The European Union and Peacebuilding: A Sysyphean but Essential Responsibility?

Introduction

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The early years of the twenty-first century witnessed an important shift in how international and supra-national organizations as well as state leaders defined security. Once widely understood as primarily linked to the protection of state borders from attacks by foreign military forces, the United Nations (UN) redefined international security as risk management during the 2000-2010 decade. The 2003 European Security Strategy, the Stockholm Programme (2010-2015) and other strategic documents reflected this new conceptualization. These international agreements treated threats—that now included weapons proliferation, organized crime, terrorism, natural disasters, cyber-piracy, energy shortages, failed states, climate change, chronic and dire poverty, communicable diseases and population movements—as multifarious and unpredictable. In the presence of non-territorialized dangers and the expansion of potential sources of menace, nations and international organizations increasingly organized their security discourse around the notion of "vulnerability," i.e., exposure to unpredictable risks that derive from intensified transnational connections.

United Nations and European Union (EU) adoption of the concept of human security, the argument that individuals should be the focus of security efforts, reflected a broader trend to reconceive national risk and security. Defending borders, a traditional concern of statehood, began to be defined by regulation of what inevitably porous borders cannot contain, including migrant populations, weapons, diseases, cyber threats, pollution and more. Nations began to view migrating populations as potential loci of terrorist attacks, communicable diseases, crime and even cultural contamination. In this emerging scenario of fresh and newly arrayed risks, international and state leaders were likely to consider states dangerous not because of their might, but because of their weakness, and their inability to prevent criminal or other "undesirable" actors from thriving within their bounds and/or the capacity of such actors to trespass their borders. European Union leaders began to define security not so much as efforts to maintain stable Member boundaries, but as initiatives aimed at normalizing the environment surrounding the Union itself. In this changed situation, military intervention is but one form of European Union involvement with specific nations. Indeed, the EU has embarked on long-term programs of rebuilding societies and states by mobilizing an array of actors, including NGOs and other local political and civil society organizations. The Union has embraced rebuilding societies in its borderlands as a way of addressing Europe's perceived vulnerability.

In fact, as early as 1993, good governance, vital market economies and well-functioning state administrations were stipulated in the Copenhagen criteria for EU admission, while also widely viewed as tools that could help make the Union more secure. A decade later, the 2003 European Security Strategy called for a ring of well-governed states at the EU's frontiers. Prevention, intended to reduce the possibility that diverse threats might come together to create catastrophic events, emerged as a key element of the EU security strategy. The Union has sought to oversee the range of risks and threats its new understanding has identified by vigorous deployment of technology and knowledge intensive instruments for monitoring an array of variables, ranging from weather trends to population movements. Similarly, security for the EU is no longer the province of national leaders alone, but now encompasses a variety of additional actors, including international government organizations, nongovernmental organizations, international nongovernmental organizations, local politicians, other civil society organizations, and the private (for-profit) sector. The Union must now mobilize and coordinate all of these potential stakeholders to craft security and peacebuilding strategies suitable to the new era. Those approaches in turn demand the EU develop capacities to create partnerships, mobilize consensus, or at least shared aspirations, and otherwise discern or develop strategies to coordinate an assortment of different agendas and institutions effectively.

This issue explores and assesses the role of the EU as a critical actor and peacebuilder in this era of perceived heightened risk and calls for human security. It brings together authors who employ different analytical tools and offer alternate perspectives to explore how the EU has conceived its peacebuilding role and how those efforts might be examined in an environment of swiftly changing conceptions of security and daunting complexity.

More specifically, these articles together address a range of concerns related to the Union's ongoing efforts to develop its capabilities to respond effectively to conflict and to help to build peace in violence-afflicted nations. Contributions include analyses of how the EU is engaging civil society organizations in its peace-related efforts and with what implications for those entities and for peacebuilding, how the Union is incorporating new threats into its peace-oriented interventions as well as how analysts might begin to examine the efficacy of the EU's peacebuilding aspirations and strategy.

Taken together, too, the various articles gathered here examine the character and claims for Union peace-related efforts in multiple contexts, raise difficult questions concerning the role of "rational-planning" based initiatives and accountability claims when these are sought in deeply political contexts and chart the difficulties of EU implementation of international initiatives, both from the standpoint of securing internal comity among member states and from the perspective of coordinating effectively with a disparate assortment of other international actors. Finally, this collection raises searching questions concerning how audaciously and comprehensively an outside actor, whether the EU or any other, can or should define its remit, when intervening in the affairs (however broken or tangled) of another nation or nations. While this question is age-old, it is no less significant or salient for that. EU efforts to elicit "comprehensive" and "transformational" social change in the nations in which it intervenes to build peace may alternately be applauded for their audacity or criticized strongly for their hubris and underlying patriarchal assumptions, depending upon the perspective the analyst adopts. This volume raises that difficult question squarely. A brief review of the character of individual contributions to the volume follows.

The Articles

In the first article, Yannis Stivachtis, Chris Price and Mike Habegger investigate the nature of the European Union (EU) as a peace actor. In so doing, they first examine EU's conceptualization of peace and security and the EU's identification of threats to international peace and security. Then, they focus on the EU's security strategy to show how the EU seeks to address challenges to international order and stability. Finally, their essay employs the concepts of 'civilian', 'military' and 'normative power Europe' to demonstrate how the EU attempts to create international security and stability both at the regional and international levels. They argue that, overall, in addressing threats that undermine international peace and security, the EU has been reacting overwhelmingly with civilian or normative power, only making use of military power when situations have become critically dire. While all three types of power: civilian, normative and military are at play, there appears to be a clear progression in the order in which they are put into practice, with military power being brought to bear last in nearly all cases.

In the next article, Laura Zanotti explores the United Nations (UN) and European Union (EU) conceptualizations of international security and, through the case of Croatia, their policies for peacekeeping and peace building. She argues that in the post-Cold War period, international organizations reconceived security as risk management. International and supra-national organizations adopted a variety of strategies aimed at transforming potentially disorderly states into disciplined and predictable actors. This political rationality echoes the disciplinary and governmental modalities of rule that Foucault described as emerging in Europe in classical age. According to Zanotti, the case of Croatia suggests that in the face of increasing complexity, security is enacted through clusters of institutions that deploy a combination of mechanisms of persuasion and coercion. These instruments include legal advice, institutional design, scrutiny, conditionality, and admission into or exclusion from international associations. International security has now been reconfigured as an endeavor that seeks to mobilize the cooperation of clusters of diverse institutions and the active engagement of its targets.

In "European Union, Conflict Transformation and Civil Society: Promoting Peace from the Bottom-Up?" Nathalie Tocci maps the frameworks and instruments through which the EU interacts with civil society institutions as it pursues its peace initiatives and challenges the oft-accepted view that privileging civil society in lieu of states in such initiatives necessarily conduces to success. Tocci also raises the specter of an unsettling potential paradox for European Union leaders: when does Union involvement with civil society actors actually work in ways that militate against the reasons why the international body wished to involve them in the first instance?

In "A Toolkit for Evaluating the Design and Implementation of European Union Common Security and Defense Policy Mission Mandates," Michael Merlingen offers a method for evaluating EU peace missions based on the coherence of their mandates, the tactical and strategic situation on the ground in the affected nations and the means available to realize peace related aims.

GiulioVenneri's "'Conquered' vs. 'Octroyée' Ownership: Police Reform and Conditionality in the EU's Peace/Statebuilding of Bosnia and Herzegovina," explores both intra-Union institutional politics and the local politics of Bosnia-Herzegovina and documents how the interaction of the two contributed to a recasting and reshaping of proposed EU governance reforms for Bosnia-Herzegovina in 2007.Venneri argues that, while portrayed as technical in character, EU interventions to secure police reform were in fact intensely political and that the complexities of politics and not technical concerns or planning rationalities, caused Union officials to revisit their assumptions and to permit local officials a larger role in decision-making. More broadly, Venneri's analysis points up the ethical tensions and practical limits implicit in any external effort to refashion social, political, economic or institutional conditions and structures in an existing society.

Meanwhile, in his analysis, "The European Union: A Peace Actor in the Making?" Kyriakos Revelas assesses the relative effectiveness of the EU as peacebuilder and the issues at stake in its peace-related operations by examining European Security and Defence Policy mission crisis management performance in Africa during its first decade of operations.

In "Climate Change, Security and Peace: The Role of the European Union," Angela Liberatore suggests that the now two decades-long EU experience of regarding climate change as a security and conflict risk has raised important questions concerning the Union's capacity to honor its own claims for civilian control and power in its operations as well as needs to reinforce its role as a "civilian" rather than military power as a security actor. She contends that it is not yet clear whether EU action will lead to credible civilian-led change or result instead in the securitization of the climate issue. Liberatore posits three alternate future scenarios of how climate change may come to be addressed (if at all) for reader consideration.

In the final article, Yannis Stivachtis and Stefanie Georgakis examine the policy of democracy promotion and view it as one of the strategies employed by the European Union in its effort to establish international peace and security. They demonstrate that the EU seeks to establish an international democratic order through the application of conditionality. They suggest that the EU does not only apply conditions to states that seek membership of the Union but also to states which seek to have close relations with it albeit short of membership, such as the countries included in the European Neighborhood Policy (ENP) or countries that seek to receive aid from the European Union. In so doing, the article analyzes how the policy of conditionality applies to each different case.

A Final Reflection

Our goal in developing this volume was not to propose supposed final wisdom on what should be done to advance EU peacebuilding efforts, although our authors do provide a measure of guidance for Union policy-makers and leaders. Instead, we sought to provide a rich portrait of the possibilities as well as challenges implicit in EU pursuit of a peacebuilding role in the context of the new international consensus conceptualizing security as risk management and human security. Whatever else might be said, it seems clear from the arguments advanced by the authors in this volume that if the EU is to succeed in its peacebuilding efforts, it must address several key imperatives. First, the Union must mobilize sufficient economic, political and social resources to secure necessary long-term internal and external support to sustain its aspirations. Second, it must do so in what looks set to be an increasingly inauspicious environment, given current and foreseeable economic conditions. Third, its peacebuilding role requires the EU to face the complex tasks of legitimating local knowledge while sharing its technical expertise effectively. Fourth, the Union must also craft its accountability claims so as to allow the possibility for social experimentation and learning.

Taken together, these findings suggest that in promoting peace, the EU's leaders and staff should not imagine local contexts solely as "targets" to be shaped to their ends, but instead seek reflectively to engage with diverse political, social and economic realities, however fractured. Having recast security and peacebuilding holistically, the EU finds itself ceaselessly negotiating competing priorities among its members and with those parties with which it would interact, and seeking to do so without at the same time silencing the diverse voices that may prove critical to realization of its aims.

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