EU comprehensive approach and coherence of EU external action

European Parliament resolution of 3 April 2014 on the EU comprehensive approach and its implications for the coherence of EU external action (2013/2146(INI))

(2017/C 408/03)

The European Parliament,

— having regard to the Annual Report from the Council to the European Parliament on the Common Foreign and Security Policy,
— having regard to Articles 2, 3, 21, 24 and 36 of the Treaty on European Union (TEU),
— having regard to Title V TEU and to the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU),
— having regard to Article 21(3) TEU, which stipulates that the High Representative shall assist the Council and the Commission in ensuring consistency between the different areas of the Union’s external action,
— having regard to Article 24(3) TEU, which states that the Member States shall support the Union’s external and security policy actively and unreservedly in a spirit of loyalty and mutual solidarity and shall comply with the Union’s action in this area, that they shall refrain from any action which is contrary to the interests of the Union or likely to impair its effectiveness as a cohesive force in international relations and that the Council and the High Representative shall ensure compliance with these principles,
— having regard to the European Council conclusions of 14 December 2012,
— having regard to the conclusions of the Inter-Parliamentary Conference for the Common Foreign and Security Policy and the Common Security Defence Policy of 6 September 2013,
— having regard to the Joint Communication of the Commission and the HR/VP to the European Parliament and the Council of 11 December 2013 on the EU’s comprehensive approach to external conflict and crises (JOIN(2013)0030),
— having regard to its recommendation to the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy/Vice-President of the Commission, to the Council and to the Commission of 13 June 2013 on the 2013 review of the organisation and functioning of the EEAS (1) and to the EEAS Review 2013 presented by the High Representative in July 2013 (2),
— having regard to Parliament’s resolutions on the CFSP and the CSDP, in particular its resolution of 22 November 2012 on the Role of the Common Security and Defence Policy in cases of climate-driven crisis and natural disasters (3),
— having regard to the European Consensus on Development,
— having regard to the report of 15 October 2013 by the High Representative/Vice-President of the Commission on the Common Security and Defence Policy,
— having regard to the EEAS report on the revision of CSDP crisis management procedures, adopted by the Political and Security Committee (PSC) on 18 June 2013,
— having regard to the Charter of the United Nations,
— having regard to Rule 48 of its Rules of Procedure,
— having regard to the report of the Committee on Foreign Affairs and the opinions of the Committee on Development and the Committee on Women’s Rights and Gender Equality (A7-0138/2014),

A. whereas it is already a requirement of the Lisbon Treaty and the current decision-making processes to ‘ensure consistency between the different areas of the Union’s external action and between these and its other policies’; whereas this objective would benefit from Parliament playing a greater role in external relations;

B. whereas comprehensiveness refers not only to the joined-up deployment of EU instruments and resources, but also to the shared responsibility of EU-level actors and Member States, whose policies, actions and support should contribute to more coherent and more effective EU external action;

C. whereas with the Lisbon Treaty the EU has recently acquired new instruments of external action which enable it to develop a more active, unified and genuine EU foreign policy;

The EU in a changing world

1. Considers that significant geostrategic changes are taking place, owing in particular to the rise of a multipolar international scene with new actors pursuing competitive regional and global ambitions, growing interdependency, the rise of multidimensional asymmetric threats, the refocusing of US security policy towards the Asia-Pacific, the growing struggle over energy and resource security, the increasingly serious effects of climate change and a severe and long-lasting global financial and economic crisis affecting all EU Member States;

2. Stresses that in such a geopolitical climate, the EU must preserve and promote its values, interests and stability on the global stage, as well as protect the security and prosperity of its citizens; stresses that this demands a fresh approach to shaping, in cooperation with our strategic partners, a new multipolar world order that is inclusive, credible, just, cooperative, underpinned by respect for human rights, the rule of law and democracy and aims to achieve the resolution of differences without recourse to armed conflict;

EU comprehensive approach: state of play in implementing the political framework

3. Emphasises that the strength of the EU lies in its potential to mobilise resources across the full range of diplomatic, security, defence, economic, trade, development and humanitarian instruments — in full compliance with the provisions of the UN Charter — and that using these instruments in a comprehensive approach (CA) gives it a unique flexibility to effectively address the most challenging international issues and achieve its own policy goals;

4. Stresses the importance of effective coordination and coherence in the European Union’s external action; agrees with the view that the development, political and security spheres are interdependent and that the added value provided by the EU in responding to complex emergencies lies in its ability to create cross-sectoral and interinstitutional synergies in order to deliver sustainable results on the ground and achieve long-term strategic objectives;

5. Stresses that the CA is today considered by all relevant international actors (including multilateral organisations and states) to be the best way to frame an efficient response to multidimensional crises and to promote human security globally, directly coming from long-standing recognition that attempting to bring stability by means solely of a single approach is likely to fail;

6. Recalls notably that the United Nations has developed, since 2006, the concept of an ‘integrated approach’ to conflict and post-conflict situations and that NATO’s members adopted, at the 2010 Lisbon Summit, a new Strategic Concept calling for a comprehensive approach to crisis management;

7. Underlines the fact that the Lisbon Treaty provides the framework for the Union to achieve a more coherent, joined-up and comprehensive approach for the effective pursuit of the Union’s external relations, including by creating the triple-hatted High Representative (HR) of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, who is also Vice-President of the Commission and Chair of the Foreign Affairs Council, and by establishing a unifying and effective European External Action Service (EEAS);
8. Regrets that, despite the Lisbon Treaty innovations, lack of progress in the consistency of the Union's external action persists in areas relating to security, humanitarian matters, development, trade, energy, environment, migration and other global issues; is concerned that the Commission often takes a restrictive approach, protecting its own competences in these areas and minimising coordination functions with the EEAS.

9. Urges the Member States to meet their Treaty-based commitments to support the Union's external relations and security policy actively and in a spirit of mutual solidarity and to comply, in conducting their own policies, with the Union's action in this area; calls on the Member States to play a constructive role by promoting strategic policy coordination at EU level; stresses that the EU foreign policy can only be effective if the Member States are willing and able to formulate common policy lines, particularly within multilateral organisations, such as the United Nations.

10. Welcomes the joint communication on the EU's comprehensive approach to external conflicts and crises of 11 December 2013; regrets, however, that it relies more on existing processes rather than trying to explore new concrete ways to facilitate institutional and practical cooperation.

11. Insists that the CA is the common responsibility of all EU actors in EU institutions, in EU Member States and on the ground in third countries, and that, at the same time, it must fully respect the specific competencies of each institution and actor.

12. Calls for active engagement and dialogue with citizens and civil society to ensure legitimacy and a common understanding of the CA and the EU foreign policy in general.

13. Believes that as a basis for moving from concept to action in the pursuit of a CA, the following four areas must be addressed:

1. Institutional coherence

14. Believes that the concept of a CA should be understood as the coordinated work of all relevant institutions (the EEAS and the Commission's relevant services, including ECHO, DEVCO, TRADE and ELARG, but also Parliament and the Council) pursuing common objectives within an agreed framework designed at EU level, and mobilising its most relevant instruments, including the CSDP when the security situation so requires; believes that, so far, institutional and procedural shortfalls have largely prevented such coherent EU external action in most crisis areas where the EU has acted damaging the EU's credibility as a global actor and security provider.

15. Recalls that the Lisbon Treaty created the EEAS and the triple-hatted HR/VP to provide unity, consistency, visibility and effectiveness to the EU's external action; underlines the fact that, so far, the potential of all three roles has not been fully exploited; calls for the vital coordinating role of the HR/VP as Vice-President of the Commission to be reinforced within the Commission itself, through institutionalised regular meetings of the RELEX college of Commissioners, chaired by the HR/ VP and enlarged to include other relevant Commissioners; calls for an immediate reform of the EEAS based on the 2013 review and Parliament's guidelines in order to make the best use of scarce financial resources.

16. Stresses that whilst cooperation is essential, the competencies and procedures of all institutions and Member States must be fully respected; calls, therefore, on all EU actors to act in good faith and to do their best to allow the pursuit of a CA.

17. Believes that a CA requires responsive, flexible and efficient structures in the EEAS; recalls its view that the EEAS institutional set-up should be streamlined to ensure effective decision-making and use of its instruments, including CSDP civilian and military instruments, as requested in Parliament's 2013 report on the matter.

18. Underlines that the development of the CA should also ensure gender mainstreaming and balance in the formulation, development and implementation of all Union external actions.
19. Stresses the important role of mediation and dialogue in preventing and resolving conflicts peacefully; commends the progress the EEAS has made in strengthening its mediation capacities, reiterates its support for further enhancing Europe's capacities in this field and calls for mediation to be made an important standard feature of any future CA for a specific crisis region; stresses Parliament's role in formulating and monitoring common foreign policy and calls on the next Parliament to ensure its effectiveness and, above all, its coherence; draws attention to Parliament's engagement to actively participate in election observation, mediation and democracy support; believes that Parliament's involvement in mediation processes in Ukraine and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM) has demonstrated the important role parliamentarians can play in this field;

20. Recalls that special attention must be paid to respecting the principles of humanitarian aid (independence, impartiality, neutrality); believes that safe access to affected populations and the security of humanitarian workers rely above all on how they are perceived by influential actors in the field, and that they should be seen as independent from any partisan political consideration; points out, however, that the Commission's humanitarian aid and civil protection (ECHO) service is still part of the EU and, consequently, strongly believes that more should be done to enhance cooperation and coordination between ECHO and the EEAS;

21. Welcomes the Joint Communication of 11 December 2013, 'The EU's comprehensive approach to external conflict and crises' (JOIN(2013)0030), which represents an opportunity to clarify and operationalise this approach in the new post-Lisbon institutional setting, as well as to consolidate the EU's commitment to a comprehensive framework for its work in the field of external relations; acknowledges the considerable challenges inherent in promoting and implementing such an ambitious policy; welcomes, in particular, the emphasis it places on the link between security and development, which should be a key underlying principle in the application of a comprehensive EU approach;

22. Strongly supports the notion of a more coherent external action; stresses that the EU should not adopt a narrow definition of the comprehensive approach; welcomes the fact that the Joint Communication promotes an understanding of the comprehensive approach that covers all stages of the cycle of conflict or other external crisis through early warning and preparedness, conflict prevention, crisis response and management to early recovery, and stabilisation and peace-building to help countries get back on track towards sustainable and long-term development; recalls that foreign policy objectives should not be placed in opposition to development principles and principled humanitarian action, as all three policies are complementary;

23. Recalls that Article 208 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU) establishes the principle of Policy Coherence for Development (PCD), and emphasises the potential for tension between PCD on the one hand and the comprehensive approach to crisis management outside the EU on the other; stresses that the main goal of the EU's development policy is the eradication of poverty and that it is therefore essential that anti-poverty objectives are not marginalised in EU foreign policy and that the comprehensive approach does not erode the civilian character of development cooperation; takes note of the fact that the Joint Communication entrusts the HR/VP and the President of the Commission with the responsibility to ensure strategic and operational coherence in external relations, including regarding the external impact of internal policies; calls on the HR/VP and the President of the Commission to commit to doing so;

24. Points out that both Article 214 TFEU and the European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid of 2008 protect principled humanitarian action; calls for the safeguarding of the humanitarian principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence which are crucial for both the effectiveness of humanitarian action and the safety of its actors; stresses firmly that counter-terrorism and security agendas must not undermine the ability of humanitarian actors to deliver assistance, and that humanitarian aid should under no circumstances serve political ends or be considered a crisis management tool; points out that to obtain access to populations in need humanitarian aid must not only be neutral but also be perceived as such; while acknowledging that a needs-based humanitarian delivery should be given some freedom of manoeuvre, calls for wider engagement with humanitarian actors in order to define better the parameters of their relationship with the comprehensive approach;
25. Is of the view that there is a strong link between development and conflict prevention, as poverty is often a prime source and outcome of conflict; stresses that prevention contributes to peace, security and sustainable development; welcomes the focus on prevention in the Joint Communication, and calls for the enhancement of the EU's early warning systems; calls on the EU to continue to support countries in situations of fragility, in order to address the root causes and establish functioning and accountable institutions that can deliver basic services and support poverty reduction; underlines the need to draw up an EU strategy for fragile states, which would integrate into the EU system both the OECD-DAC fragile states principles and the objectives of the 'New Deal for Engagement in Fragile States' agreed in Busan in December 2011:

26. Welcomes the commitment to a long-term strategy expressed in the Joint Communication, since only a long-term engagement together with sustainable development can promote peace and security; calls for better coordination of the short-term and long-term objectives of EU policies, paying due regard to the views of the stakeholders at local level;

27. Stresses that, in order to be effective, the EU comprehensive approach should be based as fully as possible on joint analysis, assessment and planning across the EU system, with a clear division of responsibilities; points out, in this context, the importance of joint programming as a tool to achieve coherence in external action;

28. Believes that the CA must be rooted in a vision shared by all EU actors of the evolving strategic context in which EU action takes place; calls, therefore, for more regular and transparent information-sharing, policy co-ordination and teamwork between EU actors through all phases of EU action; calls, further, for the development of formal structures in which those exchanges could take place and where early warning, situation analysis and crisis and post-crisis monitoring could be conducted, potentially integrating existing structures (such as the EU SitRoom, the Emergency Response Coordination Centre and ARGUS); reiterates the need for a 'Crisis Response Board' within the EEAS, to be chaired by the HR/VP and bringing together all actors relevant to crisis management;

29. Believes that pursuing a CA also requires improving coordination, under the VP/HR's leadership, with the EU's internal policies that have a significant foreign policy dimension such as the internal market, migration, environment and energy;

30. Calls for better alignment between trade policy and common foreign policy, including human rights and development;

31. Stresses that poor coordination and policy planning amongst the relevant institutions is partly responsible for the weak implementation of the EU's foreign policies on the ground; takes note that it is improving since the EU delegations took over the coordination function in the field, but more progress needs to be made to further enhance implementation of the EU's foreign policies on the ground, particularly when it comes to crisis regions and when linked with CFSP activities;

32. Calls for the strengthening of the EU's capacities for dealing with global challenges, notably climate diplomacy; calls on the EEAS to identify political trade-offs and strike political bargains by linking climate and other aspects of the EU's relations with partner countries; hopes that in the run-up to the Paris UN climate conference in 2015, the EEAS will start using its extensive network of EU delegations around the world in order to deepen European understanding of the interests and domestic politics of climate action in partner countries;

2. Financial coherence

33. Underlines Parliament's determination to ensure that the Union's external financial instruments for the period 2014 to 2020 are designed so as to facilitate the pursuit of a CA to the Union's external relations, in particular, by creating instruments that work across the nexus of conflict prevention, crisis management, peace-building, development cooperation and the strengthening of strategic partnerships; stresses that the new Partnership Instrument also provides the EU with a tool to accompany foreign policy activities with third countries financially; underlines its determination to exercise in full its democratic control of the implementation of these instruments to ensure that the Union's important but finite resources are used in an efficient and cost-effective way to achieve results; underlines Parliament's right, as part of the Mid-Term Review of the external financial instruments, to review the implementation of the instruments and make any necessary changes;
34. Regrets the lack of ambition in the EU budget for external action for the period 2014-2020; calls for better anticipation of the funding needed for the implementation of EU strategies; regrets that in some cases, the EU's actions have been delayed because of financial matters; calls for such structural problems to be remedied in future, including by making use of the new provisions on strengthening capacities for participation and deployment in civilian stabilisation missions (Article 4c) provided by the Instrument for Stability and Peace (ISP); recalls also the need to review the financing mechanism for military CSDP operations (known as the ATHENA mechanism), so as to allow for a more adequate and fairer burden-sharing of the costs of EU military operations, thus enabling all Member States to contribute through force generation or financing the supporting costs;

35. Reminds the HR/VP that Parliament has revised the Union's External Financial Instruments for the period 2014 to 2020 to provide scope for strengthening the capacity of like-minded international, regional, governmental and civil society actors who are willing to work with the Union in the pursuit of objectives, whilst upholding our fundamental values such as the promotion of democracy;

3. Coherence in practice

36. Welcomes the EU's recent development of regional strategies to define political priorities, communicate policy objectives, coordinate policy responses, build partnerships and focus on the implementation of resources; calls for the systematic elaboration of EU strategies to frame and give coherence to the EU's action on the ground, drafted jointly by the EEAS and the relevant services of the Commission (notably DEVCO and ECHO), and under the lead of the HR/VP; calls on the Commission to be actively involved in its areas of competence from the very beginning of this coordination;

37. Insists that such strategies should clearly set out the EU's objectives and priorities and the specific timeframe for implementation and determine what instruments are best suited for action (ranging from inter alia humanitarian and development aid to diplomatic action and mediation, economic sanctions, and the CSDP); insists that the role and contribution from the CSDP should be part of the initial political analysis and definition of policy objectives, thereby facilitating early involvement of CSDP planners and the relevant parliamentary bodies at European and national level; welcomes in that context, the positive development of a Political Framework for Crisis Approach for CSDP missions and operations and calls for this to be extended for all crisis response initiatives;

38. Welcomes, in particular, the EU's Strategic Framework for the Horn of Africa, which aims to bring stability to this strategic region by fighting piracy and its underlying causes, establishing legitimate authorities in Somalia and promoting regional cooperation through the simultaneous use of the EU's external instruments, in cooperation with relevant partners in the field; recalls, however, that EU action in the region has been built up on the basis of pioneering CSDP initiatives (namely EUNAVFOR Atalanta and EUTM Somalia) that have then been followed by other EU instruments, making the CA in the Horn of Africa more of an ex-post empirical and pragmatic achievement rather than a well-designed and planned strategy; believes strongly that, in future, EU strategies must be drawn up before the EU engages in a region, not after;

39. Regrets that, even when strategies are defined, the EU often does not manage to implement them, and is instead forced to take contingency and emergency action; recalls that this has notably been the case in the Sahel region, for which a very comprehensive and well-prepared EU strategy document (the 2011 EU Strategy for Security and Development in the Sahel) had been unanimously approved but did not lead to satisfactory implementation until the situation in Mali deteriorated dramatically; calls for a lessons-learned analysis of this particular case, as well as — more broadly — for improved early warning analysis of key volatile regions, in order to establish concrete conflict-prevention and mediation initiatives and thereby improve upstream action by operating a policy shift from reactive-centric approaches to a more adequate and efficient prevention-focused approach;

40. Points out that many current national, regional and international conflicts are also climate-driven and that, as a consequence, the CA needs to incorporate the concept of human security; recalls the analysis published by UNEP in December 2011 on the situation in the Sahel region, where it is stated that rising temperatures have led to water shortages and have specifically put local populations, whose livelihoods are dependent on natural resources such as farming, fishing and herding, under strong pressure, resulting, in some cases, in violence and armed conflict;
41. Is convinced that, in cases where crises cannot be avoided, the EU must be able to plan and deploy the appropriate civilian and military assets, as well as mobilise complementary EU instruments, rapidly and effectively across the whole spectrum of crisis management operations, including in cases of humanitarian crises; calls for the implementation of the relevant Treaty articles in the field of rapid response, including Article 44 TEU; underlines, in that context, the need for political and security experts within the relevant EU delegations;

42. Insists that the EU should be able to consolidate peace and stability over the longer term; calls for clear transition strategies to be determined long in advance between short-term crisis-response instruments (notably diplomatic, CSDP, ECHO instruments, and the new ISP) and post-crisis instruments (notably ISP and development assistance) in order to sustain progress achieved in the field; welcomes — as a major first step — the effective cooperation between the EEAS and the Commission in support of the CSDP mission in Mali, and the consideration, at an early stage, of an exit strategy for EUTM Mali;

43. Calls on the EU to make further progress on acting as one at country level, with a clear division of responsibilities and under the leadership of a Head of Delegation, responsible for implementing the EU’s external policy in the country, while coordinating locally with Member States as well as the host government, civil society and other international partners; calls on the Member States to commit to unified EU action in third countries and to make sure that coordination and articulation of actions on the ground are duly concerted with the EU institutions, namely the Commission and the EEAS; regrets in this regard that autonomous action by Member States in third countries, especially post-conflict and democratising societies, without proper articulation between them and the EU local Delegation has proved damaging to the EU’s goals and interests, as well as to its credibility vis-à-vis the third state and other international partners;

4. Partnerships

44. Stresses that a successful CA also requires developing partnerships outside the Union’s institutions and Member States, to include other international and multilateral partners, strategic partners, host countries, regional organisations, civil society actors and the private sector, with due respect for the decision-making autonomy of the EU;

45. Urges the EU to ensure that the EU participates effectively in the work of the UN General Assembly, making use of all the powers conferred on it by its status as a regional integration organisation;

46. Reiterates the view, in keeping with the purposes of the Lisbon Treaty in enhancing EU foreign policy and the role of the EU in global peace, security and regulation, that an EU seat in an enlarged UNSC remains a central, long-term goal of the European Union; calls on the VP/HR to take the initiative to develop a common position of the Member States to that end; suggests, in order to achieve that goal in the future, working on prior coordination of positions in the Council of the EU on the introduction of new members of the UNSC and reform of the UNSC’s decision-making towards the possible use of a super-qualified majority;

47. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council and the Commission.