



An EU Survey on Whole-of-Government Approaches to External Conflict and Crisis

---

This report is part of the Bertelsmann Stiftung's EU Survey on Whole-of-Government Approaches to External Conflict and Crises (WGA) 2020. More on the WGA at <https://www.wga-project.eu>.

Please cite as follows: Bertelsmann Stiftung, WGA 2020 EU Report. Gütersloh: Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2020.

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License ([CC BY 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)). 

# EU Report

*Loes Debuysere and Steven Blockmans*

## 1 | Introduction

To respond to security challenges posed by fragile states in its neighbourhood and beyond, the EU and its institutions have sought to develop 'whole-of-governance' approaches – as opposed to the 'whole-of-government' approaches of its member states (both referred to as WGAs) – to external conflicts and crises since the mid-1990s. The EU's WGA policies have gradually evolved in parallel to those pioneered by Denmark, the Netherlands and the UK. Similarly, other multilateral actors (e.g. the UN, NATO and the OSCE) have been developing WGAs in parallel to the EU (Debuysere and Blockmans 2019a). This has inevitably led to conceptual exchanges and interactions among these organisations.

Concretely, the EU's WGA policies have evolved from a minimal definition based on the security-development nexus to a full-fledged and ambitious 'integrated approach to conflict and crisis' (IA) that incorporates non-traditional security concepts. The rationale behind the IA is outlined in the EU's Global Strategy (EUGS) issued in 2016 (EEAS 2016: 28):

*"We increasingly observe fragile states breaking down in violent conflict. These crises, and the unspeakable violence and human suffering to which they give rise, threaten our shared vital interests. The EU will engage in a practical and principled way in peacebuilding, concentrating our efforts in surrounding*

*regions to the east and south, while considering engagement further afield on a case-by-case basis. The EU will foster human security through an integrated approach.”*

While policy documents of the past two decades have highlighted the EU’s commitment to an integrated approach, a few crucial questions remain unanswered: Has this commitment (words) truly become a working methodology (deeds)? And, if so, how has it been institutionalised and ‘operationalised’ at the headquarters level to increase the coherence of responses to external conflicts and crises? This chapter, which is based on a [longer report](#) (Debuysere and Blockmans 2019b), intends to investigate these questions.

## 2 | What policies have been developed to further policy coherence?

For the past two decades, the EU has aspired to contribute to conflict prevention, crisis management and post-conflict peacebuilding through civilian and/or military means. In 2001, an ‘integrated approach’ was introduced in a Commission communication that identifies ‘conflict prevention’ as the most effective effort to counter human suffering caused by violent conflicts (EC 2001). The 2003 European Security Strategy (ESS) (Council of the European Union 2003), while not mentioning the concepts of ‘comprehensiveness’ or ‘integration’, stressed the need for using EU policies and instruments in a more coherent and coordinated manner to respond to interconnected security and development challenges (Faria 2014: 3).

An important step in the efforts to consolidate more coherent and coordinated conflict responses came with the joint communication of the Commission and the high representative for foreign affairs and security policy (HRVP) in 2013 (EC and HRVP 2013). Building on the spirit of structural integration espoused by the Treaty of Lisbon, the European Commission and the HRVP further developed coordination by introducing the EU’s ‘comprehensive approach to conflict and crisis’ (CA) in 2013. The joint character of the communication serves to illustrate the common understanding of the CA and the desire to jointly apply the CA.

The communication identifies two core elements of a CA: the coordination of EU instruments and resources, on the one hand, and the role of both EU-level actors and member states, on the other. What’s more, it notes that “[c]omprehensiveness 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” (ibid.: 3). Four principles underpin a CA: the connection between security and development; the importance of context-specificity over blueprints and one-size-fits-all solutions; the need for collective political will and engagement; and the respect for competence allocation between the respective institutions and services of the EU and its member states.

While seen as a welcome step to further develop the EU’s comprehensive approach – especially because it offers conceptual clarifications and a common understanding of the CA (Tercovich and Koops 2013) – the joint communication also sparked criticism. Overall, while it listed commitments and recommended a number of tangible actions, critics argued that the document did not, in fact, provide EU actors with the systems, mechanisms or means to put it into practice (Faria 2014: 9; Wilton Park 2014). Indeed, it does not set out very concrete and tangible structures and processes

regarding who the Union should work with as well as when, where and how (Hauck and Sherriff 2013).

Moreover, a number of gaps were detected in the joint communication. While previous EU documents put a major stress on conflict prevention, the principal focus in 2013 – given the fallout of the Arab uprisings of 2011 – was on conflict situations and crisis management, raising the question of how the CA dealt with prevention (Faria 2014: 8). What's more, the issue of trade preferences, which can play an important role in overcoming instability and crisis, is excluded from the text, as are the roles of local structures, processes and government actors in conflict-affected countries (Hauck and Sherriff 2013). Another element missing from the joint communication were the relations with key international partners in the field (e.g. the UN, NATO, the African Union and the OSCE) despite the fact that a specific invitation to build on these partnerships was included in the Council conclusions on conflict prevention from 2011 (Council of the European Union 2011).

Eventually, the Council (i.e. the member states) endorsed the joint communication in its conclusions on the EU's comprehensive approach of May 2014 (Council of the European Union 2014) and through the adoption of subsequent action plans in 2015 and 2016/2017 (Council of the European Union 2015, 2016). Rather than presenting something new, the goal of the action plans was to focus on practical examples for CA implementation and feasible actions that the EU could implement rather than forging a shared understanding of CA in the EU (Faleg 2018: 38).

Nonetheless, the CA was quickly superseded by the EU's 'integrated approach to external conflict and crisis' (IA) in 2016. Stemming from the shortcomings of the CA, the European Global Strategy (EUGS) (EEAS 2016) sought to move forward the comprehensive approach by (re)introducing the concept of an 'integrated approach'. In fact, an IA numbers among the five priorities that the EU sets forward for its external action, together with the security of the union, state and societal resilience, cooperative regional orders and global governance.

According to the EUGS, the integrated approach has the following four characteristics. It is:

- multi-phased, in that it enables the EU to act “at all stages of the conflict cycle” and to “invest in prevention, resolution and stabilisation, and avoid premature disengagement when a new crisis erupts elsewhere” (ibid.: 9–10).
- multi-dimensional, as it says that it is essential to use “all available policies and instruments aimed at conflict prevention, management and resolution”, bringing together diplomatic engagement, CSDP missions and operations, development cooperation and humanitarian assistance (ibid.: 28).
- multi-level, as it acts to address the complexity of conflicts “at the local, national, regional and global levels” (ibid.: 29).
- multi-lateral, as it engages “all those players present in a conflict and necessary for its resolution”, and it enables the EU to “partner more systematically on the ground with regional and international organisations, bilateral donors and civil society” and to build

sustainable peace “through comprehensive agreements rooted in broad, deep and durable regional and international partnerships” (ibid.: 29).

The scope and actions of the IA have been defined in a Political and Security Committee (PSC) working document on external conflicts and crises of the EEAS and the European Commission released in 2017 (EEAS and EC 2017a). Since the action plans for implementing the CA were viewed as being too rigid, the 2017 working document outlined that the CA “established a process based on action plans and progress reports [...that...] has been valuable in establishing lessons learned on how the EU could most usefully work in a coherent way” (ibid.: 4). However, it adds that “this process made the system somewhat rigid by the nature of the process and by focusing in advance on a limited number of priorities.” As a consequence, under the IA, it has been decided to focus on substance rather than process. The 2017 PSC working document also provides an overview of the results the EU envisions to achieve by implementing the IA, as outlined according to the particular phase of the conflict cycle (ranging from prevention to crisis response to stabilisation). In addition, the Council’s 2018 conclusions regarding an IA to external conflicts and crises (Council of the European Union 2018) called for more concrete and significant progress in this realm. The conclusions welcomed that a report on the implementation of the IA is included as part of the yearly report on the implementation of the EUGS.

In general, compared to the CA, the IA does not add anything that was not already on the EU’s security agenda, and it is mostly compatible with what was laid out in the European Consensus on Development agreed in 2005 (EC 2006) in terms of responding to conflict. However, it does reaffirm the relevance of the CA and states that its scope needs to be “expanded further” by adopting a new cross-sectoral focus on multi-phase and multi-level aspects (Tardy 2017: 2). The extended scope of the IA can be understood in two ways: First, it can be seen as more ambitious, more political and longer-term than the CA. And, second, it can be seen as more operational, i.e. as a means to operationalise the CA. Indeed, the IA has brought about some institutional changes to help operationalise the concept, such as the creation of the PRISM (Prevention of Conflict, Rule of Law/Security Sector Reform, Integrated Approach, Stabilisation and Mediation) division within the EEAS.

### **3 | Who are the main actors involved in cooperating in a WGA?**

Implementing Europe’s ambitious integrated approach (IA) to conflicts and crises poses challenges, which include securing sufficient buy-in from all EU actors and the problem of competition among institutions and mandates (Tardy 2017). This section investigates the key actors that drive the IA concept and assesses the ways in which intra- and inter-service as well as international coordination have been institutionalised.

When it comes to implementing the IA at an intra-service EU level, there is one key body that coordinates the EU’s integrated approach within the EEAS: the Directorate Integrated Approach for Security and Peace (Dir. ISP). Established in March 2019, this new directorate has become the main coordination hub for EU conflict-cycle responses (Debuysere and Blockmans 2019a). Nestled under the Managing Directorate for CSDP and Crisis Response, Dir. ISP encompasses the old unit

for Prevention of Conflicts, Rule of Law/SSR, Integrated Approach, Stabilisation and Mediation (PRISM), which was regrouped with other CSDP parts of the house. Thus, the new directorate is responsible for, inter alia, concepts, knowledge management and training; conflict prevention and mediation; and international strategic planning for CSDP and stabilisation.

A wave of institutional reform that started on 1 March 2019 led to the creation of Dir. ISP. The reforms were partly driven by the recent increase in human resources devoted to defence policies and instruments (in particular, the Permanent Structured Cooperation, or PESCO), which created a need to revise and extend the existing Crisis Management and Planning Directorate (CMPD). Other motivations underpinning the reform process have been to better embed the EU's integrated approach in the institutional structure of the EEAS as well as to facilitate and improve the EU's ability to address global instability and fragility in an integrated way by deploying all its relevant policies, players and tools in a holistic and well-coordinated manner.

It is not the first time, however, that institutional change has sought to smooth the way for the implementation of an IA. Already in January 2017, the EEAS's Peacebuilding, Conflict Prevention and Mediation unit was upgraded to the status of a division reporting directly to the deputy secretary-general (DSG) for the CSDP and crisis response. This division, called PRISM, became the focal point for EU responses to the conflict cycle, including prevention and resolution. Among other things, PRISM coordinated a working group of like-minded souls within the EEAS and the Commission – the so-called 'guardians of the integrated approach' – whose ultimate aim was to enhance operational capacity by adopting an IA to external conflicts and crises.

However, due to its slightly odd position in the EEAS organisational chart, the need was felt to place PRISM in a full-blown directorate with its own managing and deputy managing directors. The result was the Dir. ISP. Itself a pillar responsible for crisis response and planning, Dir. ISP simultaneously operates with a 'policy pillar' and a 'conduct pillar'. While the policy pillar (Security and Defence Policy, or SECDEFPOL) brings together all policies relating to security and defence (e.g. PESCO, the Coordinated Annual Review on Defence (CARD), and cybersecurity), the conduct pillar combines the operational headquarters of both civilian (Civilian Planning and Conduct Capability, or CPCC) and military (Military Planning and Conduct Capability, or MPCC) CSDP missions.

Incorporating a revamped PRISM unit into a full-fledged directorate should clarify and strengthen the chain of command in implementing the EU's integrated approach. In principle, its director and managing director will now be in a position to engage directly with counterparts at their level in the hierarchy. Indeed, the introduction of the new post of managing director means that it will no longer be necessary to turn to an over-solicited DSG to engage in intra-service deconfliction. For example, Dir. ISP hosts crisis meetings that bring together all relevant EEAS divisions and Commission DGs (ECHO, DEVCO, NEAR) involved in crisis management. More than before, the geographical desks play a prominent role in these meetings, which are chaired by the DSG for CSDP or his (or her) representative.

In addition to improving its managerial strength, formalising and upgrading the former PRISM division will also foster better integration and coordination within the EEAS. By absorbing the

former Crisis Management and Planning Directorate (CMPD), which is tasked with the political-strategic planning of CSDP missions, Dir. ISP now looks at the crisis cycle in its entirety. In principle, merging PRISM with CSDP planning into a single directorate should facilitate the operational implementation of an integrated approach.

However, the fact that the directorate has been called ‘Integrated Approach for Security and Peace’ – with ‘security’ preceding ‘peace’ rather than the other way around, as is common in the international context – raises questions about where the unit’s focus lies. The staff balance also tilts towards security, with over a third of all the directorate’s personnel operating in strategic planning for CSDP and stabilisation. While, on paper, the (staff) capacity for prevention and mediation has improved compared to PRISM, it is clear that political will on the part of the member states will be needed to prioritise this aspect of the EU’s crisis response.

However, this is exactly where the shoe pinches for Dir. ISP. Rather than merging the operational level with the political level, the new directorate only merges the operational side. The reforms did not further integrate the work of the geographical divisions and of the EEAS’ DSG for political affairs. While Dir. ISP may trigger integrated action at the bureaucratic level, it will not necessarily do so at the political level. For a service that was expected to be the embodiment of inter-institutional cooperation, it is paradoxical to have developed thick bureaucratic walls within its own organisation.

Moreover, the member states are largely absent from the new directorate’s activities even though the Political and Security Committee is permanently chaired by someone in-house and despite the efforts of Dir. ISP to convene meetings of an informal network of corresponding structures, which exist in some ministries of foreign affairs.

To be truly effective from an IA perspective, the latest wave of institutional reforms should have been more informed by, and geared towards, the DSG for political affairs. In this regard, lessons can be learned from the recent UN reforms, which tried to do just that: The former Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO, now the Department for Peace Operations, or DPO) was integrated with the former Department of Political Affairs (DPA, now the Department for Political and Peacebuilding Affairs, or DPPA). This was done at both the assistant-DSG and geographical levels in headquarters and in-country through newly empowered resident coordinators.

By failing to realise the integration of the new structures for CSDP and crisis response into the geographical managing directorates of the EEAS, mainly due to limitations posed by the Treaties, Dir. ISP cannot be seen as a silver bullet for a ‘whole-of-Europe’ approach to external conflicts and crises. That said, the new directorate is an important step in efforts to improve the EU’s bureaucratic capacity to coordinate its IA.

When it comes to implementing the IA at an inter-service EU level, there are some formal bodies that facilitate coordination among the various EU institutions – principally among the European Commission, the Council and the EEAS – in tackling external conflict and crisis.

The crisis meetings previously organised by PRISM are now convened by the new Dir. ISP on a 'need to act' basis (interview EEAS, May 2019). The goal of these meetings is to bring together all relevant EEAS and Commission services and actors – including EEAS crisis response/management structures, geographical divisions, the EU Military Committee and relevant European Commission DGs (ECHO, DEVCO, NEAR) – to ensure an adequate and timely crisis response. The crisis meetings are intended to establish a clear division of labour among the different services and to provide political and/or strategic guidance in the management of a given crisis (interview EEAS, May 2019).

The Commissioner's Group on External Action (CGEA) was reactivated by then-President Jean-Claude Juncker and represents one of the most important institutional initiatives in EU foreign policymaking since the merger of the position of the high representative for CFSP with that of vice-president of the Commission (to form the HRVP) and the creation of the EEAS (Blockmans and Russack 2015). The CGEA, chaired by the HRVP, brings together the commissioners for European Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations, International Cooperation and Development, Humanitarian Aid and Crisis Management, and Trade. Commissioners who do not belong to this pre-defined cluster of four, but who nevertheless have an interest in the items on the CGEA's agenda, are also invited.

Depending on the topic on the agenda, the Foreign Affairs Council (FAC) convenes member states' ministers of foreign affairs, defence, development or trade. The FAC is chaired by the HRVP and also attended by responsible members of the Commission (Keukeleire and Delreux 2014: 66). However, rather than by the FAC, most decisions are taken by the Committee of Permanent Representatives (COREPER II) or the Political and Security Council (PSC). While the former deals with EU external action (e.g. development cooperation and trade policy) and internal policies with an external dimension, the latter deals with CFSP/CSDP policies. The PSC, which is composed of one ambassador per member state as well as a representative of the Commission, of the EU Military Committee (EUMC) and of the Committee for Civilian Aspects for Crisis Management (CIVCOM), is in fact the logical counterpart in the Council of the CGEA. As the central body for preparatory work for the FAC, it convenes at least once a week in addition to exercising the political control and strategic direction of civilian and military CSDP operations (ibid.: 69-70).

Both in the Commission (SG Inter-institutional and external relations) and the EEAS (SG AFFGEN Inter-institutional relations, policy coordination and public diplomacy), there are also specific units that facilitate intra- and inter-service coordination. These units also facilitate an IA by setting up platforms and guidelines to cooperate (interview EEAS policy coordination unit, April 2019). In times of crisis, the heads of division operate in a rather informal but swift manner, including via a pre-established WhatsApp group (interview EEAS, April 2019).

The role of the European Parliament (EP) in EU foreign policy in general and crisis response in particular is quite limited. In the CFSP/CSDP framework, the EP has only a consultative role, and the Treaty on the European Union (Art. 36) says that the HRVP "shall regularly consult the European Parliament on the main aspects and basic choices" of the CFSP and CSDP, and that the EP "may address questions or make recommendations to the Council or the High Representative." When it comes to EU external action (outside CFSP/CSDP) and internal policies with an external



dimension, the EP has two major instruments to influence EU foreign policy (Keukeleire and Delreux 2014). On the one hand, there is the consent procedure, which gives the EP a veto power over the ratification of international agreements. On the other hand, the EP has important budgetary powers, which it can indirectly use as leverage over EU foreign policy.

One 'crisis response' area in which the EP does play a role is mediation activities. What originally started as an informal consultation by Commissioner Johannes Hahn with certain MEPs in North Macedonia (or the FYROM, as it was then called) has gradually developed into a Mediation and Dialogue Unit (one pillar within the Directorate for Democracy Support at DG EXPO) in the European Parliament. In terms of conflict prevention and mediation, this unit regularly cooperates with DG NEAR, DG DEVCO, the EEAS and the EU delegation on the ground.

Regarding coordination at the international level, one can note that UN-EU cooperation has seen worse days, as both multilateral actors aim to preserve the importance of multilateralism in today's multipolar world (interview UNLOPS, May 2019). While the EU's CSDP missions and the UN's peacekeeping operations were somehow in competition a decade ago, the urgency of the threat posed to a multilateral, rules-based order – in combination with the important steering role played by HRVP Federica Mogherini and the UN Liaison Office representing the DPA and DPKO in Brussels – has greatly fostered EU-UN cooperation and coordination in the past five years.

EU-NATO relations have traditionally been described in lethargic terms due to longstanding political blockages (Duke 2008; Smith 2011). Nevertheless, bound by a shared commitment to universal values of freedom, democracy and the rule of law, NATO and the EU have not only strategic goals, but also global security challenges in common. The new security environment has driven the EU to assume a bigger role in security and defence, and has forced EU-NATO relations to evolve into a more practical strategic partnership. This has been prompted by the facts that their security is interconnected and that neither organisation has the full range of tools needed to address the new security challenges on its own.

Only limited progress has been made in developing synergies between the OSCE and the EU, which alone comprises already half of the membership of the OSCE (Jorgensen 2008). The contributions of the EU family make up over 70 percent of the OSCE's budget, not to mention the extensive financial support the EU gives to specific operations, such as the Special Monitoring Mission in Ukraine. Furthermore, there are many examples of cooperation between the OSCE and the EU, such as in electoral observation missions or in addressing protracted conflicts, such as the Transdniestrian settlement process. At the same time, there are areas in which this cooperation could be improved. For instance, conflict mediation in Bosnia-Herzegovina and elsewhere in the Balkan region would lend itself to more extensive EU-OSCE cooperation and a pooling of expertise.

The EU regularly cooperates with the International Network on Conflict and Fragility (INCAF), a subsidiary body of the OECD's Development Assistance Committee (DAC), which brings together DAC members and key multilateral agencies working in fragile and conflict-affected contexts (interview DG DEVCO, April 2019). Among the other international organisations with which the EU cooperates closely is the Council of Europe, whose Venice Commission plays a very valuable



(and, in many respects, unique) role in buttressing the rule of law in Europe's wider neighbourhood. Furthermore, while civil society organisations play an important role in conflict theatres, their role at the headquarters level is generally limited to providing inputs in consultations for the development and review of policies.

## 4 | How does your country operationalise a WGA?

Regarding operationalisation of its WGA, the EU's current external financing instruments, as established under the 2014–2020 multiannual financial framework (MFF), have struggled to provide enough coherence and flexibility in responding to today's quickly shifting contexts. In the face of mounting instability in the neighbourhood (and beyond) and a sharp increase in refugee flows and migration, the key finding of a mid-term self-assessment by the Commission was the need for "more strategic and overarching programming" and "coherent interactions at operational level in the renewed international context" (EC 2017b: 2). The need for flexibility and the problem of silo approaches similarly figure in a 'Coherence Report' from external evaluators (EC 2017a) and the European Parliament's implementation assessment (EPRS 2018).

In an effort to address these recommendations, the Commission has come up with a new and bold proposal for future spending on issues relating to the neighbourhood, development and international cooperation (EC 2018a). By merging the 11 existing instruments (cf. Debuysere and Blockmans 2019b: Table 2) into one financial instrument, the so-called Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI) put forward in the Commission's proposal seeks to increase simplification, coherence, responsiveness and strategic direction in EU external action.

The proposed NDICI consists of four components (EC 2018a). First, the geographic pillar, which takes up the biggest chunk of the NDICI budget (76%), ring-fences money for dialogue and cooperation with third countries in, for example, the neighbourhood and sub-Saharan Africa. The thematic pillar (8% of the budget) includes programmes for human rights, civil society organisations, and stability and peace. While the rapid response pillar (5%) aims at effectively responding to situations of crisis and instability, the additional emergency cushion (11%) is a flexible budget to account for emerging challenges and priorities.

An underexposed angle in the existing body of commentary on the NDICI is how the proposed instrument relates to the EU's commitment to an 'integrated approach to conflict and crisis' (EEAS 2016: 9). Pooled funding and joint financial instruments can be seen as a way to facilitate the implementation of this kind of integrated approach.

While the preamble of the Commission proposal (EC 2018a) outlines a commitment to the five priorities enshrined in the Global Strategy, the proposal does not mention the integrated approach explicitly. References are made, however, to "a more geographically and thematically comprehensive approach" by tackling policies in a "trans-regional, multi-sectoral and global way" with a goal of breaking down silos (EC 2018a: 9–10). But in what ways does the NDICI regulation

actually live up to facilitating a multi-dimensional, -level, -lateral and -phased approach to conflict and crisis?

According to the Global Strategy, the integrated approach is *multi-dimensional* in that it draws on “all available policies and instruments aimed at conflict prevention, management and resolution” (ibid.: 28), and that it brings together diplomatic engagement, CSDP missions and operations, development cooperation and humanitarian assistance.

Merging financial assistance for neighbourhood, development and international cooperation agendas under the NDICI should facilitate the financial implementation of a multi-dimensional approach to crises. However, one wonders how ‘integrated’ the NDICI actually is given that the budgets for, say, the ‘neighbourhood’ (under its geographic pillar) or ‘stability and peace’ (under its thematic pillar) remain ring-fenced.

Moreover, the NDICI proposal does not cover all dimensions of EU external action spending. For one, CSDP operations and military capacity-building for CFSP objectives cannot be included under the EU budget (and, hence, under the NDICI) due to limitations enshrined in the EU Treaty. Similarly, humanitarian aid resides outside the NDICI’s scope in compliance with the humanitarian principles of neutrality, impartiality and independence. Sufficient coordination among the NDICI, the ECHO budget (including the EU’s Emergency Aid Reserve), and different types of security funding will therefore be key.

In fact, four different security-related instruments and funds are currently on the table for the 2021–2027 period: the NDICI, the CFSP budget, the European Peace Facility and the European Defence Fund. While the NDICI and the CFSP budget mainly seek to finance soft security needs, the proposed European Peace Facility (HRVP 2018) caters to CSDP operations with military and defence objectives and the European Defence Fund (EC 2018b) aims to encourage the development and operationalisation of joint defence capabilities among member states (Blockmans 2018). The envisaged split between the NDICI and other funds will continue to hamper the type of ‘civ-mil’ coordination that a truly integrated, nimble and effective approach to external conflict and crisis requires.

According to the Global Strategy, the integrated approach is *multi-level* in that it acts to address the complexity of conflicts “at the local, national, regional and global levels” (EEAS 2016: 29).

The NDICI proposal seeks to improve coherence between geographic and thematic interventions by transferring most (global) thematic actions into (country- or region-based) geographic programmes. Despite the intention to shrink thematic programming, clarifications will be needed about how coherence will be achieved between peace and security interventions financed under bilateral and regional envelopes, on the one hand, and those facilitated by the Stability and Peace thematic programme, on the other.

Moreover, while it makes sense to invest more in geographic programmes, given that these are closer to home (neighbourhood and Africa) and tailor-made, such an approach raises concerns about support for local-level actors. Since geographic programming and implementation take place

via bilateral or regional cooperation, national governments and public authorities will have to endorse the decentralisation of allocations to, for example, authorities, councils or civil society organisations at the local level. In countries mired in conflict, repression and authoritarianism, this approach may prevent some local-level actors from having guaranteed access to EU support under the geographic pillar.

According to the Global Strategy, the integrated approach is *multi-lateral* in that it engages all players “present in a conflict and necessary for its resolution” and aims to partner “more systematically on the ground with regional and international organisations, bilateral donors and civil society” to achieve sustainable peace “through comprehensive agreements rooted in broad, deep and durable regional and international partnerships” (EEAS 2016: 29).

Generally speaking, the NDICI regulation outlines that programming should take place in cooperation with partner countries or regions, and preferably through joint programming with EU member states. Joint programming with other donors and consultation with representatives of civil society and local authorities shall take place “where relevant” (EC 2018a: 33). More specifically, when drawing up programming documents with partner countries and regions afflicted by conflict and crisis, the proposal (ibid.: 34) stipulates that “due account shall be taken of the special needs and circumstances of the countries or regions concerned”, and that “special emphasis shall be placed on stepping up coordination amongst all relevant actors to help the transition from an emergency situation to the development phase.”

The proposal remains vague, however, as to with whom and how financial coordination will be consolidated in conflict zones. For example, there is no explicit mention of joint programming or co-financing with the UN even though the latter is the EU’s core strategic partner in the field of conflict prevention and peacebuilding (Debuysere and Blockmans 2019a).

Vagueness about “effective multilateralism” also predominates at an inter- and intra-institutional EU level. A truly integrated approach to conflict and crisis will require increased coordination both within the Commission (e.g. in the Commissioners’ Group on External Action) (Blockmans and Russack 2015), the Council (among all relevant working parties) and the Parliament (between the AFET and DEVE committees, in particular), as well as among these institutions. However, at one point in the process, attempts to move the management of external financing instruments (e.g. the NDICI) from different line DGs and the FPI service (co-located in the EEAS) to DG DEVCO were interpreted as signalling an intended concentration of power of the purse, which is anathema to the philosophy of multilateralism within the EU’s own apparatus.

According to the Global Strategy, the integrated approach is *multi-phased* in that it allows the EU to act “at all stages of the conflict cycle, acting promptly on prevention, responding responsibly and decisively to crises, investing in stabilisation, and avoiding premature disengagement when a new crisis erupts” (EEAS 2016: 9–10).

Under its different pillars, the NDICI provides financial assistance for all phases of the conflict cycle. However, given that the NDICI is to be employed in a flexible manner in line with policy priorities, some phases of the conflict cycle risk being gradually overlooked in favour of quick

responses to unforeseeable challenges and crises. As such, short-term foreign policy interests (e.g. stopping migration flows) may trump longer-term preventive approaches to conflict. Further clarification regarding the flexible short-, medium- and long-term deployment and impact of, in particular, the rapid response pillar and the emergency cushion is therefore imperative.

At the intersection of a multi-lateral and -phased approach to conflict and crisis lies a difficult balancing act of reconciling complex 'multi-lateral' coordination with the need for responsive crisis intervention. While the rapid response pillar and the emergency cushion do not require time-consuming programming, clarification is needed on how swift coordination among key EU players (e.g. DG DEVCO, DG NEAR and the EU delegations) and non-EU players (e.g. the UN, NATO and the OSCE) will take place under these two envelopes in order to avoid increasing delays in responding appropriately and decisively to crisis situations.

In short, looking at it from the angle of an integrated approach to conflict and crisis, there lies a paradox at the heart of the current NDICI proposal. On the one hand, by streamlining all instruments into a single flexible instrument, there is a risk that certain conflict dimensions, levels or phases will outweigh others, such as if there is political pressure to serve the EU's direct internal and external interests. As such, a joint instrument risks undermining a truly holistic approach.

On the other hand, however, an integrated financial approach would likewise be undermined if the solution to this problem is to install excessive ring-fencing within the NDICI, thereby nullifying the philosophy of integration in the process. A difficult balance between merging instruments and preserving comprehensive action needs to be struck if the NDICI is to facilitate a genuine, rather than a merely cosmetic, integrated approach to conflict and crisis. Indeed, simplification is the hardest thing to do.

Yet despite the fact that the NDICI embodies the rationale of an integrated approach, the instrument may well be pulled apart by the future European Development Fund and the European Neighbourhood Instrument owing to a political decision late in the process. If so, this would indicate that, despite commitments and logic, more specialist interests sometimes run counter (and powerfully so) to achieving integrated action.

Furthermore, there are a number of other instruments and procedures that seek to facilitate an IA. For example, the 'Concepts, Knowledge Management and Training' division of the new Dir. ISP (ISP.1) seeks to boost a process of lessons learned. What is new about this procedure is that it will try to look at the EU's overall performance in a conflict zone. Rather than learning lessons about a certain aspect of EU intervention – as currently conducted by, e.g., DEVCO for development and the FPI service for financial instruments in external action – Dir. ISP.1 hopes to set up lessons learned processes in an integrated manner (interview EEAS, May 2019).

If it succeeds, this form of knowledge management will help to set up feedback loops, as the lessons learned will be used to impact the planning and training activities of Dir. ISP itself. However, it remains to be seen whether ISP.1 will manage to implement this kind of more integrated lessons learned procedure about the EU's overall performance. The fact is that ISP.1 lacks sufficient staff to execute this process properly, and that conducting these types of

assessments may also not be appreciated across the board, as they are likely to identify structural failures (interview EEAS, May 2019).

For the next legislature, the EU is seeking to step up its own 'joint programming' in development cooperation, which means the joint planning, analysis and response efforts (in short, a joint strategy) by all relevant EU partners. While still under negotiation, development programming in the next MFF is supposed to happen in an even more integrated manner involving DG DEVCO, DG ECHO, the EEAS and the member states (interview DG DEVCO, April 2019). Indeed, there is an increased focus on joint programming with the EU member states in the Commission proposal on a new jumbo instrument for external action (EC 2018a; cf. supra).

Important for a successful IA is to enhance information- and analysis-sharing among the various actors involved in crisis response in order to facilitate the implementation of a joint conflict response. The first implementation report of the IA, which has since been issued on an annual basis, outlines that the EU institutions are improving shared conflict analysis with member states and other stakeholders (EEAS 2017). The work being done by Dir. ISP to foster a shared understanding and analysis of a given conflict is particularly appreciated by various Commission DGs (interview DG ECHO, May 2019). They believe that different actors can provide different perspectives on a conflict or crisis with, for example, DG DEVCO (which often operates in the capital) and DG ECHO (which also operates outside the capital) providing complementary analysis.

Furthermore, human resources (HR) do not necessarily facilitate or reflect the importance of an IA to external conflicts and crises. In fact, a widespread sentiment within the institutions is that in order to write policy at the EU level, one needs to work together by default. In this sense, an IA is inevitable and an HR policy is not the core driver behind cooperation or coordination among services (interview EEAS, April 2019). Nonetheless, some interviewees have identified HR as one realm in which there is major scope for improvement in the belief that fostering incentives could enhance the services' performance in working in an integrated manner.

Political leadership is also key when trying to implement an IA. There has been massive improvement in inter-institutional coordination in the last six years. One key factor behind this has been the leadership shown by Commission President Juncker and HRVP Mogherini (Interview EC SecGen, May 2019). In contrast to their respective predecessors, José Manuel Barroso and Catherine Ashton, who were reluctant to work in an integrated manner, Juncker and Mogherini have facilitated and encouraged inter-institutional cooperation. In a similar vein, one expects HRVP Josep Borrell and European Council President Charles Michel to cooperate better than their predecessors. After all, heads of state or government play an important role in foreign affairs, especially when acting in crisis mode in the European Council. Since the staff of the European Council's president is spread too thinly, it requires the preparatory support of the EEAS.

Furthermore, leadership at bureaucratic levels can also facilitate an IA. For one thing, having heads of units and DGs rotate among different services and institutions can help to foster better inter- and intra-service cooperation. For example, when DG DEVCO got a new DG who had previously worked at the EEAS, he managed to push for more and better cooperation with the EEAS (Interview DG DEVCO, April 2019). Similarly, effective rotation between the EEAS and its

stakeholders – especially the member states – will be key to a better functioning of the EEAS as well as the success of the IA.

## 5 | Conclusion

Conceptually, over the past decade, the EU has been elaborating and deepening its WGA to external crises and conflicts. By gradually developing an integrated approach based on the security-development nexus (2003) into a ‘comprehensive approach’ (CA) (in 2013) and a more holistic ‘integrated approach’ (IA) (in 2016), the scope of the EU’s so-called ‘whole-of-governance approach’ (WGA) has ambitiously expanded. While designing this approach, the EU has learned from and exchanged with other multilateral actors (the UN, NATO, the OSCE, the OECD-DAC and civil society), which in turn has led to a gradual conceptual convergence of all these actors’ headquarters-level approaches to dealing with external conflicts and crises.

Today, the EU’s IA aims to address all conflict dimensions – ranging from security challenges to development concerns to economic grievances – during all phases of a conflict, from prevention to post-conflict rehabilitation. To effectively implement such an approach, the EU wishes to coordinate and cooperate with all relevant actors at the local, national, regional and global levels.

Indeed, the EU’s IA is system-wide in that it builds on various EU policies and instruments, including humanitarian aid, political dialogue, sanctions, CSDP, development cooperation, macro-financial assistance and trade (EEAS 2019). While the EU’s core interests in terms of external conflict management lie in its extended neighbourhood, the IA is applied much more broadly and spans the entire globe, including when tackling conflicts in the Sahel (especially in Mali and Niger), the Horn of Africa (mainly Somalia), South-east Asia (notably Myanmar) and Latin America (Venezuela).

In order to operationalise its ambitious WGA policy, several platforms and mechanisms have been put in place to enable actors to interact and coordinate. The key player and facilitator of the EU’s IA is the EEAS’ new Directorate Integrated Approach for Security and Peace (Dir. ISP), which was founded in March 2019 to regroup the former division for the Prevention of Conflicts, Rule of Law/Security Sector Reform, Integrated Approach, Stabilisation and Mediation (PRISM) and the security/defence policy, planning and conduct parts of the house. In addition to conflict and crisis coordination by Dir. ISP, there are numerous inter-service platforms (e.g. crisis meetings and the Commissioners Group on External Action) and multilateral platforms that facilitate a joint crisis response of the HRVP/EEAS, the Commission’s DGs, the Political Security Committee and other international actors. However, despite playing an interesting political role in the realm of conflict mediation, the European Parliament is generally not involved in inter-service coordination.

The latter is emblematic of one core challenge that hampers the establishment of a truly effective IA at the EU level: the remaining gaps between the political and operational dimensions in responding to external conflicts and crises. For instance, while the divisions of the EEAS with a conduct function in civ-mil security and defence cooperation have been merged into Dir. ISP, the geographical directorates under the DSG for political affairs remain largely detached and member

states are not fully integrated into their activities. As a result, although the Dir. ISP may trigger integrated action at the bureaucratic level, it will not necessarily do so at the political and operational levels.

At a more technical-operational level, one key innovation that may enhance the implementation of an IA to crisis response is the NDICI, the jumbo financial instrument that has been proposed by the Commission for the next MFF. However, the intention to merge finances for development, international cooperation and the neighbourhood also lays bare one key paradox: While the NDICI has the ability to facilitate coordinated financial action, there is also a risk that it will actually undermine comprehensive action, as some conflict dimensions, levels or phases may outweigh others within the same instrument under political pressure of serving the EU's direct and immediate interests.

While it still remains to be seen whether the merging of financial instruments will be a success factor for an IA at the EU level, the importance of political leadership in encouraging cooperation and coordination unquestionably is. The cooperation of the HRVP with both the Commission president and the president of the European Council cannot be underestimated in this regard. Moreover, investing in human resources is important to facilitate an IA – and personalities matter. While specialised staff has been hired in Dir. ISP to operationalise an IA, more could be done to create the right incentives for people to work together within and across EU services and institutions.

## 6 | Reference list

Blockmans, Steven (2018). "The EU's modular approach to defence integration: An inclusive, ambitious and legally binding PESCO?" *Common Market Law Review* (55) 6: 1785–1826.

Blockmans, Steven, and Sophia Russack (2015). The Commissioners' Group on External Action – Key political facilitator. Centre for European Policy Studies. CEPS Special Report No. 125. 17 December 2015.

Council of the European Union (2003). A Secure Europe in a Better World: European Security Strategy. Brussels. 8 December 2003. <http://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-15895-2003-INIT/en/pdf>.

Council of the European Union (2011). Council conclusion on conflict prevention. 3101st Foreign Affairs Council meeting. Luxembourg. 20 June 2011. [www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms\\_data/docs/pressdata/EN/foraff/122911.pdf](http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/docs/pressdata/EN/foraff/122911.pdf).

Council of the European Union (2014). Council conclusions on the EU's comprehensive approach. Foreign Affairs Council meeting. Brussels. 12 May 2014. [www.consilium.europa.eu/media/28344/142552.pdf](http://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/28344/142552.pdf).



Council of the European Union (2015). Taking forward the EU's Comprehensive Approach to external conflict and crises – Action Plan 2015. Joint Staff Working Document. Brussels. 14 April 2015. [https://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/sites/devco/files/joint\\_swd\\_-\\_taking\\_forward\\_the\\_eus\\_comprehensive\\_approach\\_to\\_external\\_conflict\\_and\\_crises\\_-\\_action\\_plan\\_2015.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/sites/devco/files/joint_swd_-_taking_forward_the_eus_comprehensive_approach_to_external_conflict_and_crises_-_action_plan_2015.pdf).

Council of the European Union (2016). Taking forward the EU's Comprehensive Approach to external conflicts and crises – Action Plan 2016/17. Joint Staff Working Document. Brussels. 19 July 2016. [https://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/sites/devco/files/joint\\_swd\\_-\\_taking\\_forward\\_the\\_eus\\_comprehensive\\_approach\\_to\\_external\\_conflicts\\_and\\_crises\\_-\\_action\\_plan\\_2016-2017.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/sites/devco/files/joint_swd_-_taking_forward_the_eus_comprehensive_approach_to_external_conflicts_and_crises_-_action_plan_2016-2017.pdf).

Council of the European Union (2018). Council Conclusions on the Integrated Approach to External Conflicts and Crises. 22 January 2018. [https://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/sites/devco/files/2018-01-cnl\\_conclusions\\_on\\_ia.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/sites/devco/files/2018-01-cnl_conclusions_on_ia.pdf).

Debuysere, Loes, and Steven Blockmans (2019a). Crisis responders: Comparing policy approaches of the EU, UN, NATO and OSCE with experiences in the field. *European Foreign Affairs Review* (24) 3: 243–264.

Debuysere, Loes, and Steven Blockmans (2019b). The EU's integrated approach: Between political rhetoric and institutional practice. Gütersloh: Verlag Bertelsmann Stiftung. <https://www.bertelsmann-stiftung.de/de/publikationen/publikation/did/europes-coherence-gap-in-external-crisis-and-conflict-management>

Duke, Simon (2008). “The Future of EU-NATO Relations: A Case of Mutual Irrelevance through Competition?” *Journal of European Integration* 30 (1): 27–43.

EC (European Commission) (2001). Communication from the Commission on Conflict Prevention. 11 April 2001. COM(2001) 211. [http://eeas.europa.eu/archives/docs/cfsp/crisis\\_management/docs/com2001\\_211\\_en.pdf](http://eeas.europa.eu/archives/docs/cfsp/crisis_management/docs/com2001_211_en.pdf).

EC (2006). The European Consensus on Development. June 2006. [https://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/sites/devco/files/publication-the-european-consensus-on-development-200606\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/sites/devco/files/publication-the-european-consensus-on-development-200606_en.pdf).

EC (2017a). Coherence Report – Insights from the External Evaluation of the External Financing Instruments. July 2017. [https://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/sites/devco/files/coherence-report-main-report-170717\\_en\\_0.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/sites/devco/files/coherence-report-main-report-170717_en_0.pdf).

EC (2017b). Report from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council. Mid-term review report of the External Financing Instruments. European Commission. 15 December 2017. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52017DC0720&from=EN>.

EC (2018a). Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council establishing the Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument. 14 June 2018. [https://ec.europa.eu/commission/sites/beta-political/files/budget-may2018-neighbourhood-development-international-regulation\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/sites/beta-political/files/budget-may2018-neighbourhood-development-international-regulation_en.pdf).

EC (2018b). Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council establishing the European Defence Fund. Brussels. 13 June 2018. COM(2018) 476 final. [https://ec.europa.eu/commission/sites/beta-political/files/budget-may2018-eu-defence-fund-regulation\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/sites/beta-political/files/budget-may2018-eu-defence-fund-regulation_en.pdf).

EC and HRVP (European Commission and High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy) (2013). Joint Communication to the European Parliament and the Council. The EU's comprehensive approach to external conflicts and crises. 11 December 2013. <https://publications.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/31aeff51-6312-11e3-ab0f-01aa75ed71a1>.

EEAS (European External Action Service) (2016). Shared Vision, Common Action: A Stronger Europe. A Global Strategy for the European Union's Foreign and Security Policy. June 2016. [https://eeas.europa.eu/sites/eeas/files/eugs\\_review\\_web\\_0.pdf](https://eeas.europa.eu/sites/eeas/files/eugs_review_web_0.pdf).

EEAS (2017). From shared vision to common action: Implementing the EU global strategy – Year 1. June 2017. [https://eeas.europa.eu/sites/eeas/files/full\\_brochure\\_year\\_1\\_0.pdf](https://eeas.europa.eu/sites/eeas/files/full_brochure_year_1_0.pdf).

EEAS (2019). Eu Integrated Approaches to External Conflicts and Crises. PowerPoint presentation delivered by Melis Alguadis (EEAS-ISP1) at the EUNPACK conference in Brussels on 18 March 2019.

EEAS and EC (European External Action Service and European Commission) (2017a). The EU Integrated Approach to external conflicts and crises – EEAS-Commission services Issues Paper for PSC. EEAS working document. EEAS/COM(2017) 8. June 2017. Not available online due to limited distribution.

EPRS (European Parliamentary Research Service) (2018). EU external financing instruments and the post-2020 architecture. European Implementation Assessment. February 2018. <https://publications.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/160d5f8c-2216-11e8-ac73-01aa75ed71a1>.

Faleg, Giovanni (2018). "The EU: from comprehensive to integrated approach." *Global Affairs* (4) 2-3: 171-183.

Faria, Fernanda (2014). What EU Comprehensive Approach? Challenges for the EU action plan and beyond. European Centre for Development Policy Management. Briefing Note No. 71. October 2014.

Hauck, Volker, and Andrew Sherriff (2013). "Important Progress, but Real EU Comprehensiveness Is Still Ahead of Us." European Centre for Development Policy Management. December 2013. <https://ecdpm.org/talking-points/important-progress-real-eu-comprehensiveness-still-ahead-us/>.

HRVP (High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy) (2018). Proposal of the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, with the support of the Commission, to the Council for a Council Decision establishing a European Peace Facility. HR(2018) 94. <http://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-9736-2018-INIT/en/pdf>.

Jorgensen, Knud E. (ed.) (2008). *The EU and International Organisations*. London: Routledge.

Keukeleire, Stephan, and Tom Delreux (2014). *The Foreign Policy of the European Union (2nd ed.)*. Red Globe Press.

Smith, Simon J. (2011). "EU-NATO Cooperation: A Case of Institutional Fatigue?" *European Security* (20) 2: 243-64.

Tardy, Thierry (2017). *The EU: from comprehensive vision to integrated action*. European Union Institute for Security Studies. February 2017.

Tercovich, Giulia, and Joachim A. Koops (2013). *Assessing the EU's Joint Communication on the Comprehensive Approach: Implications for EU Crisis Response and Conflict Prevention*. Global Governance Institute. Briefing Paper.

Wilton Park (2014). *EU programmes and action in fragile and conflict states: next steps for the comprehensive approach*. Conference report. 18-20 February 2014. [www.wiltonpark.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/WP1318-Report.pdf](http://www.wiltonpark.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/WP1318-Report.pdf).