European Union Comprehensive Approach: What's in a Name?

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Abstract

The article departs from the idea that the concept of comprehensive approach was adopted as an EU distinctive characteristic in managing crises. The new institutional context given by the Treaty of Lisbon and the growing number and complexity of the global challenges to be addressed by the EU contributed greatly to its operationalization. At the conceptual level, the scope and aim of the EU's comprehensive approach have been partially defined by a Joint Communication adopted in 2013 and further clarification has been added in the new EU Global Strategy, presented by the High Representative at the European Council of June 2016. Nevertheless, important divergences among Member States, as well as institutional divides and operational obstacles still hamper its effective implementation.

This article aims at analyzing the inception, evolution and current perspectives of the EU's comprehensive approach, with a view to feed the ongoing debate in the EU's institutions and among the experts' community. The first part offers an overview of the development of this concept from the adoption of the European Security Strategy (ESS) to the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty and the adoption of the European Commission/High Representative's Joint Communication. It is followed by an assessment of the efforts and gaps towards its operationalization, looking in particular at the cases of capacity building in security and development, joint programming in development cooperation and migration. It concludes with a flare on the way ahead following the presentation of the EU Global Strategy.

Resumo

Abordagem Abrangente no Contexto da União Europeia: O Significado de um Nome

O artigo parte da ideia de que o conceito de abordagem abrangente passou a ser adotado como uma característica distintiva da União Europeia no que respeita à gestão de crises. O novo enquadramento institucional dado pelo Tratado de Lisboa e o crescente número e complexidade dos desafios globais com os quais a União procura lidar, em muito contribuiu para a sua operacionalização. Ao nível conceptual, o âmbito e objeto da abordagem abrangente da União foi parcialmente definida por um Comunicado Conjunto adotado em 2013 e pela Estratégia Global da União a ser apresentada pela Alta Representante em junho de 2016. Contudo importantes divergências entre Estados-membros, bem como entre as clivagens existentes entre instituições europeias e os obstáculos operacionais ainda impedem a sua efetiva implementação.

Este artigo tem por objeto analisar a génese, evolução e perspetivas atuais sobre a abordagem abrangente da União com o propósito de incentivar o debate em curso nas instituições europeias e entre as comunidades de peritos. A primeira parte oferece uma perspetiva sobre o desenvolvimento do conceito desde a adoção da Estratégia Europeia de Segurança até à entrada em vigor do Tratado de Lisboa e à adoção pela Comissão Europeia e Alta Representante do Comunicado Conjunto. A segunda parte avalia os esforços e lacunas relativas à sua operacionalização, considerando em particular a questão do desenvolvimento de capacidades na área da segurança, desenvolvimento, programas conjuntos na cooperação para o desenvolvimento e migrações. Conclui com uma perspetiva sobre o futuro da abordagem abrangente da União considerando a adoção da Estratégia Global da União Europeia.

Introduction

The European Union (EU) has gradually developed the concept of comprehensive approach as its distinctive feature in managing crises (Faria, 2014, pp. 3-7). However, its definition and operationalization were given a decisive boost in the post-Lisbon phase, in connection with both the new institutional context created by the Treaty, and the rising number and complexity of the global challenges to be addressed by the EU. At the conceptual level, the scope and aim of the EU's comprehensive approach have been partially defined by a *Joint Communication* adopted by the European Commission and the High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy (HR) in December 2013, and further clarification has been added in the new *EU Global Strategy*, presented by the High Representative at the European Council of June 2016. Nevertheless, important divergences among Member States, as well as institutional divides and operational obstacles still hamper its effective implementation.

This article aims at analysing the inception, evolution and current perspectives of the EU's comprehensive approach, with a view to feed the ongoing debate in the EU's institutions and among the experts' community. The first part offers an overview of the development of this concept from the adoption of the *European Security Strategy* (ESS) to the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty and the adoption of the European Commission/High Representative's *Joint Communication*. It is followed by an assessment of the efforts and gaps towards its operationalization, looking in particular at the cases of capacity building in security and development, joint programming in development cooperation and migration. It concludes with a flare on the way ahead following the presentation of the *EU Global Strategy*.

The Troubled Path towards the Conceptualization of the EU's Comprehensive Approach

Before Lisbon, the EU had already modelled its *European Security Strategy* on a new concept of security, in particular by recognizing the indissoluble link between internal and external aspects of security, as well as between security and development (European Security Strategy, 2003, p. 3). The *Report on the Implementation of the European Security Strategy* confirms this inclusive approach, by affirming that "drawing on a unique range of instruments […]", the EU has "worked to build human security, by reducing poverty and inequality, promoting good governance and human rights, assisting development, and addressing the root causes of conflict and insecurity" (Report on the Implementation of the European Security Strategy, 2008, p. 2).

In the specific sector of crisis management, in the pre-Lisbon phase the EU had substantially adopted the NATO's perspective on comprehensive approach, which is conceived as an expanded Civil-Military Cooperation (CIMIC), meaning essen-

tially the cooperation among different actors (political, civilian and military) in theatre. It comes out from the recognition that military means, although essential, are not enough to meet current complex challenges to Euro-Atlantic and international security. NATO's reflection on this concept has evolved itself and in the *Strategic Concept* adopted at the Lisbon Summit in November 2010 the Allies have accepted to enhance their contribution to comprehensive approach in two main directions (Lisbon Summit Declaration, 2010, paragraph 8-9): (1) to work with partner countries, international organizations, non-governmental organizations and local authorities, taking into account their respective strengths, mandates and roles, as well as their decision-making autonomy; (2) to contribute, when required, to stabilization and reconstruction through an appropriate but modest civilian capability to interface more effectively with other actors and conduct appropriate planning in crisis management. In March 2011, NATO agreed on an updated list of tasks for its *Comprehensive Approach Action Plan*, which are being implemented by a dedicated civilian-military task force. At the Chicago Summit in May 2012, Allies agreed to establish a civilian crisis management capability at NATO Headquarters and within Allied Command Operations (SHAPE) (NATO, 2014).

In the second semester of 2009, the Swedish presidency of the EU insisted on the concept of comprehensive approach by translating it essentially in civilian-military synergies in the field of the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) (Council of the European Union, 2009, p. 22). As a consequence, comprehensive approach has coincided for a long time with the imperative to use all the tools at the EU's disposal (political, civilian/development and military) together in theatre.

In the post-Lisbon period, the comprehensive approach has been developed in a much broader framework, essentially by enlarging its scope and assigning grater responsibilities on its development and implementation to the High Representative, who is also Vice President of the European Commission (VP) and the European External Action Service (EEAS). The challenge launched by the Lisbon Treaty is to break out of the 'CSDP box' and interpret the comprehensive approach in the dimension of the EU's external relations, with the concurring contribution of different policies and actors (European Council on Foreign Relations, 2012). This development has been accompanied by a reflection on the most appropriate instruments to be used by the EU to provide an added value in crisis management, in comparison and in cooperation with other actors and by a transition of the focus of civilian-military cooperation from the field level to the planning phase in Brussels. Nevertheless, the shift from "the question of how to coordinate other tools with a CSDP mission" to "a much broader issue of how to intermingle a range of instruments, prioritize these and centre the work around a diplomatic effort led by the EEAS in cooperation with Community instruments" has proved difficult to realize (European Council on Foreign Relations, 2012).

A good overview of the competing visions of comprehensive approach still rooted in the different EU's institutions can be derived by a number of recent public interventions by their high level representatives on this subject. In particular, the stance kept by crisis management structures of the EEAS seems to be still anchored to a CSDP-centred mentality, which identifies CSDP with crisis management and advocates the need to combine it with other EU tools, i.e. diplomatic, economic, developmental, humanitarian. The comprehensive approach is intended as the 'European way' to do crisis management and exemplified with the '3Ds' approach: diplomacy, development and defence/security.

On her side, the former HR/VP Catherine Ashton has promoted a far-reaching objective for the comprehensive approach, which seeks agreement "at the highest political level, […] on a set of actions which, in a country in crisis, will deliver a solution to that crisis, and a long-term commitment to the political and economic development of that country", and refers to a broad spectrum of aspects, including "political, diplomatic, security, military, humanitarian, civil protection, border management", but also "immigration, consular activities and energy". The former HR/VP intended to operationalize the comprehensive approach "by better linking our conflict prevention, mediation, development and conflict resolution activities", while the CSDP should be reinforced both in terms of 'hardware' (military and civilian capabilities) and 'software' (how we plan and conduct operations, engage with partners" (Speech by High Representative, 2010).

On the other side, the European Commission continues to centre the notion of comprehensive approach on the elaboration and implementation of conflict-sensitive approaches in development cooperation and the need to address root causes of crises. This is reflected in a constant recall to European Commission's work on fragile countries, conflict prevention and peace-building, as well as justice and security sector reform. In line with this approach, the *Agenda for Change*, adopted by the European Commission in October 2011, advocates a differentiated approach to development cooperation and recognizes the importance of meeting specific needs of countries in fragile and crisis situations and of keeping state-building as a central element of support strategies (Agenda for Change, 2011).

A clear indication of the difficulty to find a common understanding and a shared implementation path among EU institutions and Member States came from the lengthy process for the elaboration of a *Joint HR/EC Communication on Comprehensive Approach*, aimed at bringing some definitory clarity and offer a single EU interpretation of this concept. The adoption of this *Joint Communication* was blocked for long time by the traditional inter-institutional competition over spheres of influence and approaches to crisis management: whilst the European Commission feared a politicization of humanitarian aid and development cooperation, Member States were suspicious about a possible denaturalization of CSDP. Originally

expected for September 2012, it was firstly delayed to the first semester of 2013 and then adopted only in December 2013.

The *Joint HR/EC Communication* has achieved the objective to set out a common understanding of the EU's comprehensive approach in relation to the specific field of 'external conflicts and crises', but speaks about a joint application more broadly "in the EU's external policy and action" (European Commission/High Representative, 2013, p. 2). It does not dictate policy or approach for specific countries or region, nor does it propose a blueprint for EU action in any particular crisis (Council of the EU, 2015a, p. 2). As indicated by EU institutions involved, "the comprehensive approach is not about 'what to do' but 'how to do it' and how to make the best use of the EU's collective resources and instruments, with a particular focus on conflict and crisis situations" (Council of the EU, 2015a, p. 2).

In the *Joint Communication*, comprehensiveness is intended as: (1) the joined-up deployment of EU instruments and resources, and (2) the shared responsibility of EU-level actors and Member States (European Commission/High Representative, 2013, p. 3). These indications entail a double challenge: at the operational level, it means ensuring a sequenced transition between different instruments, within the EU but also with Member States; in terms of content, the *Joint Communication* places the connection between security and development among the key underlying principles of the comprehensive approach, but stresses that the different competences and added value of the EU's institutions and services, as well as of the Member States, in the fields of humanitarian aid, development assistance and CSDP should be fully respected. It also points on the need to elaborate context-specific responses (European Commission/High Representative, 2013, p. 4).

The *Joint Communication* finally defines eight measures to enhance coherence and effectiveness of EU external policy and action in conflict of crisis situations (European Commission/High Representative, 2013, pp. 5-12): (1) develop a shared analysis of the situation or challenge; (2) define a common strategic vision; (3) focus on prevention; (4) mobilize the different strengths and capacities of the EU; (5) commit to the long term; (6) link the internal and external policies and action; (7) make better use of the role of EU Delegations; and (8) work in partnership with other international and regional actors.

Operationalizing the EU Comprehensive Approach

Now that the EU has equipped itself with a joint definition of the matter, the real challenge remains in its implementation.

It must be recognized that, even in the absence of a single concept document on comprehensive approach, EU institutions and Member States made some progress in its operationalization in the immediate aftermath of the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty. As an example, it is fair to say that the two 2011 Strategies for the

Sahel and the Horn of Africa are a specific legacy of the Treaty's appeal to "consistency" in the EU's external action (Article 21 TEU) and can be considered as a first attempt to put comprehensive approach into practice by joined-up instruments and through the cooperation among the institutions involved.

The *Strategy for Security and Development in the Sahel* (2011), for example, has been conceived after two years of intense work by all the concerned institutions (EEAS, European Commission, Council of the EU) and implemented through instruments ranging from the Instrument for Stability now Instrument contributing to Stability and Peace, the European Development Fund and the CSDP. In the Horn of Africa, the tasks assigned to the maritime operation EUNAVFOR Atalanta, the training mission for Somali soldiers EUTM Somalia, and the regional capacity-building mission EUCAP Nestor have been combined with development and humanitarian assistance, including Commission programmes on Critical Maritime Routes and Maritime Security. However, it is still unclear if experiments such as the *Strategic Framework for the Horn of Africa* (2011) should be considered as the product of a genuine effort to identify a collective purpose for EU engagements and translate the comprehensive approach into practice or more as a reverse engineering exercise, consisting in the development of a conceptual hat aimed at providing *ex post* coherence to a number of different and often non-aligned activities conducted by the EU in crisis theatres.

With a view to outline how key actions will be taken forward, implemented and reported, the Foreign Affairs Council Conclusions on comprehensive approach adopted in May 2014 urged the adoption of an action plan in the first quarter of 2015 (Council of the EU, 2014a, p. 21). The *Action Plan 2015* has been produced by EEAS and Commission staff with the aim of setting out concrete and practical actions for implementation both at EU and national level (Council of the EU, 2015a, p. 2). It is confirmed the understanding that the comprehensive approach is a 'working method' which should guide the EU external action across all areas (Council of the EU, 2015a, p. 3). Accordingly, the Action Plan selects a number of key issues to be taken forward and a limited number of countries and regions as privileged fields of implementation. Two priority actions are identified (Council of the EU, 2015a, pp. 4-5):

(1) Define a common strategic vision through the development of *Guidelines for Joint Framework Documents* (JFDs). JFDs should be a joint endeavour of EU institutions and Member States, with Embassies and EU Delegations on the ground playing a key role, and rely on a shared context analysis of a particular country or region. This shared analysis should be translated into a common strategic vision for future EU and Member States engagement which could link up all the relevant dimensions (political engagement, development cooperation, external dimension of internal policies, trade, economic cooperation, CSDP, etc.);

(2) Mobilize the different strengths and capacities of the EU through: (a) capacity building in support of security and development, with a view to fill the gap in the provision and funding of training and equipment to partner countries and regional organizations to sustain their efforts to better prevent and manage crises; (b) transition, namely earlier and more coordinated planning between EEAS and Commission services, as well as Member States or hosting authorities, to enable a smooth transition from one form of EU engagement to another, i.e. from CSDP to development cooperation; and (c) rapid deployment of joint EEAS, Commission and Member States field missions and/or staff to reinforce EU Delegations through new methods.

The priority areas for implementation are identified in the Sahel region, Central America, Afghanistan and Somalia. In all these scenarios, the EU is engaged through different actors, policies and instruments, thus representing relevant cases to pilot new forms of comprehensive approach along the lines of the Action Plan.

It is interesting to underline that the adoption of the Action Plan has inaugurated a new operation phase of the comprehensive approach, through which concrete initiatives will be identified and revised on an annual basis. The *Action Plan 2016-17* is currently discussed by relevant services in EEAS, Commission and Member States, with the contribution of external experts through consultation meetings. Its scope will be expanded to include new geographic areas – from the neighbourhood to Asia – and additional themes, in particular migration, joint programming and gender in conflict.

Beyond the institutionalized process carried out in the framework of the Action Plan, the comprehensive approach has been translated into practice through a series of *ad hoc* initiatives, ranging from capacity building to migration and development cooperation.

Capacity Building in Support of Security and Development

One of the most debated and interesting initiative is the *Capacity Building in Support of Security and Development* (CBSD), based on the Joint Communication adopted by the European Commission and the High Representative in April 2015 (European Commission, 2015) and the Council conclusions on CSDP of May 2015 (Council of the EU, 2015b, p. 8), which called to explore options, notably in terms of financial instruments, in this regard. This initiative testifies a gradual shift of both the security and development communities on the need to further integrate not only at the conceptual level, but also through concrete actions, and the activities carried out by the EU in the sector of capacity building of third countries and regional organizations to manage crises are particularly suited for experimenting this enhanced cooperation.

The mandate of recent CSDP missions deployed by the EU has been increasingly focused on assisting, advising, mentoring and training local authorities in per-

forming tasks such as security sector reform, institution-building, development of national strategies. The EU is increasingly reluctant to to deploy executive missions, in favor of an approach that follows the principle of ownership by local actors and privileges capability-development rather than direct involvement. Political considerations are at stake in such decision, as the empowerment of partner countries is an appealing concept and simultaneously puts the EU in a safer place against accusations of scarce effectiveness or limited impact on the security situation. Nevertheless, the focus on supporting local constituencies through training, mentoring and advising activities and accompanied by the financial package of the European Commission can become a special feature of the EU's crisis management model and its added value in comparison with other security actors.

In fact, in order to compensate the scarcity of funds in the realm of CSDP, crisis management institutions have increasingly involved the European Commission and requested the identification of additional financial instruments (namely the European Development Fund, the Instrument contributing to Stability and Peace or the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance) to support the EU's action in security-related sectors, including rule of law, security sector reform, border management, etc. The use of matching funds has been facilitated by the creation of the EEAS, especially through the tasks assigned to Geographic Departments in the EEAS in the programming cycle of development cooperation managed by the European Commission and the establishment of the Foreign Policy Instrument within the EEAS with competence on the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) budget. The identification of relevant instruments and resources to support CSDP actions is now an essential element in each Crisis Management Concept, both during the implementation of missions (i.e. EUCAP Nestor, EUCAP SAHEL Niger and EUTM Mali) and in the planning of exit strategies (i.e. EUSEC RD Congo and EUPOL RD Congo, EUAVSEC South Sudan and EUPM Bosnia-Herzegovina), with the handover of responsibilities to other EU stakeholders. However, the accomplishment of a real integration among different EU external policies remains a challenge for the EU: crisis management and development cooperation are still distinguished sectors, both in Brussels and in national capitals.

The CBSD initiative can represent a real quantum leap in this regard, as it proposes to identify relevant resources to fill the gaps in the way the EU builds the capacity of partners in the security sector by complementing CSDP missions with short- and long-term financing and provision of training and mentoring, non-lethal equipment and infrastructure improvements (European Commission, 2016, p. 3). This is currently done only through *ad hoc* arrangements that do not ensure effectiveness and sustainability. Its actual implementation still encounters the resistance of key actors in the European Commission, especially in the Directorate-General for Development Cooperation (DG DEVCO) and the Legal Service. However, it can be

facilitated by a recent agreement reached at the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's (OECD) Development Assistance Committee (DAC), which updated and clarified the reporting directives for official development assistance (ODA) on peace and security, particularly by making a number of security-related programmes and security sector reform ODA-eligible (European Commission, 2016, p. 1). The options currently considered to fund this initiative are: (1) adapting existing instruments, such as the African Peace Facility[1] or the Instrument contributing to Stability and Peace[2]; (2) creating a facility in the framework of existing financial instruments; (3) proposing a new dedicated instrument; (4) revising the Athena mechanism[3] to cover the supply of equipment to the military of partner countries (European Commission, 2016, p. 5).

Joint Programming in Development Cooperation

Joint Programming is identified by the *Joint Communication on Comprehensive Approach* as one of the elements of the EU's engagement to build peaceful and resilient societies. According to the *EU Common Position for the Fourth High Level Forum on Aid and Development Effectiveness* held in Busan in 2011, Joint Programming is a process whereby the EU and Member States (and other interested donors and partners) take strategic decisions based on a comprehensive view of donors' support to a given partner country (Council of the EU, 2011b). In this direction, the Joint Programming is foreseen in 55 countries in order to make the EU and its Member States' development cooperation more effective. Its aim is to present a united package of support, led at country level by the EU Delegations and Members States Embassies (European Commission/High Representative, 2013, p. 11). The Council Conclusions of May 2014 specifically recall the need to conduct Joint Programming in accordance with the principles of the *New Deal for Engagement in Fragile States* (Council of the EU, 2014b, p. 4), which commits its signatories – including the EU

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1   The African Peace Facility was established in 2004 and is financed through the European Development Fund. It constitutes the main source of funding to support the African Union's and African sub-regions' efforts in the area of peace and security with an overall amount of more than 1.9 billion Euros.

2   The Instrument contributing to Stability and Peace (IcSP) succeeded to the Instrument for Stability (IfS) in 2014 and is one of the EU external assistance instruments to prevent and respond to actual or emerging crises around the world. IcSP funds can cover: (1) urgent short-term actions in response to situations of crisis or emerging crisis; and (2) longer-term capacity building of organizations engaged in crisis response and peace-building. A financial envelope for the IcSP of 2,338,719,000 Euros is foreseen for the period 2014-2020.

3   Athena is a mechanism that was set up by the Council of the EU in 2004 and is aimed at administering the common costs (such as transport, infrastructures and medical services) of EU operations with military or defence implications. It is financed by Member States (with the exception of Denmark) in accordance with their Gross National Product (GNP).

and 13 Member States – to improve current development policy and practice with a view to support inclusive country-led and country-owned transition out of fragility. Joint Programming has become a reality in European international cooperation practice, but it is still struggling to become a strongly established – if not binding – European norm due to the multiplicity of practices at EU and national level (Helly *et al.*, 2015, p. 34). In the *EU Global Strategy*, Join Programming in development is explicitly mentioned as a tool to be further enhanced together with the comprehensive approach to conflicts and crises (High Representative, 2016, p. 49). Based on this prescription, its implementation could be reinforced through a revised *European Consensus on Development*, matching the new global agenda for Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (Helly *et al.*, 2015).

Migration

The comprehensive approach has started to be applied not only to the EU's engagement in situations of conflict and fragility beyond its borders, but also to different sectors that lie at the intersection between internal and external policies. In the field of migration, the *EU Integrated Political Response Arrangement* (IPCR) has been activated in October 2015, under the Luxemburg Presidency. Created in June 2013, the IPCR process is led by the Presidency, with the support of the General Secretariat of the Council, the Commission and the EEAS, and centred on COREPER. It includes an Integrated Situational Awareness and Analysis (ISAA) capability and a Web Platform for information sharing, through which it has produced weekly information reports. In the first months of its operationalization, it has functioned through periodical meetings among relevant stakeholders in EU institutions and other actors, including Member States, UN agencies, local partners, etc. on specific topics such as Central Mediterranean, Turkey, and others. This mechanism, if adequately reinforced and expanded, could become a central element for a new approach to migration, involving all interested parties in the assessment and planning of interventions in countries of origin and transit to address the root causes and the push factors of the phenomenon in a more comprehensive manner.

The Way Ahead: the Comprehensive Approach in the EU Global Strategy

In her answers to the European Parliament questionnaire in view of her appointment as new HR/VP, Federica Mogherini declared her commitment "to fully implement the measures put forward by the EU's comprehensive approach to external conflicts and crises" (Mogherini, 2014, p. 5) and placed at the centre of her mandate as both High Representative and Vice President of the Commission "to take a comprehensive approach at EU external action, ensuring coordination, coherence and synergies between the different instruments, both financial and policy-wise" (Mogherini, 2014, p. 8).

As it stands in the current debate at the EU level, the comprehensive approach can be considered both as a specific way of addressing "all stages of conflict or other external crises" through "a wide array of policies, tools and instruments at its disposal", building on the reciprocal relations between security and development, and, more broadly, "the central organizing principle of the EU's external action" (Kempin and Scheler, 2016, p. 2).

The *Strategic Review* released by the High Representative in June 2015 mentions the comprehensive approach as the framework in which "several action tracks are programmed to enhance the security-development nexus in capacity building missions" (Strategic Review, 2015, p. 14) and considers it as the guiding concept of the EU's engagement in external conflicts and crises, connecting it explicitly to the realm of CSDP (Strategic Review, 2015, p. 18). At the same time, the need for a 'joined-up approach' among the various actors and instruments of EU external action is recognized "in virtually every aspect of the EU's presence in the world" (Strategic Review, 2015, p. 18).

This paved the way for the wording and substance of the *EU Global Strategy*, which confirmed the relevance of implementing the comprehensive approach to conflicts and crises "through a coherent use of all policies at the EU's disposal" (High Representative, 2016, p. 9), while pointing out the need for a joined-up approach across external policies, between Member States and EU institutions, and between the internal and external dimensions of EU's policies (High Representative, 2016, p. 11).

The *Strategy* includes an integrated approach to conflicts among the priorities of the EU's external action and clearly indicates that "the meaning and scope of the comprehensive approach will be expanded" (High Representative, 2016, p. 9). According to the document, this should be done in three main directions: (1) a multi-phased approach: the EU will act at all stages of the conflict cycle, investing in prevention, resolution and stabilisation, and avoiding premature disengagement when a new crisis erupts elsewhere; (2) a multi-level approach: the EU will act at different levels of governance, including local, national, regional and global dimensions; and (3) a multi-lateral approach: the EU will foster and support broad, deep and durable regional and international partnerships to achieve sustainable peace (High Representative, 2016, pp. 28-29).

Moreover, the *Strategy* calls for action to make the EU's external action more joined-up and include the comprehensive approach to conflicts and crises as one of the policy innovations to be further enhanced, together with joint programming in development (High Representative, 2016, p. 49). The document also offers a full menu of possible initiatives to be taken at policy and institutional levels to generate coherence among different policies, between the internal and external dimensions of policies and across financial instruments (High Representative, 2016, pp. 49-51).

The recognition of the comprehensive approach as a distinctive feature of the EU's engagement in crisis management in the *EU Global Strategy* is expected to bring additional political weight to this concept. Nevertheless, in order to make it a meaningful tool to enhance the effectiveness and coherence of the EU on the ground, the process of its implementation started with the 2015 Action Plan and various *ad hoc* initiatives should be integrated, rationalized and targeted towards key objectives. Beyond the specific working methods adopted in the various fields of intervention, it should be clear that the final aim is to bring EU institutions in Brussels (especially the European Commission and the EEAS), Member States representatives in Brussels and in national capitals, and actors on the ground (EU Delegations, CSDP missions, EU Special Representatives, national embassies) to engage with other relevant partners in a common effort to ensure security and development in countries affected by conflicts and fragility. This should be done in line with a joined-up approach that: (1) starts from a common assessment of the situation on the ground; (2) mobilizes the different instruments at the disposal of the various actors; and (3) identify priorities for action together with local and international partners.

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