END OF MISSION: REINVENTING CLOSURE AND TRANSITION PROCESSES IN EU CIVILIAN CSDP

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I. Introduction

Although originally conceived as crisis management tools with limited mandates, intended to lead to follow-up post-crisis engagement, many European Union civilian Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) missions have taken on an almost permanent character. As of February 2026, 7 of the 13 civilian missions were over a decade old and only two had been closed in the previous ten years. Practitioners argue that civilian CSDP missions are long overdue for substantive revision of both the governance of the instrument and its operational deployment.[1] The EU has not made a deliberate decision to wind down and transition a civilian CSDP mission since the closure of the EU Police Mission (EUPOL) in Afghanistan in 2016. Instead, mandate renewals or adjustments have been the preferred option presented to EU member states in the strategic reviews developed by the European External Action Service (EEAS) that guide member state decision making. The long-running missions in Kosovo and Georgia have been trimmed rather than terminated. Missions in the Sahel have been extended despite deteriorating political conditions. The EU Border Assistance Mission (EUBAM) in Libya has been periodically suspended, refocused and extended. Meanwhile, the two oldest missions, EUBAM Rafah and the EU Police Mission for the Support of Palestinian Police and Rule of Law (EUPOL COPPS), have found renewed political weight following the war in Gaza. This has meant reactivation of the Rafah mission after 17 years of suspension. Continuity has become the default in civilian CSDP. However, its credibility and utility are constrained by the difficulty of ending missions in the time span originally envisaged and transitioning tasks to other parts of the EU toolkit, member states or partners.[2] There is a growing demand

SUMMARY

● European Union civilian Common Security and Defence Policy (EU CSDP) missions were designed as time-limited tools. Yet many persist for years—tying up scarce resources and limiting new deployments. This paper argues that the EU needs an updated closure and transition policy to react to new priorities in the absence of matching budget growth.

Civilian CSDP missions have become 'stuck' due to rushed and overambitious mandates, weakly defined end-states and strategic reviews that do not enable political decisions beyond routine extensions. Civilian CSDP needs to develop a culture of planned endings by strengthening political steering, and requiring realistic end-states and exit strategies from the start. Closure and transition should also be linked to evidence, partners and funding so that handovers are orderly and sustainable. Staying too long can undermine both the mission's and EU's credibility.

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[1] The findings in this publication are supported by 18 author interviews with officials from EU member state foreign affairs ministries (EU member state official), the EU External Action Service (EEAS official), the European Commission (Commission official) and staff from civilian CSDP missions (CSDP mission staff member), which took place Sep.–Nov. 2025.

[2] Ruohomäki, O. and Ruohomäki, J., 'Crisis management policies and practices: In fragile contexts, less is more', FIIA Working Paper no. 134 (Aug. 2023); Benkler, M. et al., *White Dove Down? Peace Operations and the Zeitenwende* (Center for International Peace Operations: Berlin, Apr. 2023); and Nowak, A. (ed.), 'Civilian crisis management: The EU way', Chaillot Paper no. 90 (June 2006).

for the ability to act in a rapid and politically relevant way and a growing conviction that the EU cannot afford 'forever missions'.[3]

This paper argues that the EU must reform its civilian CSDP mission closure and transition policy to improve mission turnover and better deploy its resources (section II). It examines why missions remain stuck (section III), reviews previous EU and UN mission transitions (section IV), and proposes policy solutions to enable planned and orderly transitions (section V).

II. Triggers for a policy update on closures and transitions

In recent years, the number of missions in the EU's Eastern Neighbour-hood has increased and the EU Advisory Mission (EUAM) in Ukraine has been strengthened following Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022. However, the funding for civilian CSDP missions has not increased and only one older mission has closed. Financial constraints therefore limit the scope of these new deployments.[4] This has been labelled an example of 'accidental geopolitics' driving civilian CSDP. Political unity on supporting Ukraine and shoring up neighbouring states has created a unique window for adding new missions while systemic issues in the governance of civilian CSDP prevent a balancing round of closures, spreading the instrument too thin.[5] Member states and the EEAS are attuned to the problems of closing and transition-ing missions and have committed in the 2023 Civilian CSDP Compact to include in the guidance provided to civilian missions precise and achievable end-states, as well as transition and exit strategies that take account of local ownership.[6]

The single mission closure that has taken place in recent years is the expulsion of the EU Capacity Building Mission (EUCAP) Sahel Niger by the country's new military junta in December 2023. This rare case was a warning sign for civilian CSDP, exposing political, strategic and operational fragilities in the instrument and demonstrating that civilian CSDP is not exempt from growing host-state reluctance to accept international interventions, and a willingness by some to benefit from their departure.[7] It also highlights that in the absence of a deliberate EU exit strategy, closures can happen ad hoc in crisis conditions. Transitional regimes in Mali and Burkina Faso have also expelled international actors, citing infringement of sovereignty and the ineffectiveness of the intervention, and signalling a recalibration of their foreign relations.[8] Even in cases such as the Central African Republic or Libya, the appetite for long-term foreign presences is declining, as governments

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[3] Benkler et al. (note 2), pp. 36–41.

[4] EU member state official I, 30 Oct. 2025; and EU member state official J, 31 Oct. 2025.

[5] Smit, T., 'Towards a more strategic civilian CSDP: Strengthening EU civilian crisis management in a new era of geopolitics and risk', SIPRI Research Policy Paper (Nov. 2024); and Helwig, N., 'The EU's accidental geopolitics: Europe's geopolitical adaptation and its limits', FIIA Working Paper no. 138 (May 2024).

[6] Council of the European Union, 'Conclusions of the Council and 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.

[7] Wilen, N., 'Procurement by proxy: How Sahelian juntas acquire equipment from ousted security partners', Egmont Policy Brief no. 338 (Mar. 2024).

[8] Klyszcz, I. and Marangio, R., 'The multi-aligned Sahel: Reframing the EU's role in a crowded region', European Union Institute for Security Studies Brief no. 28 (Nov. 2025).

increasingly prefer bilateral security cooperation or Russian and regional alternatives.

In sum, without an active closure and transition policy, adding new missions at a time of static budgets will continue to stretch resources and undermine the attractiveness of civilian CSDP missions to host states. This underscores the urgent need to revise the EU's approach to mission closure and transition.

Role of principled closures

The findings from the interviews indicate that civilian CSDP is most valuable to member states when it can deploy early, adapt as the situation develops and redeploy quickly as needs evolve. Improving closure and transition processes would enhance the responsiveness and flexibility of the instrument. Treating closure and transition as integral phases of the mission life cycle and planning them from the start would also release scarce personnel, while also freeing up EEAS resources and member state political attention for new priorities as they arise. Disciplined drawdown and handover mechanisms are required to free capacity when objectives are met or contexts shift. This need is made more pressing by the recognized limits on capability development by civilian CSDP, including on the EU's long-standing ambition to be able to deploy 200 experts within 30 days. Thus, delivering on the 2023 Civilian CSDP Compact's commitment to precise and achievable end-states, as well as transition and exit strategies, is a precondition for meeting the Compact's agility pledge.[9]

Developing a more disciplined approach to closure and transition might also improve the effectiveness of ongoing missions by amplifying the time-limited nature of deployments.[10] Missions that operate based on clear theories of change and time-bound end-states, and are able to hand over remaining tasks, are more likely to deliver measurable results than open-ended presences.[11] Civilian deployments that linger without clear and achievable end-states risk reinforcing local power asymmetries and inadvertently entrenching the status quo they set out to change. These unintended consequences have been documented in long-running EU missions where daily problem solving turns into routine management of conflict dynamics rather than attempts at reform.[12] Staying too long can be as or more harmful than leaving too early.

Finally, there is also a credibility argument for improving transitions and closures. Well-managed exits demonstrate strategic maturity and commitment to sustainability, allowing the EU to conclude missions responsibly while cementing a positive legacy. In doing so, the EU amplifies its role as a geopolitical actor dedicated to international peace and security.

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[9] Council of the European Union (note 6), p. 7.

[10] EEAS official A, 6 Oct. 2025; EU member state official B, 17 Oct. 2025; EU member state official C, 17 Oct. 2025; and EU civilian CSDP mission staff B, 17 Nov. 2025.

[11] Benkler et al. (note 2), pp. 36–41.

[12] Bouris, D., 'Unintended consequences of state-building in contested states: The EU in Palestine', *International Spectator*, 1 Mar. 2019.

Current policy on ending missions

Policy on mission closure and transition was established in the early years of civilian CSDP and is overdue for an update. The first 'suggestions for procedures for coherent, comprehensive EU crisis management' in 2003 discussed a phased approach to deploying civilian CSDP missions and specific responsibilities for mission termination in the final phase of a mission's life cycle.[13] The termination process was detailed further in a 2006 concept paper, which foresaw an increase in mission closures due to their time-limited nature.[14] In 2013, the concept paper was integrated into 'suggestions for crisis management procedures for CSDP crisis management operations'. Known as the CMP, this 2013 text is still the defining document governing how transitions and closures are addressed in the planning and review of civilian CSDP missions.[15] While the CMP has never been formally adopted by the member states, the planning templates that it contains prescribe that end-states and exit strategies should be addressed in the crisis management concept (CMC) and reviewed in strategic reviews. While providing structure, the CMP omits specific guidance on how end-states should be defined and advise strategic reviews to 'address the "delta" between current situation and EU end-state'.[16] The document contains similarly vague language on exit strategies. The CMP tasks strategic reviews with including options for future engagement, estimates of resource implications, and assumptions on and conditions for success. Finally, after a civilian CSDP mission has closed, its liquidation is governed by a specific vademecum on financial and accounting procedures for CSDP missions.[17] Since these policy documents were published, no further guidance on closure and transition has been developed. However, recommendations have been made internally within the EEAS on updating policy and developing specific guidelines on closure and transition, and developing a practical handbook to guide these processes.[18] Transitions have also been included in the priorities for the EU–UN strategic partnership on peace operations and crisis management, but this high-level commitment is yet to translate into concrete EU policy changes on mission transition.[19]

III. Why are missions not being closed or transitioned?

Understanding the current stasis in civilian CSDP is a starting point for building a functional approach to closure and transition. The control and governance of civilian CSDP exist within a hierarchy of the EU member

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[13] Council of the European Union, 'Suggestions for procedures for coherent, comprehensive EU crisis management', Brussels, 11127/03, 3 July 2003.

[14] Council of the European Union, 'Concept paper on procedures for the termination, extension and refocusing of an EU civilian crisis management operation', 5136/06, 9 Jan. 2006.

[15] Council of the European Union, 'Suggestions for crisis management procedures for CSDP crisis management operations', Brussels, 7660/2/13, 18 June 2013.

[16] Council of the European Union, 7660/2/13 (note 15).

[17] Commission official A, 3 Nov. 2025.

[18] EEAS official B, 10 Oct. 2025.

[19] Council of the European Union, 'Council conclusions on taking the UN–EU Strategic Partnership on Peace Operations and Crisis Management to the next level: Priorities 2022–2024', 5451/22, Brussels, 24 Jan. 2022; and Council of the European Union, 'Council conclusions on upgrading the EU–UN Strategic Partnership on Peace and Security: Joint priorities 2025–2028', 14054/25, Brussels, 20 Oct. 2025.

states, the EEAS and the European Commission, as well as the missions. To understand the reasons behind the lack of regular mission closures since 2016, the gaps in the synergies between the three levels need to be understood, as each level is reliant on the other and serves specific functions in the civilian CSDP triad.[20]

Political inertia between the member states

Civilian CSDP is fundamentally a political instrument that is subject to European Council procedures. Issues related to unanimity have long plagued EU decision making and are not limited to foreign policy.[21] This consensus-based decision making is seen as the key driver of the persistence of CSDP civilian missions, even in situations where their utility is questioned.[22] Member states' strategic interests in civilian CSDP diverge both geographically, linked to the enduring divide between eastern and southern member states, and thematically, as member states have preferences for different aspects of mission mandates.[23] In practice, this means that member states defend their priority missions and advocate for their foreign policy priorities to be included in mission mandates, leading to broad 'Christmas tree' mandates which are hard to implement fully and coherently.[24] These divergent strategic interests combined with a lack of qualified majority voting (QMV) are seen as preventing targeted and unified decisions on mission mandates that represent the EU as a whole, and on end-states and exit strategies.[25]

The unanimity issue inhibits member state discussions on when or how to conclude a specific mission, even if only one member state strongly prioritizes retaining the mission. It is difficult to declare a mission's vaguely defined end-state achieved or to plan a withdrawal that addresses the continuing interests of all member states in the host state and region. In place of unified decision making, a transactionalist approach arises as member states often support extending missions that matter to one or more partners, expecting the same courtesy for their own priority missions.[26] This political trade-off means that even underperforming or outdated missions rarely face concerted pressure to close. In the few instances where closure efforts have taken place in recent years, a single member state has effectively blocked them by putting its political weight behind a demand to extend the mission.[27] As the closure of a mission is rarely a priority for any member state, they tend to acquiesce to these extension demands to avoid escalating the disagreement.

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[20] European Centre of Excellence for Civilian Crisis Management, 'Strengthening civilian CSDP through enhanced application of the EU's integrated approach', Baseline Document for the CoE's Civilian CSDP Summer Forum, Berlin, 2024, p. 2.

[21] European Parliament, *Qualified Majority Voting in Common Foreign and Security Policy* (European Parliament Research Service: Brussels, Aug. 2023).

[22] EEAS official C, 14 Oct. 2025; EU member state official B, 17 Oct. 2025; EU member state official F, 23 Oct. 2025; EU member state official G, 24 Oct. 2025; and EU member state official H, 24 Oct. 2025.

[23] Karjalainen, T. and Savoranta, V., 'The EU's strategic approach to CSDP interventions: Building a tenet from praxis', Finnish Institute of International Affairs (FIIA) Analysis no. 11 (Oct. 2021), p. 14.

[24] van der Lijn, J., *Fit for Purpose: Effective Peace Operation Partnerships in an Era of Non-Traditional Security Challenges*, Final Report of the New Geopolitics of Peace Operations III Initiative (SIPRI: Stockholm, Feb. 2024), p. 22.

[25] European Parliament (note 21); and Smit (note 5).

[26] Karjalainen and Savoranta (note 23); and EEAS official C, 14 Oct. 2025.

[27] EU member state official A, 15 Sep. 2025; EU member state official B, 17 Oct. 2025; and EU member state official C, 17 Oct. 2025.

Confrontations in the Political and Security Committee (PSC) or its advisory body, the Committee for Civilian Aspects of Crisis Management (CivCom), are rare. Each mission usually has a constituency of supporters among the member states, due to specific mandate-related or geographic interests, leadership roles or personnel secondments. The PSC therefore tends to pre-default to roll over mandates ahead of formally addressing the topic, to avoid non-constructive confrontations over a member state's priority mission. As a result, the space for CivCom to discuss and further define the options presented in strategic reviews is constrained.[28] Meanwhile, as the time allocated for discussion of civilian CSDP priorities in the PSC has been cut, and the Foreign Affairs Council (FAC) does not address the topic, the window of opportunity to propose repositioning civilian CSDP missions has diminished.[29]

Alongside the foreign policy priorities of individual member states, there are also common reasons for the reluctance to end missions. It has been argued that symbolic and credibility-related political motives drive the launch of civilian missions, but they are also a primary factor in keeping civilian CSDP missions on the ground.[30] To member states, missions are a tangible sign of the EU's commitment to a state or region. Member state governments have at times valued the vaguely defined visibility of having an EU mission in a country above the mission's measurable impact on the ground.[31] Making visibility a driver of new missions has in turn led to the assumption by member states that ending a mission could be politically interpreted as a retreat.[32] Member states are wary of the potential message that a withdrawal would send to the host country and to global partners or rivals. While an intangible visibility value of having an intervention in place has been observed from other, larger interventions, there is no clear evidence that the withdrawal of small CSDP missions has had any negative signalling-related effects. Previous worries linked to the EU ending a civilian mission have been expressed following mission closures in Bosnia and Herzegovina (2012), the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC, 2014) and Afghanistan (2016), but these negative effects were alleviated by the relatively small scale of the missions and the timing of withdrawal, as well as active communication around transitions. Broader criticism has been levied at the EU regarding insufficient implementation of mission aims and politically motivated early withdrawals that left the mandated aims of missions unmet. Deployments that do not live up to their ambition seem to have a greater negative effect on the EU's credibility than concluding missions in a principled way.

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[28] EEAS official E, 21 Oct. 2025; EU member state official A, 15 Sep. 2025; and EU member state official, 30 Oct. 2025.

[29] EU member state official B, 17 Oct. 2025; EU member state official C, 17 Oct. 2025; EU member state official D, 21 Oct. 2025; EU member state official E, 21 Oct. 2025; EU member state official F, 23 Oct. 2025; and EEAS official C, 14 Oct. 2025.

[30] EU civilian CSDP mission staff A, 28 Oct. 2025; EU member state official A, 15 Sep. 2025; and EU member state official I, 30 Oct. 2025.

[31] Nowak (note 2), p. 87; and EU member state official A, 15 Sep. 2025.

[32] Smit (note 5), p. 15; EEAS official C, 14. Oct. 2025; EU member state official I, 30 Oct. 2025; and EU member state official J, 31 Oct. 2025.

Bureaucratic silos and path dependencies

As the EU institution responsible for CSDP missions, the EEAS connects member states with the missions in the civilian CSDP triad and is the key actor in mission planning and review, as well as in reporting to member states. Alongside the EEAS, the Commission's Foreign Policy Instrument (FPI) handles the financial administration of civilian CSDP missions. It is at this procedural level that mission lifespans take shape.[33]

The EU's planning process for civilian missions, based on the CMP, is focused on launching missions rather than closing them. During the preparatory phase of a mission, rather than designing a complete, coherent life cycle for the mission based on local ownership, the emphasis is often on rapid identification of niches that fit the predetermined interests of member states and capability-linked activities that the EU can perform.[34] Analyses of CSDP planning note that this technical orientation concentrates on rapid development of EU inputs into a current crisis, rather than identifying whether it is possible through these inputs to achieve a combination of political conditions and mission progress to allow an honourable exit in due course.[35] This front-focused planning process, combined with political pressure to launch quickly, is seen as resulting in missions that tend to underperform on overambitious mandates, leading to stagnation and an inability to exit.[36] Case study evidence demonstrates a path dependency in the CSDP planning process, whereby strategic and operational planners in the EEAS are obliged to develop objectives and tasks for the mission to fulfil the member states' varied political interests, well aware that member states will have the final say on the Operations Plan (OPLAN).[37] Lack of time at the tail-end of the political–strategic–operational planning continuum further constrains effective weaving of the different activity strands into a coherent whole. Experience of the launch of new missions in 2023 highlights only days to finalize some elements of the planning.[38]

There are also timing issues during missions. The European Court of Auditors has observed that the mandates of civilian CSDP missions are too short to achieve their intended end-states.[39] The dichotomy between the overall goal of a mission and its short-term mandate to achieve this goal remains unresolved. The resulting missions end up with mandates that are too short, too broad and incoherent, and lack a thought-through endgame.

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[33] Gross, E., 'Exit strategies: What's in a name?', European Union Institute for Security Studies Brief no. 23 (July 2014), pp. 1–3; and EU member state official J, 31 Oct. 2025.

[34] Bergmann, J. and Muller, P., 'Failing forward in the EU's Common Security and Defence Policy: The integration of EU crisis management', *Journal of European Public Policy*, vol. 28, no. 10 (July 2021), pp. 1669–87; EU member state official D, 21 Oct. 2025; EU member state official E, 21 Oct. 2025; EEAS official D, 24 Oct. 2025; and EU civilian CSDP mission staff A, 28 Oct. 2025.

[35] Gross (note 34), pp. 1–3.

[36] Mattelaer, A., 'The CSDP mission planning process of the European Union: Innovations and shortfalls', eds S. Vanhoonacker, H. Djikstra and H. Mauer, *Understanding the Role of Bureaucracy in the European Security and Defence Policy*, *European Integration Online Papers*, Special issue, vol. 14.

[37] Grilj, B. and Zupancic, R., 'Assessing the planning and implementation of the EU Rule of Law Missions: Case study of EULEX Kosovo', *European Perspective*, vol. 8, no. 2 (Oct. 2016); EEAS official E, 29 Oct. 2025.

[38] EU member state official D, 21 Oct. 2025; and EU member state official F, 23 Oct. 2025.

[39] European Court of Auditors, 'Strengthening the capacity of internal security forces in Niger and Mali: Only limited and slow progress', Luxembourg, Special Report no. 15 (2018), p. 39.

Once missions are up and running, the strategic review process is the main instrument by which the EEAS can periodically assess them. Based on the CMP, strategic reviews should evaluate how close a mission is to its end-state, whether the end-state or mission is still relevant and what adjustments or transitions are needed.[40] In practice, however, strategic reviews have not been effective at driving closure decisions, and rarely suggest options for closure and transition.[41] One reason is, again, timing. Reviews are often completed only three to seven months before the mission's current mandate is due to expire, leaving little time for member states to build agreement on their results and limiting the options to rolling the mission over for another mandate cycle. If a review were to suggest shutting down a mission and the member states agreed, a specific closure mandate would be required to plan any follow-up, and to negotiate and communicate a handover with the local authorities.

If a mission has a member state champion, the timing is irrelevant. EEAS officials know that any proposal to close such a mission will run into a political wall, making them disinclined to push for it. Instead, the default solution is to propose mission continuation. As such patronage exists for practically all missions, discussing end-states and exit strategies in the strategic reviews has become largely irrelevant. The increasing pace of change in the political and security environments of missions compounds this problem as the EEAS and member states struggle to maintain timely joint stances on all 13 existing missions.

A strategic review methodology that requires a specific process for evaluating and readjusting the end-state and exit strategy is seen as a way to rectify the gap.[42] While the EEAS briefs member states on the working method for strategic reviews and holds informal discussions ahead of reviews, no methodology has been presented to member states, even though this is required by the civilian CSDP Compact. There is no formal requirement for each mission's continued existence to be justified against the alternative of closure at each mandate renewal. Moreover, the sharing of information during reviews can be patchy, relying on personalities, networks and tacit institutional memory rather than an explicit systematic approach to knowledge management, which is another Compact commitment.[43] To correct this knowledge deficit, a new approach to impact evaluations was established in 2024, based on the Compact.[44] The initial pilot evaluation of the EU Rule of Law mission (EULEX) in Kosovo struggled to influence the strategic review, due to timing and institutional resistance in the EEAS.[45] Nonetheless, the new tool has leadership support and is on track to produce annual evaluations.[46]

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[40] Council of the European Union, 7660/2/13 (note 15), p. 35.

[41] EU member state official D, 21 Oct. 2025; and EU member state official J, 31 Oct. 2025.

[42] Council of the European Union (note 6); EU member state official A, 15 Sep. 2025; and EU member state official J, 31 Oct. 2025.

[43] European Centre of Excellence for Civilian Crisis Management (note 20), p. 8; Council of the European Union, 9588/23 (note 6); and EU member state official J, 31 Oct. 2025.

[44] Council of the European Union, 9588/23 (note 6); and Ruohomäki, J., 'Effectiveness: The missing word in civilian crisis management', Peacelab blog, 24 July 2019.

[45] EU member state official A, 15 Sep. 2025; EU member state official B, 17 Oct. 2025; EU member state official D, 21 Oct. 2025; EU member state official G, 24 Oct. 2025; EEAS official B, 10 Oct. 2025; and EEAS official E, 29 Oct. 2025.

[46] Esser, A., *Future-proofing Civilian CSDP in a Challenging Strategic Environment: Seven Questions for Debate* (SIPRI: Stockholm, Jan. 2026); and EEAS official D, 24 Oct. 2025.

The specific relationship of impact evaluations to strategic reviews remains to be codified and implemented in practice. The sustainability of the evaluation tool also remains open to question, as it relies on member state secondments to function, and it increases the already strained workload of delegates and officials to utilize another information-dense report.

A final institutional factor keeping missions open is the lack of effective coordination between the EEAS and the European Commission on transitions. The relationship is largely financial, as the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) budget that funds Civilian CSDP is managed by the Commission's Service for Foreign Policy Instruments. The Commission also funds a range of parallel long-term capacity building or governance reform actions as part of the Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI), with at times overlapping objectives. Handover from CSDP to Commission is seldom smooth, as there is no established playbook for transitioning from a CSDP mission to other EU instruments, which there is for the detailed planning done at the start of missions. Analysis of the type discussed in the Political Framework for Crisis Approach (PFCA) is not carried out after initial mission launch. The result is a procedural gap in mapping what a host country would need post-mission and how different EU actors and international partners could fill the void. This lack of shared situational analysis contributes to siloing between partially overlapping EEAS-led crisis management and Commission-led development and capacity building.[47] The end result is missed potential transition windows and opportunities for CSDP exit, demonstrating that turf wars still impact the effectiveness of EU foreign policy.[48]

Entrenched missions

At the mission level, open-ended deployments breed their own social and organizational inertia. As the political and institutional challenges of civilian CSDP governance are compounded and reach the mission level, there is little space for missions to break free and complete their mandates. Inadequate political and institutional oversight means that missions rarely receive direction to get the job done. Instead, they slide into quasi-permanent status and routine.[49]

Missions' political purpose and technical mandates mean that mission personnel build close relationships with host-country counterparts and stake out a role in the international community in the country. Over time, these relationships make the missions part of the status quo and create feedback loops. Good relations with the host government and its reliance on the mission's contribution is cited by member state champions as justification for keeping the mission in place, even though the mission might not be making progress towards its intended end-state.[50] This operational entrenchment is compounded by social entrenchment linked to an increasing reliance

[47] EEAS official A, 6 Oct. 2025; EEAS official B, 10 Oct. 2025; EEAS official E, 29 Oct. 2025; EU member state official D, 21 Oct. 2025; and Commission official A, 3 Nov. 2025.

[48] Korski, D. and Gowan, R., *Can the EU Rebuild Failing States? A Review of Europe's Civilian Capacities* (European Council on Foreign Relations: London, Oct. 2009), p. 53.

[49] Karjalainen and Savoranta (note 23), p. 17.

[50] EEAS official A, 6 Oct. 2025.

on contracted staff in civilian CSDP missions, due to falling member state secondment rates. Contracted staff are not rotated as member state secondees are, so missions accrue long-term contracted staff, with whom much of the institutional memory of the missions' rests. Long-term employment also leads to socialization and settling in, increasing personal motivations for mission retention.[51] Recognizing the issue, the Civilian Operations Headquarters of the EEAS has recently issued instructions to missions on limiting the duration of employment of contracted staff.[52] The combined effects of the institutionalization of the mission and socialization of its staff make closure emotionally and politically unattractive.

Entrenchment creates motives for missions to pursue preservation. This is demonstrated in their reporting, in which missions tend to lobby for their own survival and even expansion.[53] This is most evident in the six-monthly reports (SMR) that form the core reporting of civilian CSDP missions and are seen as overly optimistic by their recipients. SMRs tend to highlight quantitative accomplishments and activities while sidestepping deficiencies in the mission's current set-up. Missions often report output-related metrics that are easy to count, such as training delivered, equipment donated and meetings held. This reliance on positive, activity-based reporting is seen as the easiest way to present an optimistic picture of the mission.[54] Member states are aware of this tendency and rely on their seconded staff inside missions and national representations to obtain unvarnished information, in the knowledge that formal reports are 'filtered'. When official reporting is not candid, there is a risk that problems in the mission fester or lessons go unlearned. In addition, driving member states to other information sources means that the knowledge base for decision making is fragmented, as the sources of each member state differ. The SMRs rarely recommend downscaling or terminating missions' tasks, units or staff positions. Mission leadership frequently request additional staff and extended mandates, since a larger mission is equated with greater importance. Conversely, proposing a drawdown or closure of even components of the mission may be seen internally as diminishing the EU's influence or admitting that an investment has run its course, leading to member state detachment. This bureaucratic self-preservation instinct contributes to a culture in which scaling back is resisted.

Spiralling into stasis

The dynamics observed at the political, institutional and mission levels of civilian CSDP feed into and interact with each other, creating a cycle of

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[51] EEAS official A, 6 Oct. 2025; and EU civilian CSDP mission staff member B, 17 Nov. 2025.

[52] EU member state official D, 21 Oct. 2025.

[53] Issues related to reporting were widely mentioned in the interviews conducted for this publication. EU member state official A, 15 Sep. 2025; EU member state official B, 17 Oct. 2025; EU member state official D, 21 Oct. 2025; EU member state official F, 23 Oct. 2025; EU member state official G, 24 Oct. 2025; EU member state official H, 24 Oct. 2025; EU member state official I, 30 Oct. 2025; EEAS official B, 10 Oct. 2025; EEAS official D, 24 Oct. 2025; Civilian CSDP staff member A, 28 Oct. 2025; and Civilian CSDP staff member B, 17 Nov. 2025.

[54] 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: Stockholm, May 2024).

obstruction that perpetuates missions, regardless of their performance. The foundations of the cycle are rooted in the Treaty on European Union. Member states' decision making in the PSC and CivCom is bound by consensus-based Council procedures, leading to decision making that is often based on lowest common denominator solutions.[55] In the case of missions with greater member state interest, the result is broad, incoherent mandates with unclear end-states. For older missions reliant on one or a few member state champions, it is simply retention, often with only signalling value for most member states. Through the conflicted decision-making process, member states send an implicit message to the EEAS that proposing a drawdown would be unwelcome. In response, the EEAS conducts mission planning and reviews with an expectation of continuity, shying away from recommendations to terminate operations. Without pressure to push for an exit, or the means to achieve it, civilian CSDP missions conduct business-as-usual. Over time, the missions and their staff become part of the local fabric, creating motivations for their continued existence. Mission reports highlighting ongoing activity and incremental progress land on the desks of member states as justification that the mission remains useful. This optimistic reporting serves the interests of the member state champions of the mission and is used to argue for extension. This completes the loop and the mission persists. Over time, the cycle reinforces itself and creates a culture of restraint and favourable portrayals. While some member states, or even individual delegates or officials, struggle against the loop, it only takes one motivated member state to continue it.

The overall result is a downward spiral in effectiveness. As member states become disillusioned with reform attempts, they cut down their staff contributions and guidance, and they acquiesce to the instrument becoming a signalling tool focused on a symbolic EU presence. Missions that are struggling or strategically obsolete are not decisively reformed or closed. Instead, they linger on with unrealized ambitions and resources. This perpetuation of ineffective missions has a strategic cost. It erodes the credibility of civilian CSDP and the EU's ability to act. When the EU consistently sustains missions that achieve only limited impact, it signals an inability to adapt or prioritize. Financial, human and decision-making resources are tied up in operations that poorly fit the conditions they are placed in, which also limits the EU's flexibility to respond to new crises. Moreover, partners and host countries might start to view these missions as token presences rather than agents of real change.

In sum, interlocking political, institutional and mission-level dynamics trap EU civilian missions in a state of questionable effectiveness but political untouchability. Diagnosing this pattern—whereby everyone's interest in keeping the mission running ends up undermining the very purpose of the mission itself—is the first step in understanding why transitions and closures have become so difficult in EU civilian crisis management.

IV. Learning from previous closures and transitions

The long interval since the last regular civilian CSDP mission withdrawal means that institutional memory on closure and transition has been

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[55] Bergmann and Muller (note 34).

understandably weakened. This makes a review of the previous round of mission closures and transitions in 2012–16 the place to start rebuilding operational practice. Lessons can also be drawn from an examination of UN policy and practice.

The politics of CSDP mission withdrawals

Political agreement by EU member states ahead of strategic reviews has been a key enabler in previous mission closures. The withdrawal of the EU Police Mission (EUPM) in Bosnia and Herzegovina in 2012 demonstrated a model of constructive negotiations between the key member states that supported or opposed extending the mission. While there was disagreement on whether to close, a compromise was reached in advance of the strategic review, albeit following high-level discussions.[56] The example of EUPM Bosnia and Herzegovina also demonstrates the role of civilian CSDP in wider EU foreign policy, as closure of the mission was guided by an overall reshuffle in EU policy on Bosnia and Herzegovina.[57] While rare, a single member state can force an agreement to end a civilian CSDP mission by blocking the required unanimity for mission extension. This was the case with the EU Integrated Rule of Law Mission for Iraq (EUJUST LEX).[58] Taking such a stand requires a principled approach, as the member states that champion a mission are likely to defend their priorities.

Alongside early political realignment, the presence of other international actors makes decisions on CSDP withdrawal easier for member states, as does small CSDP mission size. In the closure of EUPOL RD Congo in 2014, evaluations of bilateral member state policing projects described a crowded assistance landscape. In such conditions, an advisory CSDP mission with 40 staff added less value for the member states than larger, programmable cooperation managed by the EU Delegation and partners.[59] This made negotiating the mission's conclusion easier. Behind the scenes, however, there were again holdouts among a few member states and a similar push by the mission for its continuation, as was the case in Bosnia and Herzegovina.[60]

Security issues are also effective in aligning member states' decision making, as demonstrated by the closure of EUPOL Afghanistan, which was synchronized with the withdrawal of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF). Without NATO's robust military presence, member states deemed it too perilous for an EU civilian mission to continue operating in the country.[61] The security-driven withdrawal of the mission helped member states reach unanimity, and there was only limited opposition to ending the mission.[62] Iraq demonstrated an indirect link between security and mission closure, as the mission had to operate largely outside of Iraq for security reasons, increasing costs and making closure attractive to budget-conscious

[56] Atlantic Initiative, 'Will Sorensen's office take over EUPM work?', Blog post, 18 Oct. 2011.
[57] Vogel, T., 'EU to close police mission in Bosnia', Politico, 21 Sep. 2011.
[58] Gardner, A., 'Justice mission in Iraq to close', Politico, 18 Dec. 2013.
[59] Palladium, Independent Evaluation of the Security Sector Accountability and Police Reform Programme, Final Evaluation Report, Dec. 2015.
[60] EEAS official A, 6 Oct. 2025; and EU member state official J, 31 Oct. 2025.
[61] Pfeifer, C. and van der Lijn, J., 'Multilateral peace operations in Afghanistan between 2001 and 2021', SIPRI Commentary, 16 Sep. 2021.
[62] EU member state official A, 15 Sep. 2025; and EU member state official I, 30 Oct. 2025.

member states.[63] The forced closure of EUCAP Sahel Niger is the clearest example of security-driven closure, as antagonistic behaviour by the host state towards the mission and its staff hastened mission closure.[64]

As civilian CSDP missions are used as political signalling tools, their withdrawal often requires careful communication to avoid perceptions that the EU's interest in a country is diminishing. The withdrawal of civilian CSDP missions is routinely communicated as the result of host states' development and progress, and as completion of a mission's mandate.[65] Nonetheless, it should be noted that claims of successful mandate completion were uniformly disparaged in the 2012–16 round of mission closures. For example, EUPM Bosnia and Herzegovina was criticized for failing to achieve its mandated goal of developing a sustainable, professional and multi-ethnic police service based on international standards.[66] As EUPOL Afghanistan's withdrawal coincided with and was partly the result of a broader international exit, its reception was entangled with wider negative perceptions of the international commitment to Afghanistan. The limited scope and visibility of civilian CSDP missions seem to inhibit more serious criticism, however, as people simply do not know about them.[67] Overall, it seems that the reputation of or narrative regarding a mission is established during the mission and is not substantially altered by the manner of its exit.

Planning successful withdrawals

Early political agreement gives planners direction to focus on withdrawal, instead of developing options for member states to decide on. The time constraints of strategic reviews have made final mandates focused on transition a mainstay of withdrawal-oriented planning processes. For example, following a political agreement, a 2011 strategic review concluded that EUPM Bosnia and Herzegovina had added its value and presented a detailed option for the mission's withdrawal, leading to a Council decision on a six-month closure mandate.[68] This involved a structured handover based on a Commission plan drafted at the same time. The closure of EUPOL RD Congo in 2014 followed a similar trajectory. The mission was given a 12-month final mandate alongside the EU's military Security Sector Reform Mission (EUSEC) RD Congo in order to synchronize their withdrawals, although the military mission ended up being extended.[69] For EUJUST LEX Iraq, the final mandate was

[63] Gardner (note 58).

[64] Hoffmann, H., 'Polizei durchsucht EU-Mission in Niger und beschlagnahmt Waffen' [Police search EU mission in Niger and seize weapons], *Spiegel*, 23 Feb. 2024.

[65] Vogel (note 57); b92.net, 'EU police mission leaves Bosnia-Herzegovina', 30 June 2012; and European Union External Action Service, 'The EU Police Mission in Afghanistan comes to a successful close after nine years of progress', Press release, 14 Dec. 2016.

[66] Lyon, J., 'EU's Bosnia police mission is "laughing stock"', International Crisis Group, 15 Sep. 2005; and Gross, E., 'The end of the EU Police Mission in Bosnia and Herzegovina: What lessons for the Common Security and Defence Policy?' *European Policy Centre Policy Brief*, 13 June 2012.

[67] Echavez, C. R. and Suroush, Q., 'Good intentions, mixed results: A conflict sensitive unpacking of the EU comprehensive approach to conflict and crisis mechanisms' EUNPACK, 30 Sep. 2017.

[68] Council of the European Union, 'Council Decision 2011/781/CSFP of 1 December 2011 on the European Union Police Mission (EUPM) in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH)', *Official Journal of the European Union*, L319/51, 1 Dec. 2011; and EU member state official J, 31 Oct. 2025.

[69] Council of the European Union, 'EU missions in the Democratic Republic of the Congo extended', Press release, Brussels, 23 Sep. 2013.

18 months, without clear transition tasks.[70] By the time EUPOL Afghanistan closed, the handover mandate had already stretched to two years, demonstrating the mission's complexity.

The substance of closure mandates differs from regular mission mandates in that they focus more on collaboration with partners on handing over mission tasks. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, residual tasks were transferred to a double-hatted EU Delegation/EU Special Representative (EUSR) based on the exit strategy and Commission plan.[71] A Law Enforcement Section within the EU Delegation/EUSR office in Sarajevo absorbed parts of the EUPM's mandate, ensuring continuity of key functions such as providing strategic advice on police and rule-of-law reform after the EUPM's closure, implemented through Pre-Accession Assistance programmes.

In addition to the right partners, identifying optimal exit windows and having a successor already in country facilitates withdrawal. In the DRC, follow-up EU contributions to policing continued under Delegation-coordinated projects funded by the European Development Fund (EDF).[72] This transition was made possible by a new five-year funding round of the EDF in 2014 as part of the change to the EU's Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF), which presented a window of opportunity for ending the CSDP presence. The EDF was already financing police reform in the DRC as part of the previous EDF round, which provided a natural transition for activities previously conducted by EUPOL. In the case of Iraq, the successor to EUJUST LEX ended up being another civilian CSDP mission, the EU Advisory Mission (EUAM) in Iraq.[73] As Iraq was engulfed by the war against the Islamic State group at the conclusion of EUJUST LEX, the EU's approach turned to humanitarian aid, with limited direct follow-up of the CSDP presence until the launch of the EUAM three years later.[74]

Transition planning for Afghanistan was exceptional due to its political importance for member states, as well as the difficulty of the transition, demonstrated by the €5 billion in additional aid committed at the Brussels conference in 2016.[75] Following the end of the EUPOL on 31 December 2016, the EU supported the United Nations Development Programme's Law and Order Trust Fund for Afghanistan (LOTFA) as the main vehicle for EU support. [76]

[70] Council of the European Union, 'Council Decision 2012/372/CFSP of 10 July 2012 amending and extending Decision 2010/330/CFSP on the European Union Integrated Rule of Law Mission for Iraq, EUJUST LEX-Iraq', Brussels, 11 July 2012.

[71] Council of the European Union, 'Final report of the Head of Mission European Union Police Mission in Bosnia and Herzegovina', 10762/12, Brussels, 27 Oct. 2014.

[72] European Commission and Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, 'Programme Indicatif National 11eme Fonds Europeen de Developpement, 2014–2020' [National Indicative Programme: 11th European Development Fund, 2014–2020], Brussels, 26 June 2014.

[73] Council of the European Union (note 70).

[74] Van Ween, E. et al. 'EU institutional policies and interventions in the Iraqi civil war', eds E. Van Ween et al., *Band-aids, not Bullets: EU Policies and Interventions in the Syrian and Iraqi Civil Wars* (Clingendael: The Hague, Feb. 2021), p. 42.

[75] Hassan, O., 'Reassessing the European strategy in Afghanistan', Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 17 Nov. 2021.

[76] Lundsgaarde, E., 'The EU–UNDP partnership and added value in EU development cooperation', German Development Institute Discussion Paper 20/2021, Bonn, 2021.

EU policing support also continued through a new EU delegation-led EU Police Assistance Team, which provided advisory assistance.[77] Some member states redirected policing assistance through NATO's Resolute Support mission and bilateral programmes while continuing bilateral financial contributions to LOTFA- and to EU-led programmes in the policing and rule of law sector.[78] There were still gaps, however, when transition instruments were deployed, as Commission and EEAS planning cycles differed. It took over a year to deploy a planned follow-up project to Afghanistan following EUPOL's two-year final mandate, which prevented a practical handover.[79] A European Court of Auditors report that examined the phase-out plans urged more systematic embedding of sustainability and follow up.[80]

This examination of previous civilian CSDP mission withdrawals demonstrates that planned exits have been the norm in civilian CSDP. Elements of successful withdrawals include early political agreement, identification of optimal windows for withdrawal, and having successor partners in place. The cases also demonstrate similar challenges in decision making, such as divided member states, a lack of synchronicity in transition planning and missions lobbying for their survival. The exception is when there is a security-related motive for pulling a mission out, which has a uniting effect. Differences are more pronounced when it comes to the operational planning of transition, as each withdrawal takes place in a unique context involving different constellations of EU, member state and other international actors. Good communication is a key aspect of withdrawal, although the results can be uncertain. While a negative reception can be observed in each case, the impact is likely to have been limited to the time of the exit, not least due to the limited scope of the missions. A much more pronounced negative legacy is that of underachievement by the missions due to overambitious mandates and resource gaps, as in each observed case the retrospective analysis of the mission is that it was inadequate from the start or left the job unfinished.[81]

The United Nations process for improving transitions

The UN's experience of peacekeeping transitions offers a useful point of comparison, especially given that the EU and the UN often operate side by side and have a declared strategic partnership. The UN has spent two decades refining its transition approach, which can inspire EU reforms.

[77] Council of the European Union, Outcome of proceedings, 'Afghanistan: Council conclusions (16 October 2017)', Brussels, 16 Oct. 2017.

[78] Celik, B., 'The "5000-kilometer screwdriver": German and French police training in Afghanistan through the EU and NATO', *Global Affairs*, vol. 7, no. 1 (2021), pp. 27–42.

[79] EEAS official B, 10 Oct. 2025.

[80] European Court of Auditors, 'The EU Police Mission in Afghanistan: mixed results', Luxembourg, 2015.

[81] Marijan, B. and Guina, D., 'The politics of the "unfinished business": Bosnian police reform', Center for International Governance Innovation Policy Brief no. 42 (June 2014); Arnould, V. and Vlassenroot, K., 'EU policies in the Democratic Republic of Congo: Try and fail?', Paper commissioned by the Human Security Study Group, SiT/WP/06/16; European Court of Auditors (note 80); Bayer Tygesen, C., 'A cloud over EUs legacy in Afghanistan?', Stanford University Commentary, 19 Feb. 2013; and Hassan, O., 'Afghanistan: Lessons learnt from 20 years of supporting democracy, development and security', European Parliament, Brussels, Jan. 2023.

Based on a report by the secretary-general, the UN began drafting a policy on the closure and transition of peacekeeping missions in 2001.[82] The UN 2013 transitions policy required peacekeeping missions to include early, integrated, conditions-based planning for mission drawdown or withdrawal.[83] In parallel, the Integrated Assessment and Planning (IAP) policy sets minimum requirements and defines a common UN vision for transitions, agreeing roles across the mission and the UN country team.[84] UN Security Council Resolution 2594 puts transitions on a strong, formal footing, urging early planning, clear benchmarks, strategic communications and resources for peacebuilding before, during and after drawdown.[85] A follow-up secretary-general's report provides an overview of the UN's transition priorities.[86] The UN has also planned peacekeeping transitions with host governments, for example, a joint disengagement and transition plan for the UN Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.[87] The process of improving closures and transitions has been supported by a specific UN transitions project run in cooperation with various UN agencies.[88] The project has standardized mission calendars, roadmaps and handover templates, and has helped missions and country teams manage the governance around exits. At the mission level, a guide for senior leadership on field entity closure details pre-closure, closure and liquidation roles, and related support functions.[89]

The UN views transition financing as crucial to sustaining peace once a field mission withdraws. The UN secretary-general has highlighted the importance of coordinating mission drawdowns with national peacebuilding plans and cautioned against 'funding cliffs' when mission funding ceases.[90] The UN considers transition financing to be a system-wide responsibility. Peacekeeping missions, UN country teams, the Peacebuilding Commission (PBC) and international financial institutions are all expected to cooperate on mobilizing resources for the transition. The UN Peacebuilding Fund (PBF) is the instrument of first resort for supporting transitions, while

[82] United Nations, Report of the Secretary-General, 'No exit without strategy: Security Council Decision-making and the closure or transition of United Nations peacekeeping operations', S/2001/394, 20 Apr. 2001.

[83] United Nations, 'Policy on UN transitions in the context of mission drawdown or withdrawal', 4 Feb. 2013.

[84] United Nations, 'Policy on Integrated Assessment and Planning', 8 Feb. 2023.

[85] UN Security Council Resolution 2594, 9 Sep. 2021.

[86] United Nations, Report of the Secretary General, 'Transitions in United Nations peace operations', S/2022/522, 29 June 2022.

[87] United Nations, Security Council, Letter dated 23 November 2023 from the Permanent Representative of the Democratic Republic of the Congo to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council, S/2023/904, 26 Dec. 2023.

[88] Security Council Report, UN Transitions in a Fractured Multilateral Environment (Security Council Report: New York, Dec. 2023); United Nations Liaison Officer for Peace and Security, 'UN Transitions Project. Sustaining peace and development beyond mission withdrawal', [n.d.]; and UN DCO et al., 'UN transitions: Sustaining peace and development beyond mission withdrawal', Thematic Paper prepared by the UN transitions Project as a submission to the 2020 Report of the Secretary-General on Peacebuilding and Sustaining Peace.

[89] United Nations, Department of Operational Support, 'Guide for senior leadership on field entity closure', 1 Jan. 2019.

[90] United Nations, Security Council, 'UN transitions in a fractured multilateral environment', Research Report no. 4 (8 Dec. 2023), p. 24.

multi-partner trust funds and reoriented country team and mission funding also contribute to a sustainable transition.[91]

To ensure well-informed transitions, the IAP policy makes integrated monitoring, reporting and evaluation a requirement from the start, tying exit decisions to shared evidence across the mission and country team. The UN Department of Peace Operations' (DPO) Comprehensive Planning and Performance Assessment System (CPAS) provides the UN with a common, data-driven dashboard, which includes outcomes, stakeholder effects and context trends, to track progress and inform high-level decision making. The DPO has specifically documented the contribution of CPAS to impact-based course corrections.[92]

The example provided by the UN's focus on improving transitions can help support EU member states in addressing gaps in civilian CSDP mission turnover. The UN's process for improving transitions is founded on high-level ownership by the Security Council and the secretary-general. A specific project has been used as a vehicle for developing policy holistically across the UN architecture involving deliberate policy changes. The critical question of funding post-withdrawal has been directly addressed. Practical tools for the secretariat and peacekeeping missions support implementation of the transition policy. Finally, the policies on transition tie decision making on transitions to metrics and improved tools for reviewing mission performance.

However, the UN's approach should be understood in the context that it is the largest international organization. Simply copying the UN would not be a panacea for the EU's CSDP. Even with extensive policy in place, the UN has encountered similar programming gaps in transitions to the EU, leading to late handovers and questions regarding the legacy of UN peacekeeping missions.[93] Ultimately, changes in the foreign policy priorities of EU and UN member states and shifts at the geopolitical level can overwhelm even the most deliberate institutional policy process on transitions.

V. Towards a civilian CSDP plan for exits

The EU's ability to act through civilian missions is dependent not just on how missions start, but on how they end. Ultimately, a culture of planned endings would allow the EU to deploy civilian missions more credibly as time-bound tools that bolster local capacity, and then to hand over responsibility. For the EU member states, this would mean that resources could be reinvested where they are needed most, and that civilian CSDP can achieve its effectiveness and adaptability aims. In an era of evolving crises, taking steps towards a more principled approach to avoiding forever missions is not just desirable, but essential. This paper makes three recommendations on improving closure and transition processes in civilian CSDP, and suggestions based on interviews on how to implement them.

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[91] Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 'Mission drawdowns: Financing a sustainable peace, sustaining gains and supporting economic stability post UN mission withdrawal', OECD Development Policy Papers no. 28 (Mar. 2020).

[92] United Nations, 'The Comprehensive Planning and Performance Assessment System (CPAS): Taking stock four years after the launch', [n.d.].

[93] Forti, D. and Connolly, L., 'Pivoting from crisis to development: Preparing for the next wave of UN peace operations transitions', International Peace Institute Issue Brief (July 2019), p. 11.

Reinvigorate political control of civilian CSDP in the PSC and the FAC

First, to combat political inertia, member states should reinvigorate political control of civilian CSDP in the PSC and the FAC. Effective transition requires sustained political attention. The PSC and the FAC should more actively steer CivCom and the EEAS to prioritize transition planning in their deliberations. Enhancing member states' political ownership of civilian CSDP would help counter the inertia that often delays mission closure and transition. Clearer direction from political bodies could elevate transition planning beyond operational detail and better link it to EU foreign policy goals. Structured oversight by member states could also help resolve member state divergences, thereby fostering consensus on realistic end-states and facilitating smoother transitions.

How to implement the recommendation

- Agree and adhere to a common set of principles for member states on governing civilian CSDP and use a civilian CSDP focused FAC meeting to launch new political control over the instrument.

- Hold regular strategic orientation debates on civilian CSDP in the PSC to provide clearer political direction.

- Make adequate staff commitments by member states a requirement for mission launch and mandate extension to ensure the sustainability of proposed missions, and transition those missions which lack member state support.

Turn around bureaucratic path-dependency in the EEAS

Second, turn around bureaucratic path-dependency in the EEAS by designing missions to plan for exit from the very beginning. Explicit benchmarks and scenarios on closure and transition should be developed during initial strategic planning for a new mission, and kept up to date. Existing planning tools, from the Crisis Management Concept to the Mission Implementation Plan, need to be revised to foreground transition pathways and enhance exit-oriented planning. Planning for sustainability and local ownership should be the default, not an afterthought. Improved alignment with EU Delegations, Commission instruments and other actors in transition planning would facilitate continuity but require a policy-based process in place of the ad hoc processes of previous closures. Embedding transition logic early on would help to avoid protracted missions with diminishing impact and support the credibility of the CSDP as a temporary and targeted tool.

How to implement this recommendation

- Define less ambitious, shared, concrete and achievable end-states, including at the level of lines of operation, based on a clear theory of change, with benchmarks to gauge progress.

- Share information on forecast CSFP budget impact and cost estimates with member states early on in mission planning

to increase transparency on cost-effectiveness and financial sustainability.

- Create a template transition annex in OPLANs linked to end-states and mission benchmarking, with tentative timelines and risk analyses.

- Investigate the possibility of a pre-agreed FPI transition tool, based on the NDICI rapid reaction budget, that can cover gaps in transitions.

- Codify new practices in the Compact-mandated methodology for strategic reviews, and in an update of the 2006 concept paper on mission termination.

Resist mission entrenchment

Third, resist mission entrenchment by strengthening an integrated approach and partnerships with host states. Field-level coherence remains a weak link in the EU's integrated approach. While strategic-level frameworks exist, they often fail to translate into effective cooperation on the ground between the Head of Mission and the Head of Delegation. Civilian CSDP missions, EU Delegations and Commission services must work seamlessly to support transitions. Joint analysis, joint planning and operational delivery in the field are critical to sustaining progress post-mission. This joint effort should be made more visible to member state representations in-country. A more robust integration of efforts, backed by shared incentives, focused joint in-country training, and synchronized planning cycles and information sharing, would help to ensure that civilian missions transition to locally anchored and EU-supported structures.

How to implement this recommendation

- Refocus current activity-based reporting to a more assessment-based approach to feed strategic reviews and support PSC/CivCom decisions. Strengthen the missions' analytical and knowledge management capabilities to support this approach.

- Establish joint EEAS-Commission transition task forces early on in settings where transition is being considered, to advise on transition strategies and coordinate handovers.

- Communicate the time-bound nature and planned exit of missions to the host state and key stakeholders from the launch of the mission and plan jointly for transition from the beginning.

END OF MISSION: REINVENTING CLOSURE AND TRANSITION PROCESSES IN EU CIVILIAN CSDP

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CONTENTS

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