The EU As a Crisis Manager: A Comparison Between Georgia and Ukraine

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Abstract

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. As a global actor, the EU faces complex and uncertain security issues and, consequently, a high demand to become more coherent and effective in terms of strategic approaches. As highlighted in the EU Security Strategy, the EU has come a long way improving the use of the appropriate instruments. 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, a discussion about the dynamics of EU interventions will be conducted together with an analysis of different factors interacting in a crisis context. In particular, the cases of Georgia and Ukraine will be the main objective of investigation. In fact, these case studies underline strengths and weaknesses of the EU, focusing on the capacity to respond to potential shocks and to activate early warning systems. On the basis of this study, a final overview will clarify how a more coherent European engagement could develop essential capabilities to deal with new challenges and effectively impact on conflict scenarios, via a comprehensive approach under the direction of the European External Action Service.

Introduction

Over the past two decades, the European Union (EU) has considerably

extended the focus on external policies in terms of its geographical presence and aim of activities: in fact, 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 Strategy (ESS) represented a very important step forward headed in the direction of the identification of security challenges (Council of the European Union, 2003). Moreover, it is important to underline that security is now considered not only as a global concern but as a precondition for development and, also, 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 partners" (Council of the European Union, 2011).

Also, 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.

The case of Georgia as a turning point

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 Partnership (EaP) launched in Prague in May 2009 (Council of the European Union, 2009).

In spite of these commitments, the EU's impact in Georgia can be considered as negligible until the 7th of 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 scholars, this event was only the last one of a long series in an unfavourable context for Georgia (Cornell and Starr, 2009).

It all started after Kosovo's declaration of independence in February of the same year. Its eventual recognition by several of the EU's (then) 27 member states, created an advantageous 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 welcomed by Russia. According to the International Crisis Group (2008), 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 the 12th of 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 media (Delcour, 2011).

One month later, on the 8th of 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 Georgia" (Council of the European Union, 2008). 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 Mission in Georgia was launched on the 1st of October 2008, as mentioned above, as stated by the arrangements set out in the six-point agreement between Georgia and Russia of the 12th of August 2008, as implemented by the agreement reached on the 8th of September 2008 (Pirozzi, 2012). 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 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 support" (Council of the European Union, 2008).

However, it has to be said that the relationship between the two EUSR and the EUMM has not been 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 the 1st of September 2011. The EUMM's significance was enhanced because of its soon becoming the only internationally 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 2009 (Pirozzi, 2012).

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 countries (Gordadze, 2011).

EU's Capabilities in Crisis Management

At this point, EU civilian and military crisis management is still far from a complete success achieved by itself but it is working in order to achieve better results.
According to many scholars, in order to face the security and defence challenges of this unstable world, it will be necessary to programme

coherent and strategic actions with the specific aim to achieve a definitive credibility in this role. An essential step will be the improvement of the European External Action 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 Wolff (2012) suggest the implementation of a system built 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.

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 possess. In particular, it underlines the EU's achievements and lacks in strategic terms. It is worth noting that this model can be applied on many operations cases and can help to draw credible 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 call the attention on appropriate policy tools and the 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. Moreover, on the institutional level, many progresses have been made too. 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. In addition, they provide support to 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: this set of capabilities can be divided in two dimensions. A 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 in the relationship with NATO and with third countries and international organisations because of the strong European commitment to a multilateral approach.

According to Whitman and Wolff (2012) the EU has impressively enhanced its capabilities both to act and to fund its actions. In the case of the mission in Georgia in 2008, as mentioned above, two EU Special Representatives, for the South Caucasus and for the crisis in Georgia, have been appointed; the European Neighbourhood Policy and the Easter Partnership have officially made conflict management one of their priorities.

In terms of identification of strengths and weaknesses of the EU as an actor in crisis management, Tocci (2012: 143-7) presents interesting findings. Among the EU strengths, she includes the use of policies of conditionality: the promise/threat or granting/infliction of a benefit/punishment in return for the fulfillment/violation of a predetermined condition can be considered to be a strategy which is typical not only of the EU but of mediators in general.

The advantage is that the EU can offer a more varied range of benefits and punishments compared to other mediators. For example, trade preferences, financial and technical assistance, cooperation in fields such as science, environment, culture and education, energy, infrastructure, inclusion in EU programmes and agencies and, most important, the possibility of a full membership. Another point of strength is identified in

the European propensity to induce resolutions through socialization inducing a voluntary transformation of the perceived interests.

The EU develops this system through dialogue with third states in the context of contractual relations. Also, she recognizes that the EU can promote crisis management solutions through the passive enforcement of rules and norms, even if it is far easier to put in act as there must be a set of legally defined rules embedded in EU contracts with third states.

Tocci also indicates a set of weaknesses. In particular, she highlights the European inability to act rapidly and coherently and its limited capabilities. It is no secret that EU is frequently unable to build a consensus among member states especially because the latter are not keen to give away part of their sovereignty. Another weakness is identified as a lack of credibility causing a partial delivery of EU potential in crisis management. It mostly depends on third state's perception of the EU's capacities: if the perception is negative then the EU will also lose effectiveness. In this case credibility is related to the track record in granting/withdrawing promised benefits when and only if the conditions are fulfilled/violated.

Conclusions

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

The case of Georgia has been selected because, in my opinion, represents not yet a complete success but definitely a turning point in EU crisis

management, a new start to programme coherent and strategic actions and to achieve better results and eventually a definitive credibility in this role. The European Union Monitoring Mission (EUMM) in Georgia is an autonomous mission led by the EU under the EU Common security and defence policy (CSDP). Once ended the UN and OSCE monitoring missions, EUMM is now the only international monitoring mission in Georgia. The mission is still ongoing, a characteristic that allows an opportunity for observation and comment.

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