

EU makes its mark on the world stage

In the past decade, the European Union has brought security in its missions across the globe. It is ambitious for more success



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guardian.co.uk, Sunday 11 October 2009 09.00 BST

This is a landmark year for the European Union's role in the world. It marks 10 years of European security and defence policy (ESDP), during which the EU has become a global provider of security, making a real difference to people's lives all over the world. At the same time, we are on the threshold of a new era when the Lisbon treaty enters into force and provides fresh impetus for our external action.

In 10 years, we have deployed 20 operations on three continents to help prevent violence, restore peace and rebuild after a conflict. From Kabul to Pristina, from Ramallah to Kinshasa, the EU is monitoring borders, overseeing peace agreements, training police forces, building up criminal justice systems and protecting shipping from pirate attacks. Thanks to our achievements, we are receiving more and more calls to help in a crisis or after a war. We have the credibility, the values and the will to do this.

The EU was ahead of its time in 1999. The comprehensive, multi-faceted nature of our approach was novel. And the EU remains the only organisation that can call on a full panoply of instruments and resources that complement the traditional foreign policy tools of its member states, both to pre-empt or prevent a crisis and to restore peace and rebuild institutions after a conflict.

This is where the EU's unique added value lies. We combine humanitarian aid and support for institution-building and good governance with crisis-management capacities, technical and financial assistance, and political dialogue and mediation. The EU's joint civilian-military approach makes us flexible and able to offer tailor-made solutions to complex problems. Today's conflicts demonstrate more clearly than ever that a military solution is neither the sole nor the best option, particularly during the stabilisation of a crisis – a truth President Barack Obama has also emphasised.

The ESDP first cut its teeth in the Balkans. When the Yugoslav wars broke out in the 1990s we watched as our neighbourhood burned because we had no means of responding to the crisis. We learned our lesson and organised ourselves, acquiring a set

of capabilities coupled with decision-making procedures and a security doctrine. In 2003, we prevented a fresh outbreak of hostilities in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia through our diplomatic efforts and then deployed Operation Concordia. In 2004, Operation Althea took over from the Nato peacekeeping force in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Today, we are still deeply engaged in the Balkans, fighting organised crime and building up the institutions of law and order. For example, Eulex Kosovo is the largest EU mission to date, with some 2,000 staff, working in the police and judicial system and in mobile customs teams.

The EU's crisis-management and peace-building activities are not restricted to its backyard. We have made a real difference in Africa, helping, for example, to provide a secure environment for elections in the Democratic Republic of Congo and protecting refugees and aid workers from the fall-out of the Darfur crisis. Last year, we mounted EU Navfor, our first-ever naval operation, to combat piracy in the waters off Somalia. Who would have guessed 10 years ago that the EU would one day lead a taskforce of 13 frigates in the Indian Ocean that would cut the success rate of pirate attacks by half?

This year the EU has 12 operations running concurrently – more than ever before. Since 2003, some 70,000 men and women have been deployed in 23 crisis-management operations. They come from EU member states and non-EU countries that also take part in our operations, including Norway, Switzerland, Ukraine, Turkey and the United States.

Of these 23 missions, six have been military and the other 17 civilian. We deploy army or navy personnel when and where they are needed but our business is peace-building not waging war. The EU is not a military alliance. The solution to any crisis, emergency or conflict, must always be political and our ESDP actions are always firmly anchored in political strategies, formed by consensus.

Our ESDP missions have taken us as far afield as Aceh in Indonesia, where we monitored the peace agreement reached after the 2004 tsunami, following decades of civil war. Working closely with the Association of South-Eastern Asian Nations, we mediated between rebels and the government and oversaw the decommissioning of weapons.

As we gain experience and expertise we are mounting increasingly ambitious operations. Our success with Operation Artemis, in the Democratic Republic of Congo, where the EU intervened in 2003 after violent clashes and a humanitarian crisis in Bunia, helped prepare us to mount our Eufor operation in Chad and the Central African Republic and EU Navfor Somalia, which South Africa has expressed an interest in joining.

Last year, we showed how rapidly we could mobilise when we deployed a monitoring mission to the Caucasus in less than three weeks to help defuse the crisis between

Russia and Georgia, following the EU-mediated peace agreement. As a member of the international Quartet, the EU is deeply engaged at diplomatic level in the Middle East peace process and the moment an agreement is reached between the Israelis and Palestinians we will be ready to help implement it on the ground. We already have a mission in the West Bank helping to build up the Palestinian civil police and criminal justice system. In Somalia, we are considering security-sector reform measures to complement EU Navfor Somalia and the humanitarian aid and political support that we are already providing.

To respond to the growing calls to help tackle regional and global security challenges, the EU must improve the efficiency and coherence of its external action still further. We currently have a gap between our ambitions and our resources which must be addressed. Clearer priorities and more sensible budgeting decisions are needed. And we need to strengthen our civilian and military capabilities and boost their funding in order to back up our political decisions.

The EU's unique, joint civilian-military approach must be further developed to make us yet more flexible. Our capacity to deploy rapid reaction forces also needs strengthening. In the second decade of ESDP, the Lisbon treaty will put all this within the EU's grasp.

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