



TOWARDS A MORE STRATEGIC CIVILIAN CSDP: STRENGTHENING EU CIVILIAN CRISIS MANAGEMENT IN A NEW ERA OF GEOPOLITICS AND RISK

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I. Introduction

The European Union's (EU) civilian Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) is at a critical juncture, adapting to quickly evolving circumstances while facing unprecedented challenges in several domains. In the wake of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, on 24 February 2022, EU member states have taken decisions that have shifted the geographical focus of civilian CSDP to the EU's Eastern Neighbourhood, enhancing the EU Advisory Mission in Ukraine (EUAM Ukraine) and establishing new missions in Armenia and Moldova. The geopolitical stakes for the EU in this region are high and the tasks assigned to missions deployed there are formidable—as are the expectations arising from them. What is more, three civilian CSDP missions in this region are now active in official EU candidate countries, another significant development that few observers would have foreseen just a few years ago.

The EU is operating in a fundamentally different geopolitical environment than when it first embarked on crisis management missions in 2003. The president of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen, has noted that the EU is in an era of 'geostrategic rivalry', and that the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) and CSDP must adapt to this reality.¹ This demands that the EU become more strategic and further bolster its ability to decide and act, not least in its neighbourhood.² The former president of Finland, Sauli Niinistö, has produced an influential report on Europe's civil and military preparedness and readiness (hereafter the Niinistö report).³ In the report he observes that the initial response from the EU to Russia's aggression against

¹ Von der Leyen, U., President of the European Commission, 'Mission letter to Kaja Kallas, High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and Vice-President of the European Commission', 17 Sep. 2024.

² Von der Leyen (note 1).

³ Niinistö, S., Special Adviser to the President of the European Commission, *Safer Together: Strengthening Europe's Civilian and Military Preparedness and Readiness* (European Commission: Nov. 2024).

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SUMMARY

● In the wake of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, European Union (EU) member states have taken decisions that have shifted the focus of civilian Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) more firmly to its Eastern Neighbourhood. This shift has raised the geopolitical profile and relevance of civilian CSDP, but it has also increased the stakes. Although civilian CSDP has become more geopolitical, it has not necessarily become more strategic, as decision making and action remain ad hoc and reactive. This raises questions about the EU's capacity to use civilian CSDP more strategically and beyond current levels.

This paper identifies three strategic priorities for civilian CSDP missions: equipping missions to deliver on mandates; where possible, supporting EU candidate countries in the accession process; and enhancing the ability of missions to react and adapt to evolving needs or emerging crises.

The EU and its member states have taken steps to enhance their ability to act and strengthen civilian CSDP under the Civilian CSDP Compact. However, these efforts have mainly focused on building capabilities, which are essential but not enough on their own. A more strategic civilian CSDP requires stronger political control and strategic direction from EU member states and that all key enablers—capabilities, decision making and budget—are addressed to increase its preparedness and strategic potential.

**Table 1.** Active EU civilian CSDP missions as of 31 Oct. 2024, by region

Africa	Europe	Middle East
EU Advisory Mission in CAR (EUAM RCA, launched 2020)	EU Advisory Mission in Ukraine (EUAM Ukraine, launched 2014)	EU Advisory Mission in Iraq (EUAM Iraq, launched 2017)
EU Border Assistance Mission in Libya (EUBAM Libya, launched 2013)	EU Mission in Armenia (EUMA, launched 2023)	EU Border Assistance Mission at the Rafah Crossing Point (EUBAM Rafah, launched 2005)
EU Capacity Building Mission in Mali (EUCAP Sahel Mali, launched 2015)	EU Rule of Law Mission in Kosovo (EULEX Kosovo, launched 2008)	EU Police and Rule of Law Mission for the Palestinian Territories (EUPOL COPPS, launched 2006)
EU Capacity Building Mission in Somalia (EUCAP Somalia, launched 2012)	EU Monitoring Mission in Georgia (EUMM Georgia, launched 2008)	
EU Security and Defence Initiative in the Gulf of Guinea (EUSDI Gulf of Guinea, launched 2023)	EU Partnership Mission in Moldova (EUPM Moldova, launched 2023)	

CAR = Central African Republic; CSDP = Common Security and Defence Policy; EU = European Union.

Note: Bold marks missions that were launched after Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine on 24 Feb. 2022. EUSDI Gulf of Guinea is a civilian–military CSDP initiative under the CSDP that operates in Benin, Côte d’Ivoire, Ghana and Togo. EUCAP Somalia was named EUCAP Nestor until 2017.

Source: SIPRI Multilateral Peace Operations Database, accessed 31 Oct. 2024.

Ukraine was ad hoc and improvised—a pattern also seen in civilian CSDP—and calls for an EU that is better prepared and more proactive.⁴

These messages further strengthen the impetus for enhancing the effectiveness and impact of civilian CSDP, which the EU and its member states have committed to under the Strategic Compass for Security and Defence and the Civilian CSDP Compact.⁵ Notably through the latter, member states have acknowledged the growing relevance of civilian CSDP and committed, among other things, to addressing capability shortfalls. While significant steps have been taken, such as the establishment of a structured civilian capability development process (CCDP), civilian CSDP requires more than just resources to be effective and the absence of a coherent strategy risks undermining the instrument’s credibility and strategic potential.

This SIPRI Research Policy Paper argues that civilian CSDP has become more geopolitical after Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine, but not necessarily more strategic. Focusing on the EU’s engagement in its Eastern Neighbourhood, it maintains that the EU has demonstrated its ability to decide and act rapidly in response to crises using its civilian CSDP. In order to sustain these efforts and deliver on mandates, however, and to prepare for evolving circumstances and other emerging crises, it is necessary that the EU and its member states address persistent bottlenecks in areas such as decision making, capabilities and budget. The paper argues that, above all else, what civilian CSDP needs is enhanced strategic direction from EU member states.

⁴ Niinistö (note 3), p. 6.

⁵ Council of the European Union (EU), ‘A Strategic Compass for Security and Defence: For a European Union that protects its citizens, values and interests and contributes to international peace and security’, 7371/22, 21 Mar. 2022; and Council of the EU, ‘Conclusions of the Council and of the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States, meeting within the Council, on the establishment of a Civilian CSDP Compact’, 9588/23, 22 May 2023.



II. Pivot to the East: Civilian CSDP after Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine

The EU has conducted 24 civilian crisis management missions since 2003, when the first mission deployed to the Western Balkans.⁶ These missions have been equipped with mandates ranging from stabilization, confidence building and monitoring; to substituting host governments in sectors such as the judiciary; to supporting partner countries through advice and capability building in areas such as border management, law enforcement and security sector reform. Initially, this included missions in distant regions such as Aceh (Indonesia) and Afghanistan. More recently, these missions have been concentrated in regions closer to home, in what the Niinistö report refers to as the 'arc of instability and fragility in the EU's wider neighbourhood'.⁷

The EU is currently conducting 12 civilian CSDP missions in Africa, Europe and the Middle East, as well as 1 regional civilian–military mission (as of 31 October 2024; see table 1). During the 2010s, the geographical distribution of missions and deployed personnel shifted southwards because of the gradual drawdown of the once large-scale EU Rule of Law Mission in Kosovo (EULEX Kosovo) and the growing presence of new missions in Africa and the Middle East, especially in the Sahel.⁸ During the 2020s, civilian CSDP has pivoted back to Europe and to the Eastern Neighbourhood. This shift has resulted from increasing engagement in this region in the aftermath of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, combined with a marked decline in the missions in the Sahel.

Europe

In the wake of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, EU member states have taken a number of political and strategic decisions that have shifted the geographical focus of civilian CSDP more firmly to the EU's Eastern Neighbourhood, responding not only to Russian aggression against Ukraine but to other threats to peace and security in the region as well. First, EU member states decided to maintain EUAM Ukraine and adapt its mandate and posture to the wartime conditions and needs of its local partners. Thereafter, EU member states decided to establish new civilian crisis management missions in Armenia and Moldova, whose sovereignty and territorial integrity were being threatened by military and non-military means. These missions joined the EU Monitoring Mission in Georgia (EUMM Georgia), which the EU deployed in the aftermath of the 2008 war between Russia and Georgia and has been active ever since.

Ukraine

EUAM Ukraine was established in 2014 following the Euromaidan protests and the Revolution of Dignity in Ukraine, the subsequent annexation of Crimea by Russia and the outbreak of war in the Donbas region, with a mandate to support civilian security sector reform in Ukraine through strategic

⁶ SIPRI Multilateral Peace Operations Database, accessed 31 Oct. 2024.

⁷ Niinistö (note 3).

⁸ Smit, T., 'Towards a more capable European Union civilian CSDP', SIPRI Policy Brief, Nov. 2019.



advice and training.⁹ In March and April 2022, the Council of the EU revised the mandate of EUAM Ukraine twice, adding new tasks to advise Ukrainian authorities on the facilitation of refugee flows and delivery of humanitarian aid and on the investigation and prosecution of international crimes.¹⁰ The mission returned to its headquarters in Kyiv in May 2022 after a temporary evacuation to Moldova, sending a strong signal of support to Ukraine at a time when there was still limited international presence in the country.¹¹

The Council of the EU recently extended the mandate of EUAM Ukraine for three years, starting on 1 June 2024, increasing its budget and raising its authorized strength from 197 to 228 international personnel.¹² Although the new mandate has not introduced major new lines of operation, it mentions for the first time the objective of supporting the re-establishment of government control and the rule of law in de-occupied areas. It also links the support for civilian security sector reform to Ukraine's EU accession process, which is an important new development in civilian CSDP.¹³ CSDP missions and operations can only be conducted outside the EU according to the Treaty on EU (TEU), which means that missions do not have a legal basis to operate in accession countries once they have become EU members.¹⁴

Armenia

The EU Mission in Armenia (EUMA) is an unarmed civilian monitoring mission similar to the neighbouring EUMM Georgia. It was established in January 2023 to contribute to incident and risk reduction in conflict-affected and border areas in Armenia, and to confidence building and the normalization of relations between Armenia and Azerbaijan.¹⁵ EUMA superseded the temporary EU Monitoring Capacity (EUMCAP), a team of 40 observers deployed to Armenia at very short notice in October 2022 as an immediate stabilization measure, carried out and commanded by EUMM Georgia. In January 2024 the Council of the EU decided to double the authorized strength of EUMA from 82 to 165 international personnel.¹⁶

In the South Caucasus, the balance of power and alliance dynamics shifted after 24 February 2022. Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine affected its ability and credibility as mediator between Armenia and Azerbaijan

⁹ Council Decision (CFSP) 2014/486 of 22 July 2014 on the European Union Advisory Mission for Civilian Security Sector Reform Ukraine (EUAM Ukraine), *Official Journal of the European Union*, L217/42, 23 July 2014.

¹⁰ Council Decision (CFSP) 2022/452 of 18 Mar. 2022 amending Decision 2014/486/CFSP on the European Union Advisory Mission for Civilian Security Sector Reform Ukraine (EUAM Ukraine), *Official Journal of the European Union*, L92/3, 21 Mar. 2022; and Council Decision (CFSP) 2022/638 of 13 Apr. 2022 amending Decision 2014/486/CFSP on the European Union Advisory Mission for Civilian Security Sector Reform Ukraine (EUAM Ukraine), *Official Journal of the European Union*, L117/38, 19 Apr. 2022.

¹¹ EUAM Ukraine, 'EUAM Ukraine returns to Kyiv', 18 May 2022.

¹² Council Decision (CFSP) 2024/1353 of 14 May 2024 amending Decision 2014/486/CFSP on the European Union Advisory Mission for Civilian Security Sector Reform Ukraine (EUAM Ukraine), *Official Journal of the European Union*, 15 May 2024.

¹³ Council Decision (CFSP) 2024/1353 (note 12).

¹⁴ Consolidated Version of the Treaty on European Union, *Official Journal of the European Union*, C326/13, 26 Oct. 2012, Article 42.

¹⁵ Council Decision (CFSP) 2023/162 of 23 Jan. 2023 on a European Union Mission in Armenia (EUMA), *Official Journal of the European Union*, L22/29, 24 Jan. 2023.

¹⁶ Council Decision (CFSP) 2024/336 of 16 Jan. 2024 amending Decision (CFSP) 2023/162 on a European Union Mission in Armenia (EUMA), *Official Journal of the European Union*, L22/29, 17 Jan. 2024; and SIPRI Multilateral Peace Operations Database (note 6).



and guarantor of the ceasefire agreement that ended the second Nagorno-Karabakh war in November 2020.¹⁷ This allowed the EU to enhance its diplomatic role in the region and facilitate negotiations between Armenia and Azerbaijan on a possible peace agreement. It also allowed Azerbaijan to further strengthen its position in these talks by translating its military superiority into additional battlefield gains, first inside Azerbaijan around Nagorno-Karabakh but later across the border with Armenia as well, attacking positions and occupying territory inside Armenia in September 2022.¹⁸ These cross-border clashes prompted the creation of EUMCAP in October 2022. The initial announcement of the deployment of a civilian CSDP mission in Armenia was the outcome of a meeting between the leaders of Armenia and Azerbaijan and the presidents of the European Council and France, held in the margins of a European Political Community Summit in Prague in October 2022.¹⁹

Moldova

The EU Partnership Mission in Moldova (EUPM Moldova) is a new type of civilian CSDP mission. It was established in April 2023 to help strengthen the resilience of Moldova's security sector in the areas of crisis management and hybrid threats through the provision of strategic advice and operational support, emphasizing cybersecurity and countering foreign information manipulation and interference (FIMI).²⁰ EUPM Moldova is the first civilian CSDP mission with this kind of mandate and the first that was deployed in a host country that was already a candidate for EU membership. With an authorized strength of 40 international personnel, EUPM Moldova is one of the smaller civilian CSDP missions. However, the mission follows a modular and scalable approach, meaning that it can be enhanced through short-term deployments of specific competences and capabilities that are not required permanently, for example in the form of visiting experts or specialized teams.

Africa

While the presence and impact of CSDP missions in the Eastern Neighbourhood has increased in recent years, it has diminished in Africa, especially in the Sahel. The footprint of both civilian and military CSDP missions decreased significantly in this region, reflecting a broader trend. The 2010s saw the deployment of large UN peacekeeping operations in Africa, a proliferation of regional and ad hoc initiatives, and numerous capacity-building and counterterrorism efforts by various actors including the EU. Many of these trends reversed following a series of military coups, including in countries hosting CSDP missions such as Mali and Niger. This was illustrated by developments such as the collapse of the Joint Force of the Group of Five for the Sahel (JF-G5S), the discontinuation of UN peace operations in Mali and Sudan, and the withdrawal of the French-led regional counterterrorism

¹⁷ 'Averting a new war between Armenia and Azerbaijan', International Crisis Group, Europe Report no. 266, 30 Jan. 2023.

¹⁸ International Crisis Group (note 17).

¹⁹ European Council, 'Statement following quadrilateral meeting between President Aliyev, Prime Minister Pashinyan, President Macron and President Michel, 6 October 2022', 7 Oct. 2022.

²⁰ Council Decision (CFSP) 2023/855 of 24 Apr. 2023 on a European Union Partnership Mission in Moldova (EUPM Moldova), *Official Journal of the European Union*, L110/30, 25 Apr. 2023.



operations Barkhane and Task Force Takuba, as well as three CSDP missions from Mali and Niger. The mandate of the civilian EU Capacity Building Mission in Niger (EUCAP Sahel Niger) ended in September 2024 and was not renewed, following a decision in December 2023 by Niger's military junta to withdraw its consent for the mission and ask the mission to leave the country.²¹

The strategic impact of (civilian) CSDP missions in Africa has been limited, warranting a critical rethinking of the utility of the EU's crisis management toolbox in meeting the needs and expectations of African partners.²² Some of this rethinking has already started and resulted in the launch of the civilian–military EU Security and Defence Initiative in support of West African countries of the Gulf of Guinea (EUSDI Gulf of Guinea) in December 2023.²³ This is not a CSDP mission as such, but rather a new set-up in which a small number of advisers are assigned to EU delegations in the region to support the security and defence forces of the coastal countries of the Gulf of Guinea—all recipients of military aid from the EU through the European Peace Facility (EPF)—through advice and training, with help from visiting experts or specialized teams.²⁴

The Middle East

The expanding and internationalized conflict in the Middle East—the region hosting the two longest-running civilian CSDP missions—is a major political and strategic challenge for the EU. The response to the Hamas-led terrorist attack on Israel on 7 October 2023 and the subsequent war and humanitarian crisis in Gaza have been divisive within the EU and damaged its credibility in the region, reinforcing widespread perceptions of Western double standards.²⁵ Although the EU's geopolitical influence and role in the Middle East peace process appear to have been further marginalized, the EU has reiterated its readiness to contribute to reviving a political process, reforming the Palestinian Authority and rebuilding Gaza.²⁶ It remains to be seen whether there will be opportunities to rejuvenate the EU Border Assistance Mission for the Rafah Crossing Point (EUBAM Rafah) and the EU Police Mission for the Palestinian Territories (EUPOL COPPS), both of which are approaching their twentieth anniversaries. Doing so would raise the geopolitical profile of civilian CSDP more but could also risk further overstretch.

²¹ Wilén, N., 'Procurement by proxy: How Sahelian juntas acquire equipment from ousted security partners', Egmont Policy Brief no. 338, Mar. 2024, pp. 4–5.

²² Van der Lijn, J. et al., *Assessing the Effectiveness of European Union Civilian CSDP Missions Involved in Security Sector Reform: The Cases of Afghanistan, Mali and Niger*, SIPRI Report (SIPRI: Stockholm, May 2024).

²³ Council Decision (CFSP) 2023/1599 of 3 Aug. 2023 on a European Union Security and Defence Initiative in support of West African countries of the Gulf of Guinea, *Official Journal of the European Union*, L196/25, 4 Aug. 2023.

²⁴ Council Decision (CFSP) 2023/1599 (note 23).

²⁵ Kausch, K., 'A decade of deadlock: The EU's shipwreck on Palestine embodies the EU's blockade problem', JOINT Brief no. 33, Mar. 2024.

²⁶ European Council, 'European Council meeting (21 and 22 Mar. 2024): Conclusions', EUCO 7/24, 22 Mar. 2024.



The pivot in numbers

That civilian CSDP has pivoted towards the EU's Eastern Neighbourhood after Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine is clearly reflected in the deployment statistics.²⁷ As of October 2024, the four missions deployed in this region accounted for 44 per cent of all authorized posts (occupied and vacant) and all deployed international personnel (seconded and contracted) in civilian CSDP missions (see table 2). Missions in Eastern Neighbourhood countries accounted for an even greater share of all seconded personnel (52 per cent) that were actually deployed. These figures were substantially lower before 24 February 2022. Notably, the missions that were active in Africa and the Middle East in October 2024 accounted for only 26 per cent of all seconded personnel in civilian CSDP missions, compared to 39 per cent in 2021.

This shift has implications for the overall capability requirements of civilian CSDP and the demand for personnel contributions from member states; and it is not only geographical. With the addition of EUMA, the EU must now sustain two monitoring missions instead of one, which has increased the need for monitors and certain types of assets. Meanwhile, the withdrawal of EUCAP Sahel Niger has reduced the demand for French-speaking experts. This could have a positive effect on the overall figures of member state secondments. Missions in Europe (including in the South Caucasus) usually generate more personnel contributions from EU member states than missions further away, and monitoring missions in particular.²⁸

III. Strategic pivot or accidental geopolitics?

The EU's Strategic Compass for Security and Defence and the new Civilian CSDP Compact emphasize that the increasingly hostile security environment demands that the EU increase its ability and willingness to decide and act whenever crises emerge.²⁹ The EU and its member states often emphasize that the unique strength of the EU as a crisis management actor is that it can deploy both civilian and military missions as part of an integrated approach.³⁰ The heightened activities of civilian CSDP missions in the Eastern Neighbourhood have not been the most noteworthy development in the CFSP and CSDP since 24 February 2022, after which the EU has broken many taboos and taken unprecedented steps in areas such as the provision of military aid to Ukraine. Nonetheless, the significance of the decisions to retain and enhance EUAM Ukraine and establish EUMA and EUPM Moldova at relatively short notice, and the ability of these missions to support their counterparts and contribute to conflict prevention in critical times, must not be understated either.

The EU was able and willing to act on the ground in these countries precisely because it has non-military tools, such as civilian crisis management missions, at its disposal. Indeed, in each case the deployment of a civilian CSDP mission was probably the only viable option available to host governments and the EU. For various reasons, the deployment of missions or operations

²⁷ SIPRI Multilateral Peace Operations Database (note 6).

²⁸ Smit (note 8), pp. 3–6.

²⁹ Council of the EU, 7371/22 (note 5).

³⁰ Council of the EU, 9588/23 (note 5).

**Table 2.** Personnel in civilian CSDP missions before and after Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine (from 31 Oct. 2021 to 31 Oct. 2024), by region and as a share of the total

Region	Authorized posts (% of total)	International personnel (% of total)	Seconded personnel (% of total)
<i>Africa and the Middle East</i>	From 52 to 40 per cent	From 52 to 38 per cent	From 39 to 26 per cent
Of which the Sahel	From 22 to 11 per cent	From 22 to 7 per cent	From 17 to 4 per cent
<i>Europe</i>	From 48 to 60 per cent	From 48 to 62 per cent	From 61 to 74 per cent
Of which the Eastern Neighbourhood	From 30 to 44 per cent	From 30 to 44 per cent	From 39 to 52 per cent

Note: These numbers do not include Kosovo Specialist Chambers and Specialist Prosecutor’s Office personnel. The authorized posts are based on the budget impact statement of missions.

Source: SIPRI Multilateral Peace Operations Database, accessed 31 Oct. 2024.

by other organizations, such as the UN, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), was not feasible or acceptable in either Armenia, Moldova or Ukraine. Similarly, the deployment of a military CSDP mission or operation on the territories of these countries would not have been possible or desirable at the time. This illustrates that civilian CSDP remains a useful and flexible instrument in the EU’s crisis management toolbox, which does not always receive the credit and political attention it deserves.

Accidental geopolitics

Through these decisions and actions in the wake of Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine, the EU significantly increased the relevance and geopolitical profile of its civilian CSDP in the Eastern Neighbourhood. The symbolic importance alone of the political decisions by all 27 member states to support partners and respond to crises in its immediate neighbourhood restored some of the EU’s credibility as a civilian crisis management actor, at a critical time when indecision and inaction would have done the opposite. However, while civilian CSDP has become more geopolitical, that does not necessarily mean it has become more strategic.³¹ While geopolitically motivated, the decisions on when and where to use civilian CSDP following Russia’s full-scale invasion were not proactive and based on advanced strategic planning but rather reactive and ad hoc, as is often the case in EU external action.³²

Niklas Helwig has developed the concept of ‘accidental geopolitics’ to explain this tendency in the CFSP.³³ Accidental geopolitics suggests that it is often external factors such as strategic competition or crises which push the EU to behave in geopolitical ways. These actions may be geopolitical but usually emerge without deliberate intent and strategic direction, and therefore with limited preparedness. Decision making tends to be reactive and impromptu because there is insufficient consensus on the strategic objectives of the CFSP and on the roles of different EU institutions and instruments. According to Helwig, accidental geopolitics can help to under-

³¹ Mustasilta, K., ‘The EU’s external conflict responses: Drivers and emerging trends in the era of strategic competition’, FIIA Working Paper no. 135, Sep. 2023, p. 11.

³² Helwig, N., ‘The EU’s accidental geopolitics: Europe’s geopolitical adaptation and its limits’, FIIA Working Paper no. 138, May 2024, p. 6.

³³ Helwig (note 32).



stand the ‘geopolitical repurposing’ of polices and instruments such as EU enlargement, military CSDP and the EPF.³⁴ Accidental geopolitics is also a useful concept to evaluate recent shifts in civilian CSDP, including the pivot to the Eastern Neighbourhood and the repurposing of some of the missions deployed there, as well as the somewhat improvised and non-strategic way in which these changes have come about.

From enablers to bottlenecks

The CSDP remains firmly intergovernmental, and its missions and operations are conducted under the political control and strategic direction of EU member states.³⁵ Before assessing the recent developments in the wake of the full-scale invasion of Ukraine, it is helpful to consider how decisions and outcomes in civilian CSDP are shaped and what this means for its strategic potential. Besides the prerequisite of host government consent, there are three critical factors enabling civilian CSDP action by the EU: decision making, capabilities and budget.

Decision making

The Council of the EU—in the Foreign Affairs Council (FAC) configuration, comprising the foreign ministers or sometimes the defence ministers of all member states—establishes CSDP missions and operations and decides on their objectives and scope, including through periodical mandate renewals. The political control and strategic direction of civilian and military CSDP missions and operations are delegated to the Political and Security Committee (PSC), a preparatory body of the Council of the EU. Decisions are made on the basis of unanimity, which means that every member state has the power of veto.

Capabilities

CSDP missions and operations depend on capabilities provided by EU member states for the implementation of their mandates. For civilian CSDP missions these primarily come in the form of seconded personnel with specific competences and skills, often borrowed from Justice and Home Affairs (JHA) structures and agencies in member states, which are not represented in the FAC. Where necessary, missions may also recruit and employ contracted personnel. The generation and development of capabilities is much more fragmented and unstructured for civilian than for military crisis management, which is a particular challenge for civilian CSDP.

Budget

The common costs of civilian CSDP missions are financed from the CFSP budget. These common costs do not include most costs related to seconded personnel, which are borne by the seconding member states or authorities. The CFSP budget is part of the regular EU budget and managed by the European Commission. In the 2021–27 multiannual financial framework the total CFSP budget is 2.68 billion euros, most of which is used to fund civilian

³⁴ Helwig, N., ‘Culture shock: The EU’s Foreign and Security Policy and the challenges of the European Zeitenwende’, *Zeitschrift für Politikwissenschaft*, vol. 33 (2023); and Helwig (note 32), p. 9.

³⁵ Consolidated Version of the Treaty on EU (note 14).

CSDP missions.³⁶ EU member states have less control over the CFSP budget than over the EPF that covers the common costs of military CSDP missions and operations. The EPF is not part of the regular EU budget, but a strategic financial instrument established and governed by EU member states to finance all CFSP action in the areas of military and defence.³⁷

The ability of the EU to act in the framework of its civilian CSDP depends on effective decision making and the availability of the required capabilities and resources (human and financial). In practice, these strategic enablers can actually become bottlenecks, preventing the rapid and robust action called for in the Strategic Compass and the Civilian CSDP Compact by slowing down decision making and deployments, and watering down mandates and requirements. Using civilian CSDP strategically is already difficult because 27 EU member states with varying priorities and threat perceptions must agree on its objectives. Knowing that capabilities and resources are scarce further complicates the situation, especially since the FAC and its preparatory bodies lack full control or even oversight of the relevant national capabilities and the CFSP budget.

Implications for strategic utility

This complicated situation has implications for the strategic utility and impact of civilian CSDP missions. First, strategic planning for civilian CSDP and decisions regarding the mandates, objectives and scope of missions are influenced by the expected availability of capabilities and the budget. Second, once mandates are agreed, EU member states still cannot guarantee that the necessary capabilities will be provided. This can lead to situations where the available means determine the end, instead of the other way around, yet may still be insufficient to meet the objectives. It can then cause a downward spiral in which lowering ambition leads to lower effectiveness and impact, and vice versa. In fact, this has arguably been evident in civilian CSDP as it has evolved over the years.³⁸

Long-time observers of EU crisis management often recall that the EU initially conducted relatively large and ambitious CSDP missions and operations, which appeared to have greater strategic intent and impact.³⁹ This changed following the enlargement of the EU in the 2000s and the entry into force of the Treaty of Lisbon in 2009, after which the ability of member states to agree on ambitious missions and their willingness to contribute personnel decreased.⁴⁰ In the 2010s, civilian CSDP was repurposed to counter irregular migration and other transnational security challenges across the nexus of internal and external security, and to move towards smaller capacity-building missions. The idea was that the changes would make civilian CSDP missions

³⁶ European Commission, 'Common Foreign and Security Policy', [n.d.].

³⁷ Council Decision (CFSP) 2021/509 of 22 Mar. 2021 establishing a European Peace Facility, *Official Journal of the European Union*, L102/14, 24 Mar. 2021.

³⁸ The findings in this paper are supported by numerous interviews with current and former EU and EU member state officials over the past year; current and former EU and EU member state officials, Interviews with author, Nov. 2023, Dec. 2023, May 2024, July 2024 and Oct. 2024.

³⁹ See e.g. Pietz, T., 'Einsatz mit Zukunft?' [Deployment with a future?], *Internationale Politik*, vol. 5 (Sep./Oct. 2024).

⁴⁰ Pietz (note 39).



more relevant to the JHA actors in EU member states on which they depend for many of their capabilities.⁴¹ In retrospect, however, it appears that this transformation neither reversed declining personnel contributions by EU member states nor increased the strategic impact of civilian CSDP.

From strategic impasse to accidental pivot

Prior to Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, EU member states were spending considerable time and energy on strengthening civilian CSDP, in line with their commitments under the first Civilian CSDP Compact.⁴² Yet the constellation of civilian CSDP missions had been relatively stagnant for years. The EU had only established two new missions since 2015 (small advisory missions in Iraq and the Central African Republic) and had not ended one since the EU Police Mission in Afghanistan (EUPOL Afghanistan) in 2016. There seemed to be few possibilities and little appetite on the side of EU member states to expand the number or scope of civilian CSDP missions. The CFSP budget was already running at a deficit and EU member states seemed unwilling or unable to meet the capability requirements of the 11 missions that were ongoing at the time.⁴³ In other words, civilian CSDP seemed to be operating at its maximum capacity, whereby expanding missions or starting new ones was possible only at the expense of reducing or terminating others.

This impasse changed after Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine. Within a short timespan EU member states decided to revise the mandate of EUAM Ukraine twice and establish new missions in Armenia and Moldova, shifting the focus of civilian CSDP more firmly to the Eastern Neighbourhood and the strategic competition with Russia. Before the full-scale invasion, few would have predicted or even imagined that civilian CSDP missions would soon be supporting Ukraine with the investigation and prosecution of international crimes in the context of an ongoing interstate war, patrolling remote and mountainous border areas in Armenia, and helping Moldova build up its resilience against hybrid threats. Similarly, few would have thought that the EU would soon be conducting civilian CSDP missions in official EU candidate countries.

Ability to decide or unique window of opportunity?

The EU was able to decide in the above cases for a combination of reasons involving the three identified enablers of civilian CSDP action: decision making, capabilities and budget. Returning to the concept of accidental geopolitics, Helwig argues that its dynamics are especially apparent during crises.⁴⁴ Following the shock of Russia's full-scale invasion, the EU was united and determined to show support for Ukraine. This facilitated swift decision making, including in the revisions of EUAM Ukraine's mandate in

⁴¹ Smit, T., 'Delivering the compact: Towards a more capable and gender-balanced EU civilian CSDP', SIPRI Research Policy Paper, Nov. 2022.

⁴² Council of the EU, 'Conclusions of the Council and of the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States, meeting within the Council, on the establishment of a Civilian CSDP Compact', 14305/18, 19 Nov. 2018.

⁴³ Smit, T., 'New compact, renewed impetus: Enhancing the EU's ability to act through its civilian CSDP', SIPRI Research Policy Paper, Nov. 2023.

⁴⁴ Helwig (note 32), p. 8.



March and April 2022, which did not require increasing the budget ceiling of the mission. Moreover, the EU strongly supported Moldova as it experienced severe consequences of the war in Ukraine, including an influx of refugees and an escalation of hybrid attacks from Russia.⁴⁵ EUPM Moldova is a small mission that has not required major allocations from the CFSP budget; only EUBAM Rafah (an even smaller mission) has a smaller budget.

Accidental geopolitics also emphasizes the role of individual leaders in shaping outcomes, especially during crises when formal EU decision-making processes are lagging. The origin of EUMCAP in Armenia in October 2022 is an interesting case in point. On the one hand, this was a textbook example of civilian CSDP action being the outcome of high-level peace talks led by the EU, in this case represented by the president of the European Council, Charles Michel, and the president of France, Emmanuel Macron. On the other hand, it was not an outcome of political agreement and strategic planning according to the TEU and the procedures for establishing new missions, as the mediators did not have a mandate from EU member states to promise such a deployment. When the imminent deployment of EUMCAP was announced, it had not yet been discussed in the Committee for Civilian Aspects of Crisis Management (CIVCOM) or the PSC—let alone in the FAC, whose formal decision followed almost two weeks later. Indeed, it is not certain that EU member states would have been able to agree on the deployment had the ordinary procedures been followed, especially considering that there was no money left in the CFSP budget and substantial capabilities would have to be mobilized at short notice.⁴⁶

It is evident that capability and budget considerations influenced decisions on the scope and dimensions of EUMA and EUPM Moldova. The authorized strength of EUMA and the number of monitors at its disposal were initially much smaller than those of EUMM Georgia. EUMA has more field offices than EUMM Georgia and the Armenia–Azerbaijan border is around the same length as the Administrative Boundary Line between Georgia and the Russian-occupied breakaway regions Abkhazia and South Ossetia, patrolled by EUMM Georgia. Even though EUMA has been enhanced since then, it remains smaller than its Georgian counterpart.

Meanwhile, EUPM Moldova is a small mission with a broad and complex mandate but a low advisory capacity. The mission does not follow the ordinary mission model structure, which means that it lacks certain generic functions that most other missions have, such as dedicated gender advisers. Instead, the mission follows a modular and scalable approach, which means that it can be enhanced through short-term deployments of visiting experts or specialized teams.⁴⁷ While this approach is sensible for a mission such as EUPM Moldova, it appears that its ceiling of 40 international personnel was determined in view of CFSP budget limitations rather than an analysis of the actual needs of the mission.⁴⁸ Several observers have already recommended

⁴⁵ Wesslau, F., 'Russia's hybrid war against Moldova', SCEEUS Report no. 15, 11 Oct. 2024.

⁴⁶ Helwig (note 32), p. 8.

⁴⁷ Current and former EU and EU member state officials, Interviews with author (note 38).

⁴⁸ Current and former EU and EU member state officials, Interviews with author (note 38).



that EU member states enhance EUPM Moldova and increase its authorized strength when its mandate is renewed in May 2025.⁴⁹

Ability to act or improvisation?

The relatively swift planning and decisions around the missions in the Eastern Neighbourhood after 24 February 2022 were followed by relatively quick action on the ground, especially by EU standards. This was the result of much flexibility and improvisation on behalf of civilian CSDP missions and structures, more than of the general levels of preparedness and readiness for rapid deployment. The new missions in Armenia and Moldova received critical support from existing missions in neighbouring Georgia and Ukraine during their start-up phase, borrowing both personnel and assets from them. This continued even after EUMA replaced EUMCAP, which was carried out completely by EUMM Georgia within its existing resources. For some time, the new missions relied quite heavily on personnel from other missions through the exchange of staff policy. This included a substantial number of personnel from EUCAP Sahel Niger, whose activities were suspended following the military coup in Niger in July 2023, which also relieved the CFSP budget.⁵⁰

The deployment of new missions to Armenia and Moldova at relatively short notice was a real achievement, but the improvised way in which it was done was neither sustainable nor without risks. The EU was able to act in these countries but at the expense of other missions, some of which were already struggling. The redeployment of personnel and assets to set up EUMCAP and support EUMA reduced the operational capability of EUMM Georgia at a time when the security situation in the region was volatile and unpredictable. EUMCAP and EUMA also had to accept certain risks in their operations because there was a need to be visible and patrolling from day one. Moreover, filling staff positions with seconded personnel takes time, which meant that critical capabilities in areas such as medical support or strategic communication were not always available in these missions.⁵¹

IV. Greater geopolitical relevance, higher stakes

EU member states have raised the geopolitical profile of civilian CSDP in the wake of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine. Through their decisions they have embedded civilian CSDP more deeply in geostrategic competition and rivalry, particularly vis-a-vis Russia. Russia's behaviour prompted many countries in the EU's Eastern Neighbourhood to re-evaluate their security and alliance strategies and their relations with Russia, often supported by notable shifts in public opinion towards closer alignment with the West. Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine applied for EU membership shortly after the invasion and were granted candidate status in June 2022 (Moldova and Ukraine) and December 2023 (Georgia). There have been indications that the Armenian government may be considering applying for EU membership as well, which has been recognized and positively received in a resolution

⁴⁹ Wesslau (note 45); and Zandee, D. and de Baedts, R., 'European defence: The future of EU missions', Clingendael Policy Brief, May 2024.

⁵⁰ Current and former EU and EU member state officials, Interviews with author (note 38).

⁵¹ Current and former EU and EU member state officials, Interviews with author (note 38).

adopted by the European Parliament in March 2024.⁵² In addition to support provided through civilian CSDP missions, the EU supports the armed forces of these countries through training (of the Ukrainian army, although not inside Ukraine) and equipment (funded through the EPF), and in some cases through tailored security and defence partnerships.⁵³

By supporting these partner countries in their efforts to distance themselves from Russian influence and by offering them a pathway to EU membership, the EU has raised the geopolitical stakes in the Eastern Neighbourhood. The countries hosting civilian CSDP missions in the region—Armenia, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine—are all post-Soviet states and part of what Russia considers to be its exclusive sphere of influence.⁵⁴ All four have Russian troops stationed permanently on their territories, in some cases occupying parts of these countries or supporting breakaway regions. All are highly exposed and vulnerable to hybrid threats and FIMI originating from Russia, which has been ramping up efforts to undermine the pro-Western governments in the region and their rapprochement with the EU.⁵⁵ There have been serious concerns about this type of foreign interference in light of recent and upcoming elections in Georgia (2024), Moldova (2024 and 2025) and Armenia (2026), which could influence these countries' strategic orientation and their EU accession trajectory. However, the most consequential factors will be the outcomes on the battlefield in Ukraine and eventually at the negotiation table, which will have profound implications for the entire region and the European security architecture.

Preparedness and strategic prioritization

The EU cannot control the outcomes of Russia's war on Ukraine, and even its ability to shape them may be limited. Thus, it should prepare for various scenarios at various levels, including civilian CSDP. Civilian CSDP missions must be able to adapt quickly to changing circumstances in order to retain their relevance and value, including as perceived by host governments and populations. This is also important from the perspective of strategic competition, as most countries in the EU's wider neighbourhood have more options than just the EU when it comes to strategic partnerships. The Niinistö report makes a similar case, arguing that the EU needs to be ready and prepared to respond to crises and support partners, including through CSDP action, in particular EU candidate countries and partners in the immediate neighbourhood.⁵⁶

This ability to respond and adapt to evolving crises will depend on whether the three critical factors—decision making, capabilities and budget—will enable or prevent the necessary action. There is currently little room for manoeuvre on all three fronts. Decision making was relatively quick after

⁵² Volpicelli, G., 'Armenia mulling EU membership application, foreign minister says', Politico, 9 Mar. 2024; and European Parliament, Resolution on closer ties between the EU and Armenia and the need for a peace agreement between Azerbaijan and Armenia, 2024/2580(RSP), 13 Mar. 2024.

⁵³ Ngendakumana, P. E., 'Moldova signs security and defense pact with EU', Politico, 21 May 2024.

⁵⁴ Ohanjanyan, M., 'Key elections in EU candidates Georgia and Moldova: Democracy and geopolitics at stake', Clingendael Alert, Oct. 2024.

⁵⁵ Kovalčíková, N., De Agostini, L. and Catena, B., 'Strengthening resilience in the East: How the EU can empower countries against foreign interference', EUISS Brief no. 15, Sep. 2024.

⁵⁶ Niinistö (note 3).



24 February 2022, but the apparent unity among EU member states immediately after Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine dissipated after 7 October 2023 over the Israel– Hamas war—and may not return for some time.⁵⁷ EU member states have committed to investing in capability development for civilian CSDP but several of them are facing shrinking budgets or competing priorities. This includes most of the member states that have been the largest contributors of seconded personnel in civilian CSDP missions. The CFSP budget remains overspent, and no replenishments are expected before the start of the new multiannual financial framework in 2028.

EU member states may therefore face hard choices if they wish to reserve the option of scaling up civilian CSDP engagements and using missions strategically, including in the Eastern Neighbourhood. It is possible that running 12 civilian CSDP missions (in addition to 10 military missions and operations and the EUSDI Gulf of Guinea) is too much to ensure diligent political control and strategic direction from member states and effective planning and conduct by the EEAS. Civilian CSDP already receives little attention from the FAC and the PSC compared to military missions and operations, and CIVCOM is much less influential than the equivalent EU Military Committee (EUMC).⁵⁸ The Civilian Planning and Conduct Capability (CPCC) is being enhanced and upgraded from a de facto to a dedicated, fully-fledged operational headquarters.⁵⁹ However, it remains to be seen whether this will substantially increase the CPCC's capacities and capabilities for command and control or if the changes will be insufficient for that and serve primarily as a rebranding exercise to complete this Civilian CSDP Compact deliverable.⁶⁰

There are experts who have argued that the EU should conduct fewer CSDP missions.⁶¹ An influential report by the EU Institute for Security Studies (EUISS) recommends that the EU prioritize missions which support EU candidate countries and the stabilization of the immediate neighbourhood (such as in the Western Balkans). According to this report, it is not only a matter of resources but also of strategic necessity, as these are countries and regions where the EU's core security interests lie, and where inadequate action could have the most severe consequences for its credibility as a strategic partner and security provider. The report further argues that CSDP missions are more likely to have strategic impact in such countries because member states are more willing to establish robust missions there and are better able to mobilize the necessary capabilities, and because host governments are more likely to buy into them.

Nonetheless, EU member states have proven reluctant to discontinue civilian CSDP missions, even in countries where buy-in from the host government is clearly absent. This reluctance often stems from a fear that closing ineffective missions will do more harm than good in terms of political signaling and EU–host government relations. Notably, the latest progress report

⁵⁷ Balfour, R., 'An obituary for EU foreign policy', Strategic Europe Blog, 3 Sep. 2024.

⁵⁸ Current and former EU and EU member state officials, Interviews with author (note 38).

⁵⁹ Council of the EU, 7371 (note 5).

⁶⁰ Current and former EU and EU member state officials, Interviews with author (note 38).

⁶¹ Andersson, J. J., 'Rethinking CSDP missions and operations', eds. S. Everts and B. Zorić, *Ten Ideas for the New Team: How the EU Can Navigate a Power Political World*, Chaillot Paper no. 185 (EUISS: Sep. 2024).

on the Strategic Compass and the Niinistö report emphasize the trade-offs of disengagement in regions such as the Sahel and the need for ‘principled pragmatism’ in this regard.⁶² Recent discussions on the potential reactivation of EUBAM Rafah, whose operations have been largely suspended since Hamas assumed control of the Gaza strip in 2007, support the opposite argument to above: that it is better to retain a small presence instead of terminating missions that are lacking impact, despite the obvious trade-offs and opportunity costs involved.

V. Towards a more strategic civilian CSDP

In summary, EU member states have taken bold political decisions in the wake of Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine that have shifted the geographical focus of civilian CSDP more firmly to the Eastern Neighbourhood. In doing so, they have raised the geopolitical profile of civilian CSDP in this region, but also the stakes of the missions deployed there and the expectations of their host governments and populations. The decisions to enhance EUAM Ukraine and establish new civilian CSDP missions in Armenia and Moldova have bolstered the EU’s credibility as a civilian crisis management actor, even though these decisions and deployments were somewhat ad hoc and improvised, which is typical for how the EU reacts to crises. Despite the high stakes and expectations, the initial scope and requirements of the new missions did not fully match their actual needs and were likely influenced by capability and resource constraints. Moreover, their relatively swift deployment caused temporary reductions in the operational capacity of other civilian CSDP missions. This raises questions about the sustainability of the current constellation of missions and the general ability of the EU to employ civilian CSDP more strategically and beyond current engagement levels.

Strategic priorities for civilian CSDP in the Eastern Neighbourhood

The Niinistö report, in line with the Strategic Compass and the Civilian CSDP Compact, calls for strengthening the EU’s capacity to support partners and respond to crises, and to reinforce CSDP missions and operations to this end.⁶³ It also calls for the development of an integrated EU approach to address the ‘arc of instability and fragility’ in the wider neighbourhood.⁶⁴ Within such an approach, three strategic priorities arguably emerge for civilian CSDP in the Eastern Neighbourhood. First, missions must be equipped so that they can deliver on their mandates and demonstrate their added value to host governments and populations. This requires robust political backing from EU member states and that missions have adequate dimensions and capabilities. Second, missions deployed in EU candidate countries must support host governments in their EU accession process where possible, within their mandates and aligned with a broader EU strategy. Third, missions must be able to respond and adapt to evolving circumstances and emerging crises in a more strategic way. This requires proactive planning and preparation for

⁶² Andersson (note 61).

⁶³ European External Action Service (EEAS), *Annual Progress Report on the Implementation of the Strategic Compass for Security and Defence* (EEAS: Mar. 2024), p. 5; and Niinistö (note 3), p. 154.

⁶⁴ Niinistö (note 3), p. 154.



different scenarios, so that EU member states can decide and act rapidly when mandates and postures need to be changed. This is particularly important in Ukraine, where outcomes on the battlefield and at the negotiation table will have a major effect on the needs of local counterparts and the support that EUAM Ukraine can provide.

Achieving these priorities and enabling a more strategic civilian CSDP require two key steps. First, member states must strengthen their political control and strategic direction over civilian CSDP missions. Member states should return to having more discussions on the political and strategic objectives of civilian CSDP, instead of only discussing missions individually and focusing on technical issues such as capability development. Second, all three critical enablers of civilian CSDP action—decision making, capabilities and budget—must be enhanced. This is a precondition for strengthening the EU's ability to act and to enable rapid and robust action in the civilian CSDP domain.

The EU and its member states have been addressing some of these needs, but efforts have focused disproportionately on capabilities. The main objective of the previous Civilian CSDP Compact was making civilian CSDP more capable, notably through increased personnel contributions by member states. The Strategic Compass put more emphasis on decision making, stressing the EU's ability to both decide and act. It suggested that constructive abstentions by member states could expedite decision making on CSDP missions and operations. The compass also contained an implicit reference to Article 31(3) of the TEU—the so-called passerelle clause—that allows for qualified majority voting (QMV) in certain areas of the CFSP, including civilian CSDP.⁶⁵ In fact, the Niinistö report recommends this option to facilitate rapid decision making in crises and prevent misuse or instrumentalization of the veto power.⁶⁶ However, several member states are opposed to activating the passerelle clause, which requires a unanimous decision by the European Council.⁶⁷

The Civilian CSDP Compact

The current Civilian CSDP Compact contains several commitments regarding capabilities but does less to address decision making and budget constraints. The establishment of a structured civilian capability development process (CCDP) in 2024 and a civilian level of readiness in 2025 are examples of this.⁶⁸ The CCDP must ensure that capability development at the national level is informed by and matches the requirements of civilian CSDP missions. This should enable EU member states to better align their willingness and their ability to act in this domain. The civilian level of readiness will further operationalize the commitment that the EU should be able to deploy 200 experts in a civilian CSDP mission within 30 days by 2027. The compact also contains a commitment to ensure rapid decision making, but according to the established procedures and without references to constructive absten-

⁶⁵ Council of the EU, 7371 (note 5), p. 14.

⁶⁶ Niinistö (note 3), p. 62.

⁶⁷ Koenig, N., 'Towards QMV in EU foreign policy: Different paths at multiple speeds', Hertie School Policy Brief, 14 Oct. 2022, p. 5.

⁶⁸ Council of the EU, 9588/23 (note 5), pp. 14–16.



tions or QMV.⁶⁹ Moreover, there is a commitment to ensure a ‘more robust and realistic’ CFSP budget, although there are no plans to increase the overall size of the budget during this multiannual financial framework period, which lasts until 2027.⁷⁰

The current compact contains 14 strategic guidelines but does not provide concrete strategic guidance on the overall purpose and goals of civilian CSDP in the context of the increasingly competitive and insecure geopolitical environment. According to the Strategic Compass, the new compact should have defined objectives on the type, number and size of civilian CSDP missions.⁷¹ This was meant to encourage strategic reflections among EU member states about the purpose and appropriate level of ambition for civilian CSDP, which in turn were supposed to inform and define the parameters and criteria of the CCDP, including the requirement list and gap analysis that are part of it.⁷² However, the new compact ended up with strategic guidelines that emphasized the continued ability of the EU to deploy the widest possible range of mission types, and explicitly acknowledged that the size and number of missions would have to be determined by the priorities of the member states and the available capabilities and resources.⁷³

In other words, while member states have taken decisions that have made civilian CSDP more geopolitical, the new compact has demonstrated that they have not yet made it more strategic. New initiatives such as the CCDP are necessary but insufficient for increasing the EU’s ability to act, as civilian CSDP missions require more than just resources to succeed. To make civilian CSDP more proactive and increase the chances of long-term and sustainable impact, enhanced political control and strategic direction from member states are essential. Revisiting questions regarding the appropriate objectives and level of ambition for civilian CSDP could be a useful starting point. This could also help increase the effectiveness and coherence of efforts to address constraints in other areas such as decision making, capabilities and budget.

⁶⁹ Council of the EU, 9588/23 (note 5), p. 7.

⁷⁰ Council of the EU, 9588/23 (note 5), p. 12.

⁷¹ Council of the EU, 7371 (note 5).

⁷² Smit (note 43).

⁷³ Council of the EU, 9588/23 (note 5), p. 5.



VI. Recommendations

- 1. Increase EU member states' political control and strategic direction.* In line with the Civilian CSDP Compact, the incoming High Representative/Vice President (HR/VP) should convene a dedicated political and strategic discussion on civilian CSDP in the FAC as soon as possible. In addition, the PSC should pay more attention to civilian CSDP and CIVCOM should assume a more political and strategic role in guiding CSDP missions, reducing their focus on operational and technical discussions. This shift can be further supported by empowering the new fully-fledged operational headquarters and by equipping it with robust command-and-control capacities.
- 2. Enhance the EU's ability to act strategically using civilian CSDP.* The EU and its member states should address all three enablers of civilian CSDP action—decision making, capabilities and budget—to increase the EU's capacity and preparedness to act, in line with the enhanced strategic direction. Member states should consider the proposal of the Niinistö report to use QMV and constructive abstentions for civilian CSDP more often, as well as options to speed up unanimous decision making according to regular procedures. Further, the EU and its member states should implement the CCDP at EU and national levels, based on realistic scenarios of future needs, and continue efforts to increase the availability of capabilities and capacities for civilian CSDP. EU member states and the European Commission should build flexibility into the CFSP budget to create a strategic reserve, using targeted cost reductions guided by civilian CSDP priorities. EU member states should also aim for a substantial increase in the CFSP budget in the next multiannual financial framework.
- 3. Strengthen civilian CSDP missions in the Eastern Neighbourhood.* EU member states must ensure that the dimensions and capabilities of the missions in the Eastern Neighbourhood match their actual needs, and that they are in the best possible position to deliver on their mandates and meet the expectations of host governments and populations. Given the uncertain trajectory of the war in Ukraine, the EU should develop plans for further adaptations of the mandate and posture of EUAM Ukraine to ensure that it can continue to operate effectively in various post-conflict scenarios, based on the evolving needs of its Ukrainian partners. Member states should consider expanding the capacities of EUMA and EUPM Moldova when they renew their mandates in the first half of 2025, to ensure that these are commensurate with their tasks and responsibilities. Further, EU member states should define the role of civilian CSDP missions in supporting EU candidates in their accession process.
- 4. Review civilian CSDP engagements in other regions.* To achieve all the above and make civilian CSDP more strategic, EU member states should seriously consider reducing the number of civilian CSDP missions that the EU is conducting. A starting point for a critical review of the existing engagements could be to revisit the political and strategic discussion on the level of ambition for civilian CSDP and to define the type, number and size of missions that the EU should be able to conduct. The independent impact evaluations of civilian CSDP missions called for in the Civilian CSDP Compact could also be used as a basis for political discussions about the strategic impact and prioritization of missions, ensuring that lessons learned feed back into decision making. Also in line with the compact, EU member states should define concrete end states in mandates and develop transition strategies for missions that could be replaced by non-CSDP activities. The EU should plan and prepare for the political and operational implications of transitioning or closing civilian CSDP missions, ensuring that decisions are timely and do not undermine EU credibility on the ground.

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SIPRI RESEARCH POLICY PAPER

TOWARDS A MORE STRATEGIC CIVILIAN CSDP: STRENGTHENING EU CIVILIAN CRISIS MANAGEMENT IN A NEW ERA OF GEOPOLITICS AND RISK

TIMO SMIT

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