Europe – global player for peace?

The promotion of peace, human rights, security and stability is a fundamental pillar of the EU's engagement with the world. The pursuit of these goals at global level is carried out through the EU's external policies and has been reinforced by the Lisbon Treaty, which created the EU's own diplomatic body and strengthened the position of High Representative for Foreign and Security Policy, thus enabling the current 28 Member States greater opportunity to speak with one voice.

The EU as a symbol of peace

In 2012, the EU received the Nobel Peace Prize for advancing the causes of peace, reconciliation, democracy and human rights in Europe. The Norwegian Nobel Committee said its decision was based on the 'stabilising role the EU has played in transforming most of Europe from a continent of war to a continent of peace'. Indeed, the foundation of the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC), the initial step towards European integration, came after two world wars with devastating consequences for European states, and aimed to secure lasting peace on the continent. Six decades later, the achievement of peace in the part of the continent that constitutes the EU is hailed as one of the Union’s major achievements, having been enshrined in its Treaties as one of its main aims (Article 3 TEU).

At the same time, the promotion of peace globally, following its own 'success story' has become one of the fundamental pillars of the EU’s external action. Article 3(5) TEU includes contributing to peace as the first of the objectives of EU relations with the wider world, alongside security, sustainable development, the protection of human rights and others. These objectives guide the EU in all facets of its external action including the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP); development cooperation; economic, financial and technical cooperation; humanitarian aid; the common commercial policy; and Neighbourhood policy. It follows, therefore, that the promotion of peace goes hand in hand with any type of EU engagement with the world. This has led scholars to argue that it is a characteristic of the EU's identity as a global actor. The Union’s pursuit of the diffusion of its own values and norms, including peace, in its external engagement has led to it being described as a 'normative' power.

Speaking with 'One Voice'

Since the creation of the CFSP with the Treaty of Maastricht in 1992, it has increasingly become clear that, in order to pursue the aims of its external relations effectively, the Union needs to be able to speak with one voice and take common – or coordinated – action. The first issue was addressed by the Treaty of Lisbon which created the position of High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy. Appointed for a term of five years, the High Representative steers EU foreign policy, represents the EU in diplomatic negotiations and international fora, including the United Nations (UN), coordinates the EU’s foreign policy tools (development assistance, trade, humanitarian aid and crisis response) and helps build consensus between the Member States. The High Representative is assisted by the European External Action Service (EEAS), the EU's 'diplomatic service', also created by the Treaty of Lisbon. On the substantive level, the first major effort to strengthen the EU’s presence as a global actor, by defining specific principles, aims and tools, was the elaboration in 2003 of the European Security Strategy. A strategic reflection about the EU's future Global Strategy is ongoing, with a new strategy to be submitted to the European Council by June 2016.

This note has been prepared for the European Youth Event, taking place in Strasbourg in May 2016.
Promoting peace

...in the 'near' and 'far' abroad

The EU has made the promotion of peace a quintessential part of its enlargement policy, offering the EU membership perspective as a vehicle and incentive for applicant countries to consolidate peace and stability. This is, for example, the case of the Western Balkans. Beyond the limited group of potential members, it promotes regional cooperation, democratisation, the rule of law and economic reforms as a prerequisite for peace through its neighbourhood policy (ENP), which covers 16 countries to the south and east of the EU. The conception of the ENP is an example of how the EU aims to export its values, as a route towards achieving the 'democratic peace' that the EU itself enjoys. Beyond the immediate neighbourhood, similar principles are applied, aimed at the promotion of the EU model through its interregional and bilateral trade agreements, and also in development cooperation. Moreover, the EU promotes peace through active participation in mediation and diplomacy, including through the UN. The Middle East Peace Process (MEPP); Ukraine; and Colombia are some examples of the wide-ranging involvement of the EU in diplomatic talks for peace. The European Parliament is an active supporter of mediation, democracy promotion and peace through its legislative activity (e.g. MEPP); parliamentary diplomacy (e.g. Ukraine); and parliamentary control.

...through peacekeeping

The EU has developed a broad crisis-management agenda, including conflict prevention, mediation, and peacekeeping as well as post-conflict stabilisation. With the establishment of the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) the EU began to engage in crisis-management activities outside its territory, aimed at 'peacekeeping, conflict prevention and strengthening international security' (Article 42(1) TEU) in line with the UN Charter. Nowadays, it is a major actor in peacekeeping, through its own peacekeeping operations (PKO) but also by cooperating systematically with the UN at the strategic and operational level, through established consultation and coordination mechanisms. The UN recognises the EU as one of its most important regional partners in peacekeeping, for its operational capacity and also due to the great convergence of norms and values, including the overarching goal of a peaceful world. Moreover, the EU and its Member States contribute around 37% of the funding for UN peacekeeping. So far, 17 CSDP missions and operations have been completed and another 17 are ongoing on three continents, deploying over 5,000 civilian and military personnel. Their tasks include military training, capacity-building, counter-piracy, rule of law and security sector reform, and border assistance. The majority of these missions have been in Africa, with some operating in parallel to UN PKOs or to African Union (AU) missions.

Figure 1 – UN peacekeeping operations and EU CSDP missions

Sources: EEAS & UN PKO factsheet, 31 August 2015. Map from EPRS briefing on EU-UN cooperation in peacekeeping and crisis management.