for the missions' ability to navigate local law and practice. However, because of the high salaries that the EU can offer, CSDP missions often attract staff employed by local counterparts (ministries, agencies, and civil society), which in turn complicates the establishment of constructive working relationships with these very same counterparts.

Mission performance is further inconvenienced by a huge internal coordination burden within EU structures. The civilian CSDP missions formally refer to their headquarters in Brussels (Civilian Planning and Conduct Capability, or CPCC) for reporting and authorizing mission activities on the ground. At the same time, while the missions perform within a specific mandate given by the Member States, they also need to coordinate actions and statements with the EU Delegations on the ground to make sure they are in line with the political framework of the European External Action Service (EEAS). The coordination burden is exacerbated by the fact that the European Commission interacts with the national authorities in parallel, including in relation to projects and in-country visits from the Directorate-Generals that overlap with the rule of law (Home Affairs, Justice, Near, Economic and Financial Affairs). Coordination is possible but rivalry naturally occurs among so many intersecting actors. The 2016 EU Global Strategy prescribed an 'integrated approach' as a solution to align all available policies and instruments to prevent, manage, and solve crises and conflict abroad. This makes sense, and the missions have demonstrated the capacity for a fruitful cooperation with other international efforts such as with NATO and the UN. Yet, all too often, the missions work toward the 'integrated approach' as an achievement in and of itself instead of a means to an end.

Problems of Leverage

However, the real impediment to CSDP delivery does not pertain to its operational attributes as much as to its inability to encourage host authorities to push SSR and the rule of law through in the face of national or local resistance. The lack of political will is a structural condition specific to the host countries and a reality that is very difficult to change. At the same time, the EU has not managed to integrate the

ability of the CSDP missions to perform into its broader conditions for political integration and financial support. Member States' decisions to deploy missions need to be accompanied by sober analyses of the extent to which authorities are likely to buy into the strategic advisory and implement recommendations accordingly.

Following the EU Global Strategy, the European Council in 2018 adopted a 'civilian CSDP Compact' in order to match the many initiatives to strengthen military CSDP (Permanent Structured Cooperation, European Defence Fund). The Compact recommends speedier mission deployments within thirty days of a Council decision and the further development of CSDP civilian capabilities and human re-

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sources. However, other than mentioning the need for closer coordination with other EU instruments and operational benchmarks, the Compact falls short of proposing how the CSDP could achieve greater impact than is the case today.

First, it seems clear that the CSDP missions cannot risk open-ended deployments that legitimize the absence of progress. Under the current practice, CSDP missions remain on the ground beyond the time one can reasonably expect countries to show significant achievement. The EU should retain the possibility of not extending a mission mandate or discontinuing mission components if a country has not shown progress in one or more sectors within a reasonable time frame (three years for law enforcement and five years for the judiciary, for instance). The EEAS mission reviews would benefit from downbeat assessments of the real political will to dismantle deep-seated interests in control over the security sectors.

Second, in recognition of the political struggle of SSR and the rule of law, the missions need to invigorate their public diplomacy efforts. In short, rather than the current practice of EU-host country 'friendship cultivation', they need to be prepared to call out obstacles to reform in the public space. Ukraine, Kosovo, and Iraq are democracies, although imperfect, where

voters wish to see a higher degree of accountability and more efficient service delivery. In an environment where political leaders cannot disregard voter demands, the missions would benefit from, as agreed within the overall frame of the EEAS, the possibility to voice concerns about reforms or lack thereof. A higher degree of public exposure by an external actor that popula-

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tions generally perceive positively could bolster domestic pressure against self-interested elites in favor of decisions they may not otherwise take.

Third, it seems clear that the EU must develop its ambition to align all policies and instruments into the application of leverage *vis-à-vis* the host countries. Despite their significant staffing numbers, CSDP missions usually do not participate or play only an auxiliary role in bilateral dialogues between the EU and host countries, nor does mission delivery condition the disbursement of sector support or macro-financial assistance. CSDP will continue to

exist as an appendix to EU diplomacy if its reform missions – and the important areas they cover – are not elevated to the core of what is at stake in the EU's attempt to project stability abroad.

Strategic Autonomy

In the end, civilian CSDP cannot be separated from the broader and recurrent question about European strategic autonomy. It will be achieved not through symbolism but through action and impact. Effective missions that are able to affect change for the better will increase the credibility of European strategic autonomy, whereas the deployment of ineffective missions will reinforce perceptions of a Union that is unable to translate its internal potential into foreign policy results. A more outcome-oriented common external policy will require applying conditionality and political pressure as closely as possible to the delivery of reform.

The EU's ambition in the early 2000s to build a 'ring of friends' collapsed with the Arab Spring and the Ukraine crisis, which led some observers to characterize its environment as a 'ring of fire'. A more precise characterization, however, seems to be that the EU is surrounded by a 'ring of poor

governance', which is the root cause of the instability that it struggles to manage. Requiring a government or domestic non-state actors to give up their power and the wealth that comes from it also calls for recognizing the paradox inherent to changing the governance of a country that is officially a partner. The EU has the necessary technical expertise but has yet to demonstrate its preparedness to approach SSR and the rule of law as profoundly political struggles. Developing the capacity to do so will be an essential element in boosting the EU's role as an autonomous foreign and security policy actor.

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