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EU Security Sector Reform Requires Revision to Achieve and Maintain Its Goals

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In recent years, the European Union has been increasingly active in promoting the idea of security sector reform. To date, the EU has launched a number of operations within the CSDP framework that have been devoted entirely to the implementation of it, mostly in African countries. Among the tasks of these missions has been to implement good governance rules, reconstruct the country's security institutions (army, police, intelligence services and the like) and create mechanisms to prevent violence towards the most vulnerable groups. Despite the EU's institutional and financial efforts, the achievements of these missions are rather modest and have little or no influence on the capabilities of these countries to protect their citizens from violence.

Over the last decade, the European Union has been engaged through the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) framework in operations with a security sector reform (SSR) mandate. Despite numerous engagements, there are serious concerns among experts that the EU's effort has added value to security in these countries. If the approach of the EU does not change in the years to come, the credibility of the EU as a security promoter will be seriously damaged and will influence its political ability to engage in other areas of conflict. At the same time, the need for SSR types of missions is on the rise, as shown by the developments in North African countries where the "Arab Spring" led to a serious undermining of the ability of local security forces to create a secure environment for the populace (the recent terrorist attack in Tunisia is only one of many examples of this weakness). Meanwhile, the government of Ukraine, where ongoing military engagements with Russian-backed separatists have destabilized the eastern part of the country, may soon call for more comprehensive EU engagement in reforming the country's security sector.

Premises. As stated very generally in the European Security Strategy (2003):

The EU "should think in terms of a wider spectrum of missions. This might include joint disarmament operations, support for third countries in combating terrorism and security sector reform. The last of these would be part of broader institution building."

Moreover, in 2005 the Council of the EU adopted a 20-page document, "EU Concept for ESDP support to Security Sector Reform," which sets the standards for EU engagement in this process, underlining the "human security" perspective as well as the importance of rules of good governance in the security sector (such as transparency, rule of law, accountability, civil control over the armed forces, inclusiveness, consensus orientation and the like). On the one hand, this is an acknowledgment of the obvious fact that SSR is one of the most promising stability-building measure close to the EU borders. On the other hand, it means that the EU has the means and instruments (including political and financial ones) at its disposal to promote such activities. It is worth mentioning here that the EU (as the European Communities) actively supported the so-called "first round" of SSR initiated mainly by NATO in former Soviet bloc countries (many of which later became members of both the EU and the Alliance).

The EU SSR-Mandated Missions in Africa. Most of the latest EU SSR engagements have been taking place on the African continent. Since 2005, EU advisers and trainers have been sent to the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) as part of the security mission EUSEC RD Congo, and since July 2007 within the police mission EUPOL RD Congo. Since May 2010, the EU has also been active in Somalia with the training mission EUTM Somalia, in Niger since July

2012 in the capacity-building project EUCAP Sahel Niger, and in Mali since February 2013 on another training mission, EUTM Mali. Between 2008 and 2010, the EU has been implementing SSR in Guinea-Bissau (EU SSR Guinea-Bissau). The mission's tasks include the promotion of good governance, reconstruction of the country's security institutions (army, police, intelligence services, defence ministry, oversight institutions and the like), the reintegration of former insurgents into regular armed forces, the establishment of credible methods of payment for recruits, and the creation of mechanisms to prevent violence towards refugees and those of different ethnic or religious origins than the ruling majority, and women and children. Very often, the EU cooperates with other missions in a particular country or in the region, such as UN or African Union missions, ECOWAS and others.

Effectiveness of EU SSR Engagement. The EU's efforts in promoting security sector reform in the African countries are troubled. The most striking example of the inadequacy of the EU's efforts (and to be fair, of other external actors as well) is the level of insecurity among the populations in the DRC despite having EU advisers in the country. Since 2005, the EU has been assisting the central government with building security forces (police and army) capable of ensuring a safe environment. Aside from the complicated internal conditions, including the lack of Congolese authorities accepting the reform concept, the EU also suffers from a number of shortcomings that have hampered its effectiveness in this particular mission. These include a lack of awareness among EU staff on the ground of the existence of a comprehensive strategy in the implementation of SSR in the DRC. Moreover, the EU CSDP institutions and the Member States apparently have different agendas while being simultaneously engaged in the country (e.g., the EU and UK have established separate missions in DRC). There is also a lack of a body that is perceived as an institutional SSR leader. Finally, experts point to the lack of an integrated approach to reforming various pillars of the security system in DRC, the excessive focus on EU fiscal bureaucracy, the lack of financial resources and so on. Moreover, the experts argue, the EU representatives on the ground have no political mandate to negotiate with the DRC's administration when problems arise, not to mention the fact that the reform programme was largely conceived in Brussels without sufficient input from the Congolese government (which means breaking the most important rule of "local ownership," meaning that the reform concept must be presented by the locals to avoid its rejection when implementation begins).

Another EU mission, in Guinea Bissau, had to be terminated as the EU team was not able to reach consensus with the government of the country. The mission aimed at reforming the defence, police and justice sector in the country but ended due to the inability of the EU side to influence the rival political parties in the country, which continued to pursue their own goals using violence. Experts pointed out the main shortcomings of this particular mission as a lack of qualified human resources (the whole mission amounted to only a dozen experts), a lack of sufficient policy analysis and intelligence gathering, and inadequate coordination with other institutions engaged there (mostly with the UN).

Recommendations. Most of the EU experience as an SSR "promoter" shows that the whole concept of EU engagement should be revised if the Union wants to be a desirable partner for non-member countries in their efforts to reform their security institutions. First of all, there is a need to include strong policy leadership for the mission to succeed. More often than not the EU engages mostly in technical spheres of SSR (as during the Cold War when different external partners were engaged in so-called "train and equip" programmes) while abstaining from broader political participation. The modern approach to these reforms include, however, strong political involvement and a "grand strategy," as SSR should not be treated as technical assistance but an endeavour aimed at deep transformation of the whole governance sphere of the country. This is especially important in some countries, such as the DRC, where there is strong negative political interference by the country's neighbours—Uganda and Rwanda. Second, the EU should better coordinate its efforts, both on the internal EU level (between different EU institutions and also engaged Member States—and the Franco-British rivalry is especially visible here) and on the international level with other stakeholders in the region (including Indian and Chinese advisors who are increasingly interacting with African governments). Third, the EU must secure a sufficient pool of experts (by establishing, for example, centres of excellence to gather specialists with unique SSR skills and practices) and secure adequate funds for these missions, as they often struggle with serious underfunding issues, which threatens the sustainability of the effect of the mission. Fourth, the EU should stick to the "human paradigm" agenda when dealing with some corrupted African administrations, as they tend to view EU efforts not as a tool to make their population secure but as a means to strengthen their own political regime by building strong security structures.

The implementation of these recommendations will allow the EU to improve its performance within the SSR missions. It is worth noting that in many countries and regions the EU is the most welcome political power (as the UN and AU missions are also not views as particularly effective, especially in terms of financing and sustainability), which is crucial given the delicate nature of some aspects of the reform.