

THE EUROPEAN UNION AND ITS PARTICIPATION IN UNITED NATIONS PEACE OPERATIONS

*Yasmin Paes**

Introduction

In International Relations, it is imperative to analyse how the collaboration among different actors, such as states or international organizations, develops. In that sense, a topic that draws attention today is the relationship between the European Union (EU) and the United Nations (UN): two entities of great importance in the current international scenario. The first, on the one hand, consists of a regional organization with roots established 60 years ago and whose primary objective is to unite European states in cooperation, maintaining and guaranteeing peace between them after being the stage of many wars. The UN, on the other hand, is a global organization with more than 70 years of history, created to preserve international peace and security by fostering combined efforts among its member states.

Both organizations share the principle of cooperation and are firmly committed to maintain international peace. Since its early years the United Nations has been deploying peace operations – which are classified as preventive diplomacy, peacemaking, peacekeeping, peace enforcement or peacebuilding – with the aim of helping countries in conflict situation build their path back to peace. Therefore, it's natural to assume that the EU and the UN would be partners in such missions. The purpose of this column is to analyse how these two entities have worked together in the past and in the present days to establish peace in different regions devastated by wars.

The relationship between the EU and the UN

Since its creation, the European Union has the promotion of multilateralism as one of its pillars in international relations. It includes cooperating closely with organizations that have strong influence on the global scenario, such as the United Nations. The Treaty of Lisbon, noting that EU's actions on an international level have increased, addressed that “The Union [...] shall promote multilateral solutions to common problems, in particular in

* Graduanda em Relações Internacionais, INEST - UFF, yasmin.c.paes@gmail.com

the framework of the United Nations.” (Art. 21-1) and that “The Union [...] shall work for a high degree of cooperation in all fields of international relations, in order to [...] preserve peace, prevent conflicts and strengthen international security, in accordance with the purposes and principles of the United Nations Charter.” (Art. 21-2)

Multilateralism is also affirmed in the European Union Global Strategy when it asserts that “the EU will promote a rules-based global order with multilateralism as its key principle and the United Nations at its core.” Hence we can infer from these statements that the EU has a firm commitment to improve multilateralism, especially through UN channels.

In addition, the EU has an active participation in the UN system. In 2011, it received the status of permanent observer, which allows its presence in UN conferences, committees, and councils. Since the EU has a Common Foreign and Security Policy, great coordination is required among its members in order to build a coherent position and present it at coming meetings.

Although the EU has a Permanent Observer status, the UN only admits states as members, which means the European Union has to be represented by the agency of its member states. We can illustrate this by taking a look at the United Nations Security Council (UNSC), where the EU can only be represented and have voting power through France, the United Kingdom – which both have permanent seats – and other non-permanent members. Therefore, according to article 34 of the Treaty of Lisbon,

Member States which are members of the Security Council will, in the execution of their functions, defend the positions and the interests of the Union, without prejudice to their responsibilities under the provisions of the United Nations Charter. (TREATY OF LISBON, 2007)

The EU-UN relationship is also based on a crucial matter: the EU’s contributions to UN’s budgets, funds, and programs, becoming UN’s most significant single financial contributor. According to the European Union External Action Service, EU member states provide 30.38% of the UN regular budget and also amounts 33.17% of the UN peacekeeping budgets. These numbers indicate the willingness of the EU on being present in the UN not only on a political matter but also financially.

The EU-UN cooperation in peace operations

The United Nations has been establishing Peace Operations since 1948 and in more than 70 years of history has mandated around 70 Peacekeeping Operations (PKOs) around the world, mainly on the African continent. The United Nations Security Council has the power to conceive peace operations, and the UN can authorize the use of force in such missions by following Chapter VII of the United Nations Charter.

Since the 1990s, the number of missions established has increased enormously, similar to the use of financial, technological and human resources - civil and military. These aspects have given a more robust and multifaceted character for the existing operations. The period

coincides with a higher participation of European states in peace operations, especially those carried out in Europe itself, such as the missions arising from the conflicts in Yugoslavia.

With this considerable development in the area, new challenges have arisen, making it difficult for the United Nations to sustain operations through its own means - resources constituted by its member states contributions, such as civil, military and police troops. Thus the need for cooperation with other international organizations, like the European Union, has become crucial to the progress and effectiveness of operations. However, this has not always been easy to achieve, especially after UN major failures in Rwanda, Somalia and Bosnia and Herzegovina. This has led countries to distrust the United Nations peacemaking mechanism and to have less participation in such operations. Therefore, states were engaging in other peace operations developed by regional organizations, such as NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization) and the EU.

This reluctance is noticed by the EU member states preference to participate in UN-mandated missions, in disregard of UN-led missions. In mandated operations, the Security Council delegates the development of a mission to a state or organization; in UN-led operations, the organization calls for troops contributions from member states to use them under the UN flag, constituting what is known as “the blue-helmets troops”.

In this way, the United Nations began to seek for closer relations with the European Union in order to combine forces and to ensure the missions’ success. However, relations with the EU are a two-way street. According to Thierry Tardy (2005):

On the one hand, the EU and EU member states are strong supporters of the UN, in accordance with the European Security Strategy and the concept of ‘effective multilateralism’. [...] On the other hand, the strong emphasis that the EU places on its political autonomy leads it to somehow distance itself from the UN. (p.51)

A key event that happened to strengthen cooperation between the two organizations in this field was the 2003 Joint Declaration on EU-UN Cooperation in Crisis Management. According to the article by the Institute for Peace in Partnership, the Declaration

sets the framework for the UN-EU cooperation comprehending both civilian and military operations. [It] was developed following the unprecedented EU cooperation in Bosnia and Herzegovina where the EU Police Mission (the EU’s first Common Security and Defence mission) took over the UN International Police Task Force and in Democratic Republic of Congo where the EU conducted Artemis, one of its first military operations. (BEMBA; STELMACH, 2016)

The EU Police Mission was an EU-led operation without a UNSC resolution, it successfully took over the UN mission and established a positive start to the cooperation. Operation Artemis is a good example of an UN-mandated mission in which the UN requested the leadership of the European Union; it also resulted in an overall well-managed cooperation between the organizations.

In 2007, this coalition was renewed with the adoption of the new Joint Statement on UN-EU Cooperation in Crisis Management, which recognized the progress achieved and sought to expand collaboration between the two in Africa, a continent known by its necessity of international help.

From a practical point of view, the partnership would develop with the establishment of missions in the Democratic Republic of Congo and Chad. Unfortunately, not all of the actions outlined in the statement were carried out, especially due to the use of EU Battlegroups by the United Nations to have a rapid intervention in Congo in 2008.

Another aspect of the collaboration can be seen in the implementation of various consultative bodies. It includes the EU-UN Steering Committee, the UN-EU High-Level Political Dialogue created in 2013, annuals UNSC meetings with the EU's Political and Security Committee and regular meetings between UN Secretary-General and the High Representative of the European Union External Action Service. Furthermore, there was the creation of Liaison Offices such as the UN Liaison Office for Peace and Security (UNLOPS) set up in Brussels in 2011 and the UN-EU Desk to Desk dialogue.

According to the European Parliament Briefing on EU-UN cooperation in peacekeeping and crisis management, between 2003 and 2012 the European Union had already collaborated with the UN in 15 peacekeeping operations, and are currently operating in parallel in Mali, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Somalia, Kosovo and the Middle East. Cooperation has evolved substantially since 2003, but some problems must be highlighted, such as

the reluctance of the EU Member States to get involved in contributing to the operations of national interests, the shortage of EU operational capabilities and interoperability problems, and the slow EU decision-making, but also problems resulting from persistent differences between the organizational cultures, practices and procedures of the EU and UN. (EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT, 2015)

To solve those issues identified as persistent in previous operations, the EU developed the Plan of Action to enhance EU CSDP support to UN peacekeeping. The plan's outcome had some positive aspects, such as the improvement of communication between the parties and exchange of information about both organization's operational planning. However, there were still some limitations, especially when it comes to availability of EU member states capabilities to be used under the UN's flag. This is a significant issue considering EU member states prefer to dialogue bilaterally with the UN, despite the Plan of Action's willingness to unite all member states in one EU cohesive dialogue, providing the UN the support it needs.

A new Action Plan is currently in progress which is called "Strengthening the UN-EU strategic partnership on peacekeeping and crisis management: Priorities 2015-2018". It sets seven priorities in which EU and UN should enhance their cooperation: facilitate EU's rapid response in support of UN missions; support the African Union and strengthen the collaboration between UN, EU and AU; promote EU member states' contributions to UN peacekeeping; cooperate in the areas of Security Sector Reform (SSR) and Rule of Law; enhance information and analysis exchange; assist in support and logistics; and continue to follow-up the EU Plan of Action. Unfortunately, there has been a low progress to achieve these goals.

Conclusion

Despite the existing limitations and the slow progress of the Plan of Action, European states should carefully consider continuing its efforts to cooperate with the United Nations. It is well known

that peace operations contribute significantly to train and capacitate military and police troops in times of peace. In face of recent events, at the borders of Europe and nearby regions, notably the Civil War in Syria, the refugee crisis and the disastrous terrorist attacks in major European cities, a review and improvement of the European Security Strategy is urgently needed to contain the effects of these facts on the continent.

The United Nations can accomplish many things as long as it has the support of its member states, of which the European countries make up a sizable part. To that end it's time to realize that the UN has changed a lot since 1990's events and that a continued and active cooperation with the EU is indispensable if international peace and security will really continue to be fostered around the world. It is in everyone's interest and duty to contribute to this common goal.

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