EU comprehensive approach and its implications for the coherence of EU external action

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The Committee on Foreign Affairs adopted the own-initiative report by Arnaud DANJEAN (EPP, FR) on the EU comprehensive approach and its implications for the coherence of EU external action.

The EU in a changing world: Members recalled that significant geostrategic changes are also taking place in other parts of the world, owing in particular to the rise of a multipolar international scene. They considered that 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. They stressed that in such a geopolitical climate, a fresh approach is needed in order to shape a new multipolar world order that is inclusive, credible, just, cooperative, underpinned by respect for human rights, to resolve differences without recourse to armed conflict.

EU comprehensive approach: state of play in implementing the political framework: Members stressed the importance of effective coordination and coherence in the European Unions external action. They underlined 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 Unions 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).

In this regard, Members regretted that, despite the Lisbon Treaty innovations, lack of progress in the consistency of the Unions external action persists in areas relating to development, trade, energy, environment, migration and other global issues.

Member States are urged to meet their Treaty-based commitments to support the Unions external relations and security policy actively and in a spirit of mutual solidarity and to comply, in conducting their own policies, with the Unions action in this area. Members called for active engagement and dialogue with citizens and civil society to ensure legitimacy and a common understanding of the comprehensive and the EU foreign policy in general.

Priority areas for a comprehensive approach: Members considered that as a basis for moving from concept to action in the pursuit of a comprehensive approach, the following four areas must be addressed:

1. Institutional coherence: Members stated that the concept of a comprehensive approach should be understood as the coordinated work of all relevant institutions (the EEAS and the Commissions 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.

This general approach should be supported by the EEAS and promote: i) mediation and dialogue; ii) the principles of humanitarian aid. Members welcomed in this regard Joint Communication "A comprehensive approach to the European Union against external crises and conflicts" (JOIN(2013)0030), which represents an opportunity to clarify and operationalise this approach in the new post-Lisbon institutional setting. In addition, they stressed that the main goal of the EUs development policy is the eradication of poverty and that it is therefore essential that antipoverty objectives are not marginalised.

Members also focused on other related aspects of the comprehensive approach:

- the importance of conflict prevention;
- joint analysis, joint assessment and planning as well as the clear division of responsibilities in this context.

2. Financial coherence: Members recalled Parliament's determination to ensure that the Unions external financial instruments for the period 2014-2020 are designed so as to facilitate the pursuit of a comprehensive approach to external relations Union.

They regretted that the lack of ambition in the EU budget for external action for the period 2014-2020 and called for better anticipation of the funding needed for the implementation of EU strategies. They recalled 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.

3. Coherence in practice: Members insisted that such strategies should clearly set out the EUs 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). They stressed that the role and contribution from the CSDP should be part of the initial political analysis and definition of policy objectives. They regretted 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 (as was the case in Sahel region, for which a very comprehensive and well-prepared EU strategy document had been unanimously approved but did not lead to satisfactory implementation until the situation in Mali deteriorated dramatically). There is a need to improve upstream action by operating a policy shift from reactive-centric approaches to a more adequate and efficient prevention-focused approach.

Members are 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. They called 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. Members regretted 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 EUs goals and interests.

4. Partnerships: Members stressed that a successful comprehensive approach also requires developing partnerships outside the Unions 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. They reiterated their 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. They, therefore, invited the VP/HR to take the initiative to develop a common position of the Member States to that end.

It should be noted that the report was subject to a minority opinion tabled by Sabine LÖSING (GUE/NGL, DE) rejecting the option recommended in the report to merge military/security and humanitarian/development aid. Instead, the minority opinion advocated a European development policy which initially focused on the eradication of poverty and which must not be used for military purposes.