The European Union as an Actor in Africa: Comparing Development Cooperation and Peace-building

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The European Union’s (EU’s) external relations and foreign policies have expanded dramatically since the end of the Cold War and the establishment of the EU through the signing of the Treaty of Maastricht in 1993. Today the EU has relations with virtually every country and most regions in the world. The EU has become a force in international affairs, especially in trade, development cooperation, the promotion of regional integration, democracy and good governance, human rights, and to an increasing extent also in security policies.

Yet, differing views abound about what type of political animal the EU is, about its nature as an actor, and the impact of its external relations (Manners 2010). Clearly, today’s EU was not designed to become a global actor, and sceptics argue that the EU still has diffuse and ineffective foreign policies, being divided between the interests of its member states and with no genuinely common values; in essence, that the EU is an incomplete or merely potential ‘actor’ on the world scene (Hyde Price 2008). Even among the proponents there are different interpretations about the nature of the EU’s foreign policy and its ‘actorness’ (Bretherton and Vogler 2006; Hill and Smith 2005). As a result, the EU is often perceived as an ambiguous actor (polity or power) and its foreign policy profile appears to be a moving target. Nevertheless, a large number of other scholars continue to argue that today’s EU has become a force on the world scene and that it is gradually becoming more unified and
coherent, albeit more in some policy areas and counterpart regions and countries than in others.

This chapter analyzes the EU’s role as an actor in two policy domains in which the EU wants to be portrayed as ‘a force for good’ and towards one of its major partners. The EU’s policies in the field of development cooperation and security policy are often regarded as ambiguous and pluralistic, not the least because in these policy fields decision-making is either ‘shared’ between EU institutions and EU member states, or based on intergovernmental decision-making. Key policymakers, especially from the European Commission but sometimes also from individual EU member states, claim that the making of the EU as an efficient and legitimate global actor across different fields of foreign policy depends on a strengthening of the EU’s central institutions, instruments, and policies, where the Commission or the Council must, so the argument goes, play a leading role (Bretherton and Vogler 2006). Such attempts at centralization and communitarization of decision-making and policy are contested, however, and it is therefore important to analyze the tensions and paradoxes between the EU’s central institutions and those of the individual EU member states as these are played out in the different policy areas. Following on from the above, the fundamental question addressed in this chapter is to what extent and under what circumstances the EU is acting as ‘one’ in its relations with Africa in the two policy domains under study. More specifically, is the EU best understood as a single and unitary actor, as a dispersed actor, or even as no actor at all in its relations with Africa? Does this vary across the two policy areas being studied?

The two policy areas analyzed in this chapter are particularly interesting because of the varied historical, political, legal and institutional configurations within the EU, but also since they are rarely compared (in spite of an impressive amount of research on each of the policy fields). The study also makes a methodological contribution through the combination of extensive interviews from within the EU’s machinery in Europe with fieldwork in distinct sites and countries in Central and Southern Africa. The next section discusses the concept of the EU as an actor and the general framework guiding the analysis in the two subsequent sections.

**Conceptualizing the EU as a Global Actor**

Following its increasing outreach in world politics there have been an increasing number of studies on EU as an international actor and its actorness during the two last decades (Allen and Smith 1990; Bretherton and Vogler
Actorness for a region is not necessarily the same as for nation-states, although there are of course certain similarities. One unique feature of regional actorness, compared with nation-states, is that it must be created by voluntary processes, and based on dialogue and cooperation rather than ‘coercion’ and hierarchy. Furthermore, the EU can act as a collective actor in international affairs and be seen as ‘one’ by both outsiders and its own citizens, for instance, when signing a trade agreement or disbursing aid. However, being an international and global actor is more demanding than simply being or performing as a regional organization and community. The fact that the European Commission does ‘something’ — for instance disbursing aid — is not enough for a claim to possess actorness (purposive capacity to act), at least not for the claim to be a ‘global’ actor. Similarly, highly stated ambitions and a normative agenda are not automatically translated into actorness, which Christopher Hill (1993) elegantly showed in an influential study about the EU’s ‘capabilities-expectations gap’.

An important distinction in the literature about the EU as an actor is between presence and actorness (Bretherton and Vogler 2006; Hettne 2010). The two are closely related. Presence stems from the fact that simply by existing, and due to its relative weight (demographically, economically, militarily and ideologically), the Union has an impact on the rest of the world. Its footprints are seen everywhere. The EU is for example the largest donor in the world and the size of its economy is comparable to that of the US. The EU is also setting up a military capacity to be used outside the region. This provokes reactions and creates expectations from the outside. Presence is a complex and comprehensive material variable, depending on the size of the actor, the scope of its external activities, the relative importance of different issue areas, and the relative dependence of various regions upon the European market. A stronger presence means more repercussions and reactions and thereby a pressure to act. In the absence of such action, presence itself will diminish. The crucial question is to what extent the EU’s strong international presence is actually transformed into a purposive capacity to shape the external environment by influencing the world (i.e. actorness): In this case in Africa.

Actorness implies a scope of action and room for manoeuvre, in some cases even a legal personality, which is however rare in the case of regions. It suggests a growing capacity to act that follows from the strengthened presence of the regional unit in different contexts. Indeed, literature on EU actorness is very clear on that the EU’s external policy is closely connected to
endogenous and internal conditions, especially coherence and coordination within the Union (Hill and Smith 2005; Bretherton and Vogler 2006; Hettne 2010). This link between the internal and external is evident in the EU’s official policy documents and treaties, which repeatedly stress that without a unified, coherent, consistent and coordinated external policy, the legitimacy of the EU as a global actor will be called into question.

Even if more general questions about the EU’s power and identity of course may influence the EU as an actor and its actorness, the framework adopted in this chapter focuses in particular on institutional and vertical coherence: the unity of EU’s central institutions and the relationship between these central institutions and the EU member states (Nuttall 2005). More specifically, institutional coherence refers to the way the EU’s central institutions relate to one another (e.g. Commission, Council, Parliament and the Court). Vertical coherence indicates the degree of congruence between the external policies of EU member states and the EU’s central institutions. Thereby, a variety of coordination mechanisms are at work in the making of the EU’s foreign policies, such as the community method, the open method of coordination between the EU and the member states, the intergovernmental method, or a strictly national system of foreign policies, which takes place outside the EU’s structures.

Especially vertical coherence draws attention to that it is crucial how we conceptualize the EU as an actor. Whereas the EU is often reduced to its central institutions (the Commission, the Council), and how these institutions perform in the world, this is not the case here. Instead, the EU as a ‘actor’ refers both to the EU’s central institutions and the member states. The focus on institutional coherence draws attention to the interplay between the EU’s central institutions, while vertical coherence problematizes the interplay between EU and the member states. Many member states, for example Denmark, France, Germany, Sweden and the United Kingdom (UK), have developed rather comprehensive Africa policies covering most policy areas. These Africa policies are first and foremost formulated as national policies, although they are often reinforced through common or shared EU policies/instruments. Two EU member states, the UK and France, stand out since they have the most comprehensive policies with Africa in the policy areas covered in this chapter. Other member states, such as Sweden and Denmark, are deeply engaged in development cooperation but less involved in security (Söderbaum and Stålgren 2010a).

The UK and France deserve a special mentioning. The UK’s policy stance towards Africa is fairly similar to the EU’s stance, and to some extent it has,
at least on a general level, become significantly Europeanized in relation to the overall ideological and political content of foreign policy as well as in terms of foreign policy making (Williams 2002). However, the UK will keep devoting special attention to its own distinctive security, development cooperation and energy policies, as well as in terms of its maritime strategy, the promotion of the English language and the maintenance of colonial ties and cultural preservation. Yet, ‘British’ and ‘EU’ foreign policies are not mutually exclusive activities, and like many other EU member states, the British government has drawn upon its increasingly close relationship with the EU to supplement its own bilateral (and other multilateral) efforts to achieve its foreign policy objectives.

France also plays a significant role in Africa, especially in its former colonies, through extensive aid programs, commercial activities, military agreements, and cultural impact. Quite a few observers criticize the relationship as neo-colonialism under the name Françafrique, stressing France’s support of various dictatorships, among others: Omar Bongo (Gabon), Idriss Déby (Chad), and Denis Sassou Nguesso (Congo-Brazzaville). In addition, France is very active in peace and security operations in its former colonies. Of 12,000 French troops engaged in peacekeeping operations around the world, nearly half are deployed in Africa in both military and advisory capacities. Despite these contributions to peacekeeping operations, the French economic and political influence in Africa is likely to continue to decline, particularly in light of Africa’s growing ties with, for example, China (Touati 2007).

The EU as a Global Development Actor in Africa

As eloquently described by Franck and Lorenzoni in this volume, the EU’s development policy is rooted in the colonial relations of its member states. From the mid-1960s the then European Community (EC) established special relations with its ex-colonies beginning with the so-called Yaoundé Conventions. These relations were constantly expanded under the aid and trade agreements of the Lomé Conventions from 1975 on, which were then passed into the Cotonou Partnership Agreement (CPA) in 2000. With the adoption of the Maastricht Treaty in 1993 development policy was formally introduced as an area with ‘shared competency’. Following nearly a decade of dubious performance in this area, negotiations between the Council and the Commission resulted in a joint policy statement in 2000 stipulating the principles and objectives of the EU’s development policy. After the European Parliament was brought into discussions, these principles and objectives were revised
in 2005 in the so-called ‘European Consensus on Development’ (European Union 2000, 2005). This consensus also took into account external events such as the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and the terrorist attacks in New York and Washington D.C. in September 2001.

The EU’s objective to become a global development actor has been stimulated by efforts to consolidate the EU internally within the Union as well as by global and multilateral developments. Indeed, the EU’s official brief is to systematically and constructively exploit the potential for complementarity and synergy within the Union and to assist the member states in developing their own aid systems and the EU’s joint position in the multilateral aid architecture. One mantra repeated in Brussels and most other European capitals is that EU is the world’s largest donor. Yet, this is chiefly a rhetorical strategy to build the EU’s identity, because it is only the case if the EU multilateral aid is lumped together with the separate national aid budgets. As will be seen below, there is rather little evidence that the EU’s central institutions and the national aid agencies are genuinely working together as ‘One’.

The debate about a common EU development policy carries a particular emphasis on the delineation of roles between the EU and the member states. The so-called ‘added value’ of the EU and the European Commission is an important, but also contested, element in the discussion on EU’s development policy. According to the Commission, ‘Community action is more neutral than action by the Member States, which have their own history and are bound by a specific legal system. Community solidarity and the Community’s integrated approach to cooperation are undoubtedly major assets’ (European Commission 2000: 4). The Commission also claims to provide ‘added value’ through its ability to formulate and defend a common European position globally (European Commission 2004: 7). Against this background, the Commission’s priority of promoting a common European position within global and multilateral coordination initiatives, such as the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness and the MDGs becomes apparent (OECD/DAC 2005a). The EU’s official view is that it should strive toward being a single unified actor at all ‘levels of governance’ in the development community (on the multilateral, interregional, regional, as well as country level) (European Commission 2004: 6-7).

There is a reasonable and at times relatively sophisticated degree of coordination in the international donor community in Africa (OECD/DAC 2005a, 2005b; Delputte and Orbie 2014). This type of coordination is above all taking place within multilateral frameworks (and outside EU structures per se), such as the Paris Agenda, the MDGs, Poverty Reduction Strategies (PRS) and
a variety of budget support mechanisms or sectoral or thematic approaches. While the European Commission is in itself seen as a donor committed to the implementation of the global commitments on aid effectiveness, the EU is not recognized as a feasible aid coordination platform in itself, and the European Commission is mainly acting as one among the other donors in the larger (non-EU) donor-wide coordination platforms. Although there is a general impression that the EU Delegations are active participants in these platforms, this does not give them an opportunity to act as a ‘driving force’ for EU coordination. The donor coordination groups are not restricted to EU donors only (members are for example Norway, Canada, USA) and not all EU donors are participating (Delputte and Orbie 2014). Importantly, the EU Delegations are not playing a different role than other committed donors such as the Nordic Plus countries, they are ‘just like one of the other donors acting in the donor forums’ (interview with donor representative, Lusaka, Zambia, February 2011). In theory, the role of each agency depends on its comparative advantage, constructed upon a functional logic. The Division of Labour is organized on a sectoral or thematic basis, in which each sector is led by one or more ‘leads’ or ‘lead donors’. Following this principle, every donor can act as a lead. In practice those donors with special competence or special commitment to a particular sector are normally considered as better prepared to perform as ‘leads’. The European Commission is a large and influential donor in these processes, but the EU does not perform well as a coordinating mechanism (Söderbaum and Stålgren 2010b; Delputte and Söderbaum 2012; Delputte and Orbie 2014).

However, it is fair to say that there is a certain degree of success of EU-based coordination, especially regarding coordination of general policy, both in Brussels and on specific policy issues on the country level in many African countries. With this said however, it is safe to say that the EU cannot be understood as a viable coordination mechanism on the ground. As a senior official of the Delegation of the European Commission in Mozambique points out, describing the Commission’s role in the field of HIV/AIDS:

The Commission is almost a Byzantine bureaucracy in certain respects... All the others harmonize including the Norwegians, the Dutch, the Irish. And they ask me that as we have agreed in principle on some many things, why can’t you also take part in this? I try to tell them that it is not because we don’t want to, but we have rules. But I know they still think this is an odd position. (Interview, Maputo, February 2005).
The problematic role of the European Commission is shared by other bilateral donors. One donor representative described the Delegation of the European Commission as ‘probably the most difficult donor to cooperate with because of its unique and bureaucratic administrative routines and funding mechanisms’ (interview, Maputo, February 2005). Another EU member state representative described the Commission as ‘someone who likes to go his own ways and always follows the dictates from Brussels instead of supporting existing coordination efforts’ (interview, Maputo, February 2005). Differently expressed, in contrast to the EU’s official rhetoric and the ambitions of the European Consensus on Development, the EU is, by and large, not functioning as a platform for coordination between the EU member states (Söderbaum and Stålgren 2010b; Delputte and Söderbaum 2012). Since individual EU member states can and do continue to conduct international development policy according to national priorities and preferences a complete communitarization of international development cooperation is not politically desirable for many EU member states and would presumably be of questionable value for a number of developing countries (Grimm 2010). Hence, on the ground in Africa, the European Commission can most of the time be understood as ‘just another donor’, and within the EU family as ‘the 29th’ member state, conducting its own aid policies, rather than serving as the hub for donor coordination within the EU as a whole. Thus, the EU demonstrates weak actoriness in this policy field, and it can hardly be said to be acting as ‘one’ (Söderbaum and Stålgren 2010b; Delputte and Söderbaum 2012).

The lack of coordination is certainly tied to internal differences and contradictions within the EU. One traditional line of difference is between liberal and free trade-oriented position of the DG Trade and those EU member states who argue that free trade is the best strategy for growth and development, and the more ‘development-friendly’ member states who argue that the special needs of the Least Developed Countries (LDC) must be taken into account (Elgström 2009: 452). The Nordic countries belong to the ‘development-friendly’ group, which results in that divergences cannot simply be categorized along the liberal-protectionist axis.

Previous research on the functioning of the EU suggests that divergences among member states may not only impact negatively on the Council, but may also make the Commission weak, by watering down Commission proposals to the lowest common denominator (Elgström and Larsén 2008: 7). However, Elgström and Larsén’s (2008: 3-4) study shows that differing preferences among member states in the Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA) negotiations provided the Commission with significant autonomy vis-à-vis
the Council. The Commission’s autonomy was further reinforced ‘due to its informational and procedural advantages given by its institutional position as sole negotiator’ (Elgström and Larsén 2008: 3). The same authors emphasize a second main conclusion, namely the importance of Commission unity. According to previous research in the field, internal fragmentation within the Commission may negatively affect its effectiveness and assertiveness vis-à-vis member states (cf. Carbone 2007). It is well established in academic research that there were some tensions between DG Trade and DG Development/DG Agriculture during the early phases of the EPA negotiations with Africa (which also impacts on development cooperation). Yet, these conclusions are tied to the field of trade and the EPA negotiations rather than development cooperation more broadly.

The Commission’s failure to be a coordination mechanism within the EU reflects its inability to present to member states its comparative advantage and a coherent ‘value added’ proposition relative to other coordination mechanisms and regional programs. Indeed, it is not clear what the EU can do more effectively than the individual member states, nor in what way it enhances aid effectiveness.

It appears plausible that the EU’s ambition to be a coordination mechanism in the field of aid is first and foremost tied to its self-serving ambition to manifest its own identity (especially the self-serving statement to be the world’s largest donor, which in reality is more or a chimera). A senior policy advisor of a EU member state concurred: ‘Development policy is a tool for the Commission to build the EU as a global actor’ (interview, Stockholm, January 2007).

The failure of the EU to act as ‘one’ in development cooperation is also related to competing ‘identity claims’ in the donor community (and of course the shared competence). Development cooperation remains a scene for the manifestation of international identities, not only for the European Commission but also for individual member states. The attempts for a centralized and common European Aid policy with the Commission in the driver’s seat compete with other identity-driven ambitions of bilateral donors, such as France and UK, but also most other large EU donors such as Sweden, Denmark, the Netherlands, who are generally considered as role models in the field. To the extent that development policy is driven by the ambition to manifest one donor identity, these efforts can be seen as a threat to other donors’ identities. Coordination efforts under the banner of a common donor identity, such as the EU, limit the visibility of the individual donors and member states. As one donor official put it: ‘A donor who does not give is not a donor’ (interview,
The urge to maintain and strengthen a donor identity may undermine aid effectiveness and donor coordination. But this is not always the case. At least to some extent, the identity motive may explain the particular type of donor coordination known as ‘lead donor’, which is a kind of division of labour where one particular donor is given responsibility for leading a particular sector and the other donors are followers. Being a lead donor enables a donor to manifest its own identity for the sector it is in charge of. Similarly, it appears that donor identities are not challenged as much in the multilateral mechanisms for donor coordination as they appear to be within the EU framework. This may very well be related to the very strong ambitions of the European Commission to control the process, which the national donor agencies, for various reasons, are not accepting. Indeed, since EU donor coordination appear to be driven by political reasons instead of aid effectiveness, several national aid agencies are resisting EU-led donor coordination.

The EU as a Global Peace and Security Actor in Africa

Literature in this area frequently posits the view of the EU as an economic giant but a political dwarf, with the conclusion that its security policy is weak. The EU has nevertheless begun to demonstrate a considerable amount of activity in the security field, especially since the turn of the century. One reason for this lies in the contemporary conceptualization of security, which goes well beyond conventional large-scale military presence to include, for example, terrorism, proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, human security and state fragility. In the face of the multiplicity of new threats, the EU member states have been able to overcome some of their internal differences leading to a consolidation of the EU as a global peace and security actor, with an evident global ambition.

Following the signing of the Treaty of Amsterdam, the European Security Strategy (ESS), adopted in 2003, has become an important framework for the EU, highlighting both present and future global challenges and key threats to international security. Human security is emphasized as a central concept guiding the EU’s approach regarding the implementation of the ESS. Questions of human security are high on the European agenda for the African continent due to the fact that conflicts frequently either provoke or exacer-

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6 This section builds on research undertaken together with Meike Froitzheim and Ian Taylor (see Froitzheim, Söderbaum and Taylor 2011).
7 The EU’s High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Federica Mogherini, is responsible for developing a new EU Global Strategy on Foreign and Security Policy that should replace the European Security Strategy.
bate the devastating humanitarian situation in conflict prone areas, such as the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Sudan, Somalia, the Central African Republic (CAR), Liberia and Sierra Leone and so forth. In addition, through the discourse on the so-called security-development nexus the EU stresses the relationship between development and security and emphasizes the fact that many conflicts in Africa are tightly linked to state fragility. These two discourses have been developed during the last decade both in Africa-focused strategies and frameworks, as well as on a more general level in the ESS and in the EU’s Human Security Doctrine. In effect this means that the EU can deploy conventional military missions or civilian missions under the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP), and at the same time rely on various types of humanitarian aid or long-term development cooperation under the leadership of the Commission.

Looking at EU’s involvement in African conflicts, some of the EU’s missions deployed under the CSDP, such as the EUFOR Chad/CAR mission in 2006 and Operation Artemis in the DRC in 2003, had limited mandates focusing mainly on the stabilization of the security conditions and the improvement of the humanitarian situation in geographically confined areas with a short-term perspective. These two missions are often assessed as having achieved their objectives, and the EU appeared as a successful global actor in this regard. Yet, it is equally clear that in view of their limited mandates and short time frame, these operations had only marginal impact on the conflicts and to long-term peace-building.

The CSDP missions with a more comprehensive mandate and long-term perspective, such as the EUPOL and EUSEC RD Congo, can be problematized on a number of accounts. Importantly, their weaknesses are often directly linked to the limits and inefficiencies of the EU as an actor. To put it bluntly, the EU’s complex institutional set-up invariably results in overlapping and competing competencies, institutional divisions, personal agendas and turf wars (Froitzheim, Söderbaum and Taylor 2011). The overlapping of responsibilities and the rivalry between different European actors (including the member states, especially France and Belgium) are then compounded by coordination weaknesses and institutional incoherencies springing from structural issues related to the nature of the various mandates and diverse instruments of the EU’s agencies, in particular the rivalry between the European Commission and the Council of the European Union. In addition, there is a systematic lack of coordination between the administrative EU centres in Brussels (and the various European capitals) and the operational levels and EU representatives on the ground (Christiansen 2001; Gegout 2009a and b;
Lurweg 2011; Froitzheim et al 2011; Smis and Kingah 2010). Furthermore, although the EU tries to be present ‘on the ground’, inadequate exchange of information between the Delegations hamper effective policy design and implementation. Dysfunctional EU security governance also arises due to the multitude of actors, an overlap of bilateral and EU policies and top-down approaches from Brussels (i.e. vertical incoherence). All this is then further exacerbated by low staff competence resulting from the overrepresentation of inexperienced and junior employees due to the fact that senior experts are very reluctant to be deployed in the extreme working and living conditions of conflict prone areas in Africa (Froitzheim et al 2011).

The weak institutional and vertical coherence also affects the EU’s relations with other actors, which undermines EU’s ability to perform as a global actor in this field. The EU’s official stance is to support a UN-led system and to contribute to a more ‘effective multilateralism’. In most regional conflicts, however, there is a systematic tendency for external powers and donors involved in peace-building to focus on their own ‘visibility’ through implementing highly noticeable projects that promise immediate results rather than following a comprehensive and coordinated – and thus necessarily joint and long-term – strategy. Clearly, there is a tendency for all external powers and donors (including individual EU member states) to focus on specific projects in order to get immediate and visible results as a means to justify the expenditure of resources to domestic constituencies. This seems to result from the fact that in complex environments such as the one in DRC, long-term goals and achievements are difficult to achieve in the short-term. Yet it is in these complex environments where comprehensive and long-term peace-building strategies are needed the most. In this regard, the EU’s main focus is placed on gaining international visibility and a rather symbolic presence instead of a clearly defined and credible strategy how to build peace, which thereby reinforces ineffective rather than effective multilateralism.

A general feature of the EU’s engagements (and for other actors as well) is that peace-building and intervention usually lacks a comprehensive conflict analysis (Froitzheim 2011). As an example, the deployment of the EUFOR Chad/CAR mission was initiated without sufficiently discussing the political and security situation on the ground. The result was that the EU was predominantly perceived as not being impartial but instead was following French-driven policies and siding with the two incumbent regimes in Chad and CAR. The lack of poor preparatory work often results in a lack of knowledge on how to define successful strategies as well as what are the likely consequences of an external intervention and involvement on the ground (Schulz and Söderbaum
2010). In contrast, there tends to be one-size-fits all strategy, which is poorly adapted to the present specific contexts. The most important goal for the EU appears to be seen to be ‘doing something’ and showing a presence instead of ensuring real and lasting achievements on the ground.

In examining the role of the EU in the DRC (which is the conflict with the most comprehensive EU involvement), it is hard to avoid the conclusion that the EU’s key political goal is not mainly to solve the myriad problems — if that is indeed possible (Lurweg 2011; Froitzheim, Söderbaum and Taylor 2011). The most important goal appears instead to be to build the EU’s presence and appearance (which of course is an element of actorness). Starved of resources and beset by institutional in-fighting, bureaucratic turf wars and an inability to deal with the very nature of the entity that passes itself off as the Congolese state, almost without exception EU interviewees in the eastern DRC were dismissive of their own organization’s efforts in conflict management, security sector reform and peace-building. For instance, one EU representative based in eastern DRC felt totally cut off from other EU units, and had no idea what either Brussels or the EU Delegation in Kinshasa did with the information that was provided to them (interview, Goma, November 2010). These problems were candidly lamented by another EU representative in DRC who stated that ‘I do not know what I am doing here’ and went on to say that ‘the EU’s involvement is purely political’ (interview, Goma, November 2010).

Conclusion

There are some intriguing similarities across the two policy fields analyzed in this chapter. The study reveals that, with regard to institutional coherence, the EU’s organizational complexity provokes comparable institutional divisions and bureaucratic ineffectiveness in the two policy fields and in different cases. This is somewhat surprising given the widely different institutional configuration within the EU in the two policy areas. Concerning vertical coherence, the tensions between the EU’s central institutions (especially the Commission and the Council) and (some) EU member states also play out quite similarly in development cooperation as well as peace-building. These incoherencies are closely related to the EU’s failure to develop systematic relationships with other international actors/donors as well as with the African counterparts. Indeed, the internal incoherencies seem to be a major explanation for the EU’s underdeveloped external policy approach, in particular the wide gap between the EU’s official policy stance and what takes place in the field in Africa.
In the case of development cooperation, EU Delegations are keen on taking initiatives to promote EU coordination in the field, but face reluctance of many of its member states, especially those that have more developed donor policies. Development cooperation is still a shared competence and the division of roles is not clear. Even when the added value of more EU coordination is recognized in certain areas, EU member states are unwilling to provide the Commission with the necessary capacities to facilitate more coordination. Rather, the Commission is often acting (and also perceived) as the 29th member state, and the much talk about the EU as the world’s largest donor is to a large extent rhetoric, since it refers to both common EU aid and the bilateral aid by the individual EU member states (which in effect have fairly little to do with one another, at least on the ground in Africa). The limits of EU actor-ness is a consequence of the ambiguity surrounding the ‘added value’ of the EU compared to bilateral and multilateral aid as well as the inability of the Commission to lead the process towards more coherence. The internal contradictions and complexities result in a weak partnership with low amounts of African ownership as well as weak donor coordination with other donors outside the EU machinery.

There are some indications that the European External Action Service (EEAS) will provide the Delegations with more formal leverage in the area of aid coordination. As the Delegations of the EU will have a more strategic and political role to play than the former Delegations of the EC, it remains to be seen to what extent they will be able to further promote their added value as the ‘neutral’ and ‘natural’ coordinator amongst EU donors.

The EU’s peace security partnership with Africa has become stronger over time, and the EU is increasingly seen as one peace and security actor on the African continent, not the least through a number of military and civilian peace operations. However, the EU’s impact as an actor and as ‘a force for good’ is severely constrained by failures of inter-institutional synchronization between the Commission and the Council. This is in turn tightly linked to the fact that the EU is rather selective in its involvement in conflict management and peace-building in Africa. Several missions were/are very specific and limited (such as Operation Artemis, EU FOR Chad/CAR) and with only a marginal impact on conflict management and peace-building.

One of the EU’s weaknesses is that it has often lacked the flexibility that is at times needed to mediate and resolve conflicts because of overemphasizing the respect of a particular set of norms. This normative stance has prevented the EU from engaging in a collaborative way with some of the key actors in the conflict, which has consequently reduced the effectiveness of the EU’s
actions. This was visible in the case of the Sudan, where the EU’s insistence that President Al-Bashir and other high profile Sudanese officials be indicted and tried by the ICC put it at loggerhead with the government in Khartoum and even jeopardized the ongoing peace process. Strong norms are not necessarily problematic in themselves. However, the EU’s normative approach is seen as double standard, because it tends to be political (even rhetorical) instead of genuinely normative, and because of the lack of proper conflict analysis. Hence, the EU has to transform the political will of being ‘present’ into actual achievements through increasing both the resources as well as bolstering its effectiveness. This is particularly relevant regarding the various CSDP missions so far, which have been simply too weak and underfinanced to have any real and lasting impact. Some observers have claimed that several of the EU’s interventions are not carried out to help civilians in conflicts or to achieve lasting impact on the ground, but rather to first and foremost promote the EU’s identity and visibility as a security actor: This severely undermines the credibility of the EU as a global peace and security actor.

Somewhat paradoxically, the EU’s normative approach and its selectivity travels well with the fact that the EU actively tries to reduce/downplay its own role in complex conflicts and humanitarian emergencies through buying in to the politically correct policy of ‘African solutions to African problems’. However, the weakness of this policy is that it seeks to transfer responsibility and accountability to African institutions without providing them with enough resources and capacities to solve the complex conflicts. African ownership is thus a chimera and the current solution suits European policy-makers in the sense that the EU’s involvement can be selective and limited, and does not have to take the blame or shame for failure, while at the same time it can boost the EU’s visibility — but without taking responsibility and without providing extensive resources.

Looking at the EU across the two policy fields, there is evidence of the EU as a coherent and unified actor albeit to different degrees depending on various circumstances and institutional configurations. In many regards, however, the EU is not capable of pursuing a coherent and coordinated policy. There are too may diverging interests within the Union, and the negative effect on actorness of the EU’s complicated and even inefficient institutional machinery should not be underestimated. The EU’s actorness is also undermined by its own geostrategic interests. Importantly, any policy based on narrow self-interest meets resistance from within the EU as well as from its partners, which only appears to undermine the EU as a global actor. With this said, however, the most important explanation for the EU’s weakness
as a global actor may not be bureaucratic politics or national/geostrategic interests, but the EU’s quest for identity-building and gaining visibility and presence as a global actor on the world scene. Indeed, there is considerable evidence of that too much of what the EU (particularly the Commission) does in these two policy fields is ultimately aimed at building the EU’s identity and visibility as a global actor. Even if such identity- and visibility-building may be legitimate for certain purposes, the fundamental problem is that genuine actorness cannot be built mainly around symbolic presence and proud policy declarations that are detached from real achievements and implementation on the ground. In the debate about the EU as a global actor, there is a widespread belief that the Lisbon Treaty and the EEAS will help to improve performance and implementation. The analysis in this chapter suggests that institutional reforms may not be able to improve the EU’s performance — the prevailing logic of the EU as a global actor is driven by more fundamental factors, both within the EU’s central institution and in its member states.

References


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