

Building EU-UN Coherence in Mission Planning & Mandate Design

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Just over five years ago, relations between the EU and UN were strained due to the difficulties of planning and implementing coordinated missions in Chad and Kosovo. Today, relations are considerably more cordial, but there is still room to improve the two organizations' joint planning procedures. This paper aims to assess what has been achieved in the field of planning coordination and what the remaining challenges are; it also makes some suggestions for further action.

Planning Coordination: Tangible Improvements

The 2012 *Plan of Action to enhance EU CSDP support to UN peacekeeping* called for the establishment of modalities for coordination between the EU and UN during planning and conduct of EU civilian missions (recommendation C.1) and of EU military operations (recommendation D.1) deployed in support of UN operations. Technically, although EU and UN operations interact on the ground, most current EU operations and missions are not deployed in direct support of the UN operations (with the exception of EUFOR RCA and maybe EULEX Kosovo).

Inter-institutional cooperation in planning is nonetheless important for the effectiveness of the two organisations' operations. There are at least three scenarios of operations that require coordination in planning:

- Operations set up in parallel simultaneously by the UN and the EU;
- One of the two organisations takes over from the other / the EU provides a bridging operation before the UN takes over;
- An EU (or UN) operation is established while there is already a UN (or EU) mission.

In the framework of the *Plan of Action*, the two organizations have elaborated a paper on “mutually agreed modalities for coordination on planning” that is a step forward in the inter-institutional rapprochement. This document, which aims to consolidate existing practices rather than propose major innovations, focuses on parallel planning processes (rather than sequential) and coordination at HQ level; the next step is the elaboration of a similar document on sequential planning. The modalities were finalised at the end of 2013, so the planning for the Central African Republic (EUFOR RCA and MINUSCA) as well as for EUCAP Sahel Mali could partially take account of the recommendations of the document.

Coordination in planning has improved significantly. The degree of mutual knowledge and confidence between the two organisations seems to be reasonably high, information is being shared to the extent possible, and the two parallel planning structures are aware of the necessity to work with one another. Improved coordination is also the result of the internal upgrading of the EU planning capability, with both CMPD and CPCC being increasingly professionalised and therefore better equipped to reach out to partners. In the field, EU missions now have staff dedicated to inter-institutional cooperation.

In comparison with the 2008 Chad operation where tensions between the two institutions had been tangible, the recent Mali and CAR situations have revealed smoother relations (though interviews have revealed that the lessons of the 2008 operations are not necessarily known to current EU planners).

Communication between the two institutions has taken place at the HQ level (through VTCs for example, at least at the political and strategic planning level; in the case of CAR, DPKO representatives briefed the PSC) as well as at field level; field coordination seems to have been more developed than coordination between headquarters (the HQ level being yet the focus of the Guidelines). For example, any Fact Finding Mission (FFM) or Technical Assessment Mission (TAM) by either of the two organisations has included meetings and exchange of information as a priority.

Yet, good coordination in planning also appears to be mostly the result of an agreement on the division of tasks at the political level, raising the issue of coordination in mandate design. When there are disagreements over mandates, tensions re-emerge. For example, EU-UN dialogue on Libya was far more difficult because of divergences on the respective responsibilities of the two organisations (and the question on which one should have the lead on what). In contrast, a clear division of tasks in CAR has facilitated planning coordination.

Structural Challenges

If the latest examples of EU and UN operations deployed in parallel or sequentially have shown that coordination in planning has been handled rather efficiently, there are still constraints that inherently limit the scope of coordination. These constraints can be put in four broad categories: inter-institutional politics, institutional inertia, the “human factor”, and the “no-one-size-fits-all” issue.

Inter-institutional politics

As noted above, EU-UN coordination in planning is conditioned upon a convergence of views at the highest political level. No mechanism or agreed-upon rules would resist a political crisis

between the two institutions. In the same vein, institutions’ rivalry and competition in the same market inevitably hamper coordination. In the case of Mali, some tensions between the UN and the EU surfaced as soon as the EU civilian mission (EUCAP Sahel Mali) was perceived by the police component of MINUSMA as possibly encroaching upon its turf. An exchange of letters at the highest political level aimed to clarify the situation. Any civilian follow-up mission to EUFOR RCA would need to factor in these possible problems in the planning phase.

This is why mandate coherence and planning coordination are intimately linked. UN-EU consultations on EUCAP Sahel Mali did start at an early stage. However, several interviewees on the EU side have pointed to the absence of clarity of the MINUSMA mandate in the civilian domain as a possible source of misunderstanding between the two institutions. Conversely, some EU planning documents relating to EUCAP Sahel Mali mentioned the role of the UN even when no consultation with the UN had taken place.

It is, perhaps, inevitable that peace operations’ mandates are sometimes unclear or diffuse. But improved early coordination and political consultation between the EU and UN could ease or even prevent tensions arising from these uncertainties by addressing misunderstandings over mandates (as for example in the case of EUCAP Sahel Mali vs. the police component of MINUSMA).

Institutional inertia

There are limits to EU-UN coordination that have to do with the two organisations’ respective cultures and planning rules. Differences in the ways the UN and the EU plan operations are often invoked as obstacles to good coordination. Two main differences appear. One relates to the conflation of strategic and operational planning within DPKO vs. clear delineation of responsibilities within the EEAS (with CMPD and EUMS doing the strategic planning and CPCC and OHQ doing operational planning).

The second difference relates to the level of political control over the planning process on the EU side compared with a much higher autonomy of DPKO together with a decentralized decision-

making process on the UN side (in practice, unlike EU planning, UN planning is also done in the field). UN officials complain that their EU counterparts are not always able to make reliable statements about what plans and objectives their political masters will agree to, making it harder to plan joint efforts in advance. DPKO officials are also in regular contact with representatives of individual EU member states, meaning that they receive multiple different read-outs on mandate and planning discussions in Brussels.

In practice, these differences in planning cycles and degrees of political interference complicate coordination. First, because the EU planning process offers less flexibility as a result of the nature of its political oversight. Second for technical reasons that relate to the difficulty to synchronise parallel processes or identify the appropriate interlocutor on the other side. This being said, one objective of the Guidelines is precisely to explain to each side the planning cycle of the other and create a better understanding of the right entry points and tools for coordination.

Furthermore, while the exchange of information has improved between the EU and the UN, there are still important obstacles to it. One relates to the extent to which – most often classified – planning documents can be communicated to the other side in the absence of a security agreement between the two institutions. Such an agreement is currently being negotiated. In relation to that, one question is whether the EU planning units – be it at the strategic or operational level – can share documents with the UN at a stage when these documents have not been seen, let alone endorsed, by the EU intergovernmental bodies. While sharing these documents might make day-to-day planning easier, some EU members fear that anything they give to the UN will quickly leak to non-European states.

Having said that, mutually agreed guidelines on planning are a way to remedy institutional inertia insofar as they empower staff to do certain things (i.e. exchanging information) that would be more difficult in the absence of such documents. Guidelines do not legally commit the planning actors but create a political framework and therefore are an incentive for cooperation.

Institutional issues also relate to the size of missions. If coordination with other actors is always essential for the EU, there might be a diffuse reciprocity problem with the UN that in most cases deploys much larger and multidimensional operations. For the EU in Bamako or Bangui, the UN is the largest partner to coordinate with; for the UN, the EU is one among many.

The 'Human factor'

Third, coordination can only be efficient and sustained if those in a position to ensure this are aware of guidelines, willing to implement them, and in sufficient numbers to do so.

Interviews conducted with EU officials for the purpose of this paper suggest that difficulties in coordination were due to an insufficient level of information about EU-UN cooperation among staff; a lack of institutional memory (few interviewees were aware, for example, of an EU-UN After Action Review of the 2008-09 Chad operation); the fact that incoming and outgoing staff rarely share their knowledge about coordination with the UN; and the lack of human resources.

While officials at UN Headquarters appear more conscious of the rocky history of EU-UN coordination, and frequently visit Brussels and engage in VTCs with their counterparts, they sometimes conclude that it will make more sense to work out problems on the ground once operations are underway.

Furthermore, while the participation of EU or UN officers in fact-finding missions of the other organisation is often suggested, it is practically difficult to implement due to the shortage of staff. Also, while desk-to-desk dialogue or VTCs are often presented as routine communication channels, interviews have revealed that little was done on a routine basis and that the identification of counterparts was not systematic. There is still a need to promote awareness of the new paper on “modalities for coordination on planning”, let alone ensure that planners actually use these guidelines in practice.

Some planners are not willing to share information and often documents are being informally shared as a result of personal contacts rather than through official channels.



No one size fits all

Finally, there is a difficulty to define patterns of coordination that would apply in a generic manner, regardless of the specificity of operations. For example, while the “modalities for coordination on planning” are undoubtedly a step forward, the fact that the document deals with parallel planning has de facto limited its utility in the case of CAR. As we have noted, the document on planning coordination for sequential operations is currently being developed.

But not all missions fit into neat categories. In CAR, for example, EUFOR RCA was initially to be a bridging operation to the African Union operation (MISCA) and not to a UN operation (UNSC Resolution 2149 establishing MINUSCA was adopted on 10 April 2014 at a time when EUFOR RCA had already started its deployment). Here again guidelines would have had to be used with some degree of flexibility. As a consequence, the EU Fact-Finding Mission that went to Bangui at the Crisis Management Concept stage met UN representatives but coordination at the strategic level was necessarily influenced by the uncertainty about the UN operation. The same happened when operational planning was done by OHQ, with meetings with the UN in Bangui during the Technical Assessment Mission while HQ coordination was less prominent.

Although the coordination needs may be the same, current coordination on the UN take-over of EUFOR RCA is by nature different from coordination between EUCAP Sahel Mali and MINUSMA. And things would be different again if the UN were to make a request for an EU military force to reinforce a UN mission as was the case in the DRC in 2003 and 2008. In the end, each case has its own specific circumstances and therefore requires flexibility that any institutionalisation process must take account of, for example in the Lessons Learnt and Best Practices exercises.

Suggestions for action

On the basis of the interviews conducted with DPKO, CMPD, CPCC and the EUMS, the following suggestions are made:

Strategic/political level

1. Ensure clarity on respective mandates at the highest political level before any planning starts;
2. Fully involve the political level in the drafting of the document on sequential planning so as to guarantee the visibility of the document;
3. Ensure that substantive follow-up to the *Plan of Action* is agreed upon so as to keep the momentum on EU-UN cooperation (for example through the Steering Committee and regular high-level or track-two meetings facilitated by think tanks);
4. Explore options for better delineating strategic and operational planning within the UN.
5. Explore modalities for trilateral planning coordination also involving the African Union.

Operational level

6. Add “inter-institutional coordination” to any matrix/check list/guidelines of the respective EU and UN planning bodies;
7. Ensure that a list of planners in DPKO and CMPD/CPCC is shared and updated;
8. Organise ad hoc meetings of UN and EU planners on a yearly basis or prior to the start of any planning process;
9. Fully incorporate EU-UN coordination in ESDC courses on strategic planning and in any ENTRi-relevant courses; fully incorporate UN-EU coordination in UN courses;
10. Explore the appropriateness and feasibility of involving the EUISS and the IPI in the relevant Lessons Learnt and Best Practices exercises/ reports relating to UN-EU cooperation in crisis management – possibly including keeping records thereof;
11. Conduct EU-UN Joint Action Reviews (on planning) on both Mali and CAR.

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