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**EU's growing credibility in crisis management:
the case of Georgia as a turning point**

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Abstract

As a global actor, the European Union faces several complex and uncertain security issues and, consequently, a high demand to become more coherent and effective in terms of strategic approaches. The purpose of this paper is to offer an analysis of the EU's growing credibility as a crisis manager in conflict situations. In order to prove this point, I will review the literature concerning the EU's response during the conflict between Russia and Georgia in August 2008. Indeed, this particular case study indicates how, compared to considerable difficulties experienced in the past, the EU has come a long way improving its instruments, as highlighted in the EU Security Strategy, "through mediation between the parties, humanitarian assistance, a civilian monitoring mission, and substantial financial support". Finally, on the basis of the analysis of this case, I will investigate how a more coherent European engagement could be deployed to address new challenges, via a comprehensive approach under the direction of the European External Action Service and the use of the appropriate instruments.

Introduction

Over the past two decades, the European Union has considerably extended the focus on external policies in terms of its geographical presence and aim of activities. The uncertain security environment rising from the ashes of the Berlin wall is characterised by several complex challenges. As a global actor, the EU faces the need to become more coherent and effective in terms of strategic approaches and, of course, capabilities development in crisis management.

In 2003, the introduction of the European Security Strategy¹ (ESS) represented a very important step forward headed in the direction of the identification of security challenges. Moreover, security is now considered not only as a global concern but as a precondition for development and the concept itself of security has changed to include multiple types of threats beyond war and military conflicts. For these reasons, a comprehensive approach is considered to be a key asset to tackle the complex, multi-actor and multidimensional crises and growing security threats of today and tomorrow (ESS, 2003). The EU disposes of a unique array of instruments to help promote peace and security where needed.

As laid down in the Lisbon Treaty, preserving peace, preventing conflicts from erupting into violence and strengthening international security (Article 21) are among the principal aims of the external action of the EU. In particular, in 2011, the Council of the European Union underlined that “preventing conflicts and relapses into conflicts, in accordance with international law, is a primary objective of the EU’s external action, in which it could take a leading role acting in conjunction with its global, regional, national and local partners²”.

The Council of the European Union asserts that in addition to continuing with civilian missions and military operations, the EU has to improve its ability to foster civilian-military cooperation and to use the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) as part of coherent and comprehensive EU action, which should also include a wide and variegated range of political, diplomatic, legal, development, trade and economic instruments.

The Treaty of Lisbon, moreover, represents an opportunity for reinforcing this comprehensive approach. As the European External Action Service (EEAS) becomes operational under the direction of the High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, who is also Vice President of the Commission, the Treaty’s implementation will aim to facilitate and promote effectiveness of policies and instruments in a more coherent and strategic manner, in order to address the whole cycle, from preparedness and preventative action; through crisis response and management, including stabilisation, peace-making and peace-keeping; to peace-building, recovery, reconstruction and a return to longer-term development.

¹ Council of the European Union, “A secure Europe in a better world, European Security Strategy (Brussels, 12 December 2003), <http://consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cmsUpload/78367.pdf>, accessed 10 June, 2013.

² Council of the European Union, “Council conclusions on conflict prevention”, 20 June 2011.

EU crisis management structures³

In order to enable the European Union to assume its responsibilities and improve a coherent planning for crisis management, the European Council (2000) decided to develop the establishment of permanent political and military structures. In the Lisbon Treaty framework, all of these Common Defence and Security Policy (CSDP) elements have been integrated in the EEAS.

The Political and Security Committee (PSC) can be described as a preparatory body for the Council of the EU. Its main functions are keeping track of the international situation, and helping to define policies. It prepares a coherent EU response to a crisis deciding on the mandate of each mission and exercises its political control and strategic direction.

The European Union Military Committee (EUMC) is the highest military body set up within the Council. It is composed of the Chiefs of Defence of the Member States. The EUMC provides the PSC with advice and recommendations on all military matters within the EU.

Together with the EUMC, the PSC is advised by a Committee for Civilian Aspects of Crisis Management (CIVCOM). This committee provides information, drafts recommendations, and discusses the opinions with the PSC on civilian aspects at every stage of the planning process of crisis management.

The Crisis Management and Planning Directorate (CMPD) contributes to the objectives of the European External Action Service (EEAS), the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) and a more secure international environment by the political-strategic planning of CSDP civilian missions and military operations, ensuring coherence and effectiveness of those actions as part of the European comprehensive approach to crisis management and developing CSDP partnerships, policies and capabilities.

The European Union Military Staff (EUMS - working under the direction of the EUMC and under the authority of the HRVP, Catherine Ashton) represents the military expertise component of the EEAS's Comprehensive Approach. The EUMS coordinates the military instrument, with particular attention on collective military operations and missions, military support and the creation of military capability.

Enabling activity supporting these initiatives includes: early warning, situation assessment, strategic planning, concept development, training and education, and support of partnerships through military relationships.

³ European External Action Service, <http://www.consilium.europa.eu/eeas/security-defence/csdp-structures-and-instruments.aspx?lang=en>, accessed on 10 June 2013.

The Civilian Planning and Conduct Capability (CPCC), which is part of the EEAS, is the permanent structure responsible for an autonomous operational conduct of civilian CSDP operations. Under the political control and strategic direction of the Political and Security Committee and the overall authority of the High Representative, the CPCC ensures the effective planning and conduct of civilian CSDP crisis management operations, as well as the proper implementation of all mission-related tasks. The CPCC Director is responsible for all the civilian missions and is the bridge linking all the heads of missions.

Effectiveness of EU conflict management in Georgia

The principal aim of this paragraph is to analyse the EU's response as a crisis manager during the conflict between Russia and Georgia in August 2008. Prior to this time, the EU's only important experience of conflict management was in the Balkans which can be considered far from a success.

The Caucasus region has strategic significance to the EU. In 2003, as already mentioned above, the ESS highlighted that "frozen conflicts, which also persist on our borders, threaten regional stability (...) and pose problems for Europe" and requested that EU "should take a stronger and more active interest in the problems of the Southern Caucasus". Also, the relationship began to grow closer after the inclusion of Georgia in the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) in 2004 and the restatement of EU commitment to contributing "to support efforts to prevent and resolve conflicts as well as post conflict rehabilitation with the two secessionist regions, Abkhazia and South Ossetia". Later, Georgia (together with Belarus, Moldova, Ukraine, Armenia and Azerbaijan) became part of the new Eastern Partnership⁴ (EaP) launched in Prague in May 2009.

In spite of these commitments, the EU's impact in Georgia can be considered as negligible until 7 August 2008 when Georgia and Russia clashed in a five-day war after Georgia sent troops to South Ossetia in the attempt to regain control over the separatist region. According to some scholars⁵, this event was only the last one of a long series in an unfavourable context for Georgia. It all started after Kosovo's declaration of independence in February of the same year. Its eventual recognition by several of the EU's 27 member states, created a precedent for Russia. Also, Georgia's aspiration to become part of NATO and NATO's offer to a path toward membership, as declared at the Bucharest summit in April 2008, was not at all

⁴ Council of the European Union, "Joint declaration of the Eastern Partnership Summit", Prague (7 May 2009)

⁵ Cornell, S. and Starr, F. , 2009 "The guns of August 2008: Russia's war in Georgia", Armonk: M.E. Sharpe.

welcomed by Russia. According to the International Crisis Group⁶, Russia had multiple aims: to punish Georgia for its NATO ambitions; to warn others, especially Ukraine; and to humiliate NATO by showing it to be indecisive and ineffective’.

The importance of the EU’s capabilities for effective crisis management was highlighted in this occasion. The French presidency of the EU, headed by Nicolas Sarkozy, together with the Finnish OSCE chair was fundamental in editing the six-point ceasefire plan agreed by both Russia and Georgia on 12 August. This date can be considered as a turning point for the EU’s role in crisis management: the French mediation on behalf of the EU was received as a success by European and international media⁷.

One month later, on 8 September, an implementation agreement was signed by Moscow and Tbilisi, after an extraordinary European Council meeting gave full backing to the ceasefire agreement and committed the Union, “including through a presence on the ground, to support every effort to secure a peaceful and lasting solution to the conflict in Georgia⁸”. This statement was followed by the deployment of a civilian monitoring mission (EUMM), demonstrating the EU’s capability to act quickly in terms of decision-making, financing and deployment. The EU Monitoring Mission⁹ in Georgia was launched on 1 October 2008, as mentioned above, as stated by the arrangements set out in the six-point agreement between Georgia and Russia of 12 August 2008, as implemented by the agreement reached on 8 September 2008. The decision to deploy a civilian monitoring mission was taken the week after the agreement. Its mandate ranged from contributing to stabilisation, normalisation and confidence building to informing EU decision-making on the situation in the field. The mission started with the recruitment of 200 monitors from different backgrounds.

Right after the establishment of the EUMM, the EU’s presence in Georgia was played by four actors: EUMM; EU’s delegation in Tbilisi, the EU special Representative (EUSR) for the South Caucasus, appointed in 2003; and the EUSR for the crisis in Georgia, appointed in September 2008 to represent the EU at the Geneva talks and facilitate the implementation of the settlement plan between Georgia and Russia. It is important to underline that the political weight of the EU in the Geneva settlement negotiations was considerably higher than it had been in previous occasions. Moreover, the 2008 report on the implementation of the ESS underlined specifically the situation of the conflicts in Georgia, emphasizing that “since 2003, the EU has increasingly made a difference in addressing crisis and

⁶ International Crisis Group, “Russia vs Georgia: the fallout”, Europe Report 195, Brussels, 22 August 2008, p. 8

⁷ Delcour, L., 2011, “The European Union’s Policy in the South Caucasus: in search of a strategy” in A. Jafalian, “Reassessing security in the South Caucasus – Regional conflicts and transformation”, p.177-190, Ashgate.

⁸ Council of the European Union, “Presidency conclusions”, Extraordinary European Council, Brussels, 1 September 2008.

⁹ Pirozzi, N., 2012, “EU performance in civilian crisis management” in R. Whitman and S. Wolff “The European Union as a global conflict manager”, p.189-208, Routledge.

conflict, in places such as (...) Georgia” and pointing out that “the situation in Georgia, concerning Abkhazia and South Ossetia, has escalated, leading to an armed conflict between Russia and Georgia in August 2008. The EU led the international response, through mediation between the parties, humanitarian assistance, a civilian monitoring mission, and substantial financial support¹⁰”.

However, it has to be said that the relationship between the two EUSR and the EUMM have been not easy because of overlapping competences and functions. At this point, the High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Catherine Ashton, decided to merge the two EUSR positions: Philippe Lefort was appointed EU Special Representative for the South Caucasus and the crisis in Georgia on 1 September 2011¹¹. EUMM’s significance was enhanced because of its soon becoming the only international presence in Georgia after Russia forced the closure of the United Nation Mission (UNOMIG) in Abkhazia in 2008 and the OSCE Mission in South Ossetia in 2009¹².

One year after the Five-Days war, in August 2009, while the humanitarian assistance programmes run by the EU have continued quite successfully, the political process has stalled and Russia, shortly after President Obama visited Moscow and Tbilisi, restated the intention to protect the two separatist regions against a possible Georgian aggression, closing any possible resolution to the conflicts and sending a clear message to the western countries¹³.

What needs to be improved

The EU can be considered a latecomer on the stage of the crisis management and this could be a significant reason why it faces so many difficulties in the pursuit of a role.

According to a report from International Crisis Group¹⁴, the EU is still trying to overcome different opinions among the member states. The conflicts in Georgia are a really good example: on one hand, countries like France and Germany prefer bilateral relations with Russia over a common EU approach, while, on the other hand there is another block (including Baltic states and Poland) which prioritize a common approach.

¹⁰ Council of the European Union, “Report on the implementation of European Security Strategy: providing security in a changing world”, Brussels, 11 December 2008, p. 1-7, http://www.consilium.europa.eu/ueDocs/cms_Data/docs/pressdata/EN/reports/104630.pdf, accessed 10 June, 2013.

¹¹ Pirozzi, N., 2012, “EU performance in civilian crisis management”, p.202-203.

¹² Whitman R. and Wolff S., 2010, “The EU as a conflict manager? The case of Georgia and its implications”, *International Affairs* 86, p. 87-107

¹³ Gordadze, T., 2011, “Georgia-Russia conflict in August 2008: war as a continuation of politics”, in A. Jafalian, “Reassessing security in the South Caucasus – Regional conflicts and transformation”, p.11-31, Ashgate.

¹⁴ International Crisis Group, “Russia vs Georgia: the fallout”, p.23-24

This double vision has caused a lack of coherence and strategy in foreign policy and, consequently, an insufficient action in crisis prevention.

EU's capabilities in crisis management

In order to enhance the EU's credibility as a global actor, Whitman and Wolff created an analytical framework explaining the necessary capabilities that any crisis manager must possess¹⁵. In particular, it underlines the EU's achievements and lacks in strategic terms. In addition, this model can be applied on Georgia's case and help to draw some conclusions on EU's crisis management system and its impact on conflict scenarios.

In order to succeed in conflict management, the EU must possess three sets of capabilities: capabilities to act, to fund and to cooperate and coordinate.

Capabilities to act: Appropriate policy tools and ability to deploy them in the right time. In this case, political will is a determining factor. The EU progressed significantly since the Petersberg tasks were included in the Maastricht Treaty in 1992. Also, on the institutional level, many progresses have been made. Before the Lisbon Treaty, an example is the appointment of the EU Special Representatives (EUSR), a crucial role in the diplomatic negotiations in conflict areas.

Later, with the entry in force of the Lisbon Treaty, two important innovations were the creation of the High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and the European External Action Service (EEAS).

Capabilities to fund: Capable of funding its efforts, possibly over extended periods. It is important to be able to fund operations both in short and long terms.

The short term operations aim to prevent conflict and support post-conflict political stabilisation. Also, they support activities such as development of democratic institutions, international criminal tribunals, promotion of independent media and general support of civilian population.

The long term operations aim to fight the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, strengthen response of non-EU members to cross-border threats and enhance capacity building.

A demonstration of EU's capacity to deploy financial resources to deal with issues of conflict prevention, crisis management and peace building was the introduction of the Instruments for Stability (IfS).

Capabilities to cooperate and coordinate: These capabilities can be divided in two

¹⁵ Whitman, R. and Wolff, S., 2012 "The European Union as a global conflict manager: capabilities and context in an interdependent world" in R. Whitman and S.Wolff "The European Union as a global conflict manager", p.3-19, Routledge.

dimensions. An horizontal dimension coordinating EU's institutions involved in crisis management and a vertical dimension between EU as a supranational organization and the member states. Moreover, at the external level, this capability is essential with NATO and with third countries and international organisations because of the strong European commitment to a multilateral approach.

According to Whitman and Wolff the EU has impressively enhanced its capabilities both to act and to fund its actions¹⁶. In the case of Georgia, as mentioned above, two EU Special Representatives, for the South Caucasus and for the crisis in Georgia, have been appointed; the ENP and the EaP have made conflict management one of their priorities; and in terms of intervention the French Presidency's diplomacy action during the Georgian–Russian war of August 2008, has left a positive mark, especially compared to the past experiences. Also, various funding instruments available, such as the Instrument for Stability (IfS) and the European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument (ENPI), are working more effectively in both the short (1, 487 million of euros) and the long (484 millions of euros) term than even the so-called Rapid Reaction Mechanism and other instruments did before 2007.

Conclusions

At this point, EU crisis management in Georgia is not yet a complete success but it is a turning point, a new start to programme coherent and strategic actions and to achieve better results and eventually a definitive credibility in this role. According to many scholars, to face these challenges it will be necessary the improvement of the European External Service enhancing the role of the High Representative, in order to avoid fragmentation and overlapping competences among the institutions, and the establishment of an effective and coherent management strategy instead of individual efforts made case by case. Whitman and Wolff¹⁷ suggest the implementation of a system on three pillars: a definition of EU interests, capabilities and players; an assessment of EU strengths and weaknesses and clear ideas on how to work with these, especially in terms of exit points from the process.

¹⁶ Whitman R. and Wolff S., 2010, "The EU as a conflict manager? The case of Georgia and its implications", *International Affairs* 86, p.87-107

¹⁷ Whitman, R. and Wolff, S., 2012 "The European Union as a global conflict manager: reflections on the past, perspectives for the future" in R. Whitman and S.Wolff "The European Union as a global conflict manager", p.211-220, Routledge.

