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# **NGOs and the EU's Common Security and Defence Policy: Room for Improvements?**

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DANIELA IRRERA, JUL 1 2013

The policy-making context of global emergency actions includes different types of actors, institutions, procedures and practices. This makes the study of global policies for crisis management and conflict resolution relevant when it comes to understanding the current change of global politics. The interaction among state governments, International Governmental Organizations (IGOs) and non-state actors is more balanced in the formation of these compared to other policies and it is based on declared goals and principles (Attinà, 2013). Thus, in the current phase of world politics, humanitarian emergencies are imposing to the global institutions a process of change which is both demanding and producing rules and policies. A potential humanitarian set of actors, institutions, rules and practices is undoubtedly appearing and consolidating on the global landscape.

NGOs, being essential players of the emergency policy-making and implementation process, are able to deploy a wide range of materials and logistics and to make use of apposite capabilities to solve the problems of action in peace building and reconstruction missions. They have their own approach to providing reconstruction and service to the people affected by crises. The growing participation of NGOs in this very sensitive policy field is part of their struggle for effective international actorness in world politics, and, at the same time, a significant political innovation. In principle, their action is complementary to the states' and IGOs' approach. In practice, it can be very different from it and can even clash against it. NGOs' contribution to the most important and used tool, that is to say, military operations, is a controversial issue, given their peculiar identities and security cultures. However, it reflects the way the global system is changing and shaping its policies and practices. In the specific case of the EU Common Security and Defence Policy, NGOs participation has the potential to enhance the civilian dimension of the missions and, following recent events, to strengthen the innovative tasks that the EU strives to exert in troubled contexts, inside and outside its borders.

This article focuses on this last aspect and briefly debates how humanitarian NGOs are currently fitting into the CSDP agenda and whether such coordination is expected to be improved. The main assumption is that the EU is essentially destined to fulfil the high demand for specialised civilian assistance, like Security Sector Reform (SSR) and border control, from people and governments in conflict-affected countries, and this will inevitably require more NGOs' involvement.

### **NGOs and the Humanitarian System**

Peace, democracy promotion and humanitarian crises management are priorities on the present agenda of the world governmental system, which has been, increasingly concerned with violence and security issues in the past years. At the same time, increasing interdependence and the growth of collective problems have made the impact of the NGOs stronger in traditional fields as well as in high politics. On such a premise, the scholars' and policy-makers' attention is driven to the impact humanitarian NGOs have on the tools IGOs make use of when responding to humanitarian emergencies. Assessing such impact entails the analysis of the transformations which affect the concept of global security as well as the implications on the nature of contemporary conflicts and the attributes of humanitarian intervention in contemporary world politics.

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On one side, an entire *humanitarian system* has been developed as a more effective and comprehensive set of principles, actors, policies, practices, rules and procedures which are shaping intervention as a result of recent global trends.

On the other, events which have recently affected regional and global stability required a people-centred concept of security and contributed to the shaping of the human dimension of security as an additional and fundamental component, next to politico-military and economic cooperation. In the last decades, the transformations in the nature of conflicts, especially at the end of the Cold War, and the growth and diversification of crises pushed the world governmental system to act more collectively by implementing and adapting traditional and new tools, without underestimating the human dimension of security (Paris, 2001).

The different roles NGOs play in the field are multidimensional and destined to produce results in the long-term. If traditional crisis management can be envisaged as an overall process, including different phases and requiring diversified competencies, it is worth affirming that NGOs cover and contribute to all the different phases of this process.

They can have a preventive role in the initial stage of a civil conflict, work on the root causes, facilitate peace talks and counteract the escalation of violence. They can provide relief and assistance during the crisis, manage a wide range of logistics and facilities, maintain procedures for keeping on, updating, and monitoring the whole security planning process and, if necessary, use a rapid reaction capacity.

They can be active even after a crisis, in the long-term and work on peace-building. In this phase, NGOs are becoming more and more crucial because of the relations they are able to establish with the local actors (individuals and associations). These relations are often much stronger than those created by the peace operation personnel (Irrera, 2010).

In sum, traditional practical roles have consolidated and are currently encompassed by innovative tasks which have more political and social implications in all phases, both in civil conflicts and in more complex emergencies, but are, at the same time, coherent with the standardised approaches to peace and security.

## NGOs and CSDP

Within the humanitarian system, the EU has a very peculiar role, because of both its civilian approach to conflicts and its structured and comprehensive set of policies and tools, which includes the direct engagement of civil society actors.

The Lisbon Treaty has increased the level of ambition and the nature of the CSDP, with Art. 26, conferring to the European Council the task of defining the strategic interests, determining the objectives and formulating the general guidelines for the overall strategy. As a consequence, the EU is expected to be able to coordinate and control its capabilities and to present itself as a reliable actor in dealing with civilian and military operations. According to the Treaty, within the core foreign policy priorities, contribution to peace, conflict prevention and strengthening of security are listed as top priorities. Conflict resolution and transformation, as well as conflict management continue to be the EU's preferred approaches. They are mainly based on human and minority rights protection, state legitimacy promotion and civil society development. Additionally, the Treaty enlarges the provision of military and civilian capabilities and requires more efforts for enhancing coordination (EPLO, 2013).

Such pattern of security and defence requires the participation of several actors. States, European institutions and bodies are directly or indirectly involved in CSDP and interact with each other as well as with external actors from the civil society in terms of influence, consultancy and expertise (Knutsen 2008). The EU Member States' representatives are the main decision-makers. They are responsible for launching new CSDP missions and for supervising the existing ones. At the same time, the European External Action Service (EEAS) under the Lisbon Treaty is expected to play a pivotal role, by preventing Member States from pursuing their national foreign policy interests and by mediating the involvement of other actors. The relationship between NGOs and the EU has been

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significantly shaped and strengthened through the aid policy and assistance in developing countries, mainly in the African continent. The direct financial support for NGOs' initiatives and projects which are promoted among local communities by the European Community Humanitarian Office (ECHO) has become the privileged method for driving the civilian competencies and knowledge.

As for missions, NGOs have often served as a bridge between the EU personnel and the local communities, especially in countries with low levels of trust in public authorities. Cooperation with civil society can legitimate the EU external intervention and, as a consequence, enhance their effectiveness.

Since the first mission was deployed in 2003, the EU has launched 26 civilian missions and military operations. Missions were focused on policing and reforms (EUPM BiH Bosnia; EUPOL PROXIMA Macedonia; EUPOL Kinshasa DRC; EUPOL COPPS Palestinian Territories; EUPAT Macedonia; EUPOL DR Congo; EUPOL Afghanistan), on the rule of law (EUJUST THEMIS Georgia; EUJUST LEX Iraq; EULEX Kosovo), on frontiers and truces monitoring (EUSR BST Georgia; EUBAM Rafah; EUBAM Libya), on Security Sector Reform (SSR) (EUSEC DR Congo; EUSSR Guinea-Bissau; EUTM Somalia; EUCAP Sahel Niger; EUNAVCO Somalia; EUAVSEC, South Sudan). Some missions are *integrated* and include different tasks at the same time (EULEX, Kosovo); some deal with a more 'civ-mil' synergy perspective (AMIS II, Darfur)(ISIS, 2013).

While civilian CSDP missions were conceived as a tool for short-term crisis management response, many of them are involved in longer-term complex peace-building work and may be deployed in a country or region for years. The fact that missions are more and more expected to carry out different tasks and functions perfectly fits into the human security approach and confirms the EU's ambition to produce a more comprehensive, flexible and adaptable strategy (Hatzigeorgopoulos, 2013).

This brings to two intertwined postulations.

Firstly, the majority of the EU's interventions have been civilian and this tendency is liable to continue and increase. The recent crises in Libya and Mali made clear that what the world governmental system expects from the EU is the provision of very specialised system for civilian assistance to conflict-affected countries, able to fulfil different tasks and to coordinate a permanent civilian and military planning.

Secondly (and consequently) the more civilian missions will be deployed, the more NGOs will be directly or indirectly involved. Specific tasks, like SSR, rule of law or border control require a detailed understanding of the conflict dynamics, as well as the inclusion of experienced staff that is competent in the areas covered by the missions' mandates and able to supply strategic input at both planning and operational level.

It is true that current procedures are dominated by intergovernmental dynamics and that CSDP occasionally suffers the excessive influence of national interests. Nevertheless, the need to identify the specific skills which are required to appropriately meet the challenge of a crisis is shaping the whole crisis management mechanism. Despite the urgency to safeguard their independence, NGOs are perfectly integrated in this mechanism through their consolidated practices and roles.

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Daniela Irrera is Assistant Professor of Political Science and IR at the University of Catania. She has been Research Fellow at the Stony Brook University; Visiting Scholar at the Clinton Institute for American Studies, University College Dublin; University of Delaware; Université Libre de Bruxelles, and University of Oxford. She has extensively worked and published on international NGOs issues, particularly in the field of humanitarian action. Her book on NGOs, *Crisis Management and Conflict Resolution: Measuring the Impact of NGOs on Intergovernmental Organisations* is forthcoming by Edward Elgar. Among her recent publications are the following: *Humanitarian NGOs in Peacebuilding and Reconstruction Operations*, in F. Attinà (eds), *The Politics and Policies of Relief, Aid and Reconstruction. Contrasting approaches to disasters and emergencies*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2012, and *Multilateral security and ESDP operations*, Fulvio Attinà and Daniela Irrera (eds.), Ashgate, London,

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## About the author:

**Daniela Irrera** is associate professor of International Relations at the University of Catania and Visiting Professor of Political Violence and Terrorism at the OSCE Academy in Bishkek. She currently serves as Chair of the ECPR Standing Group on International Relations, President of the European Peace Research Association (EuPRA) and member of the ISA Governing Council. She has authored and co-edited 10 books, including *NGOs Crisis Management and Conflict Resolution: Measuring the Impact of NGOs on Intergovernmental Organisations*, Edward Elgar; *EU Emergency response policies and NGO. Trends and innovations*, Palgrave; *The European Parliament and its International Relations (with Stelios Stavridis)*, Routledge; *The Palgrave Handbook of Global Counterterrorism Policy (with S. Romaniuk, F. Grace and S. Webb)*, Palgrave.