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European Contributions to UN Peacekeeping Operations: Lessons Learned and the Way Forward

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On June 5, 2018, IPI organized the forty-eighth Vienna Seminar, an annual event co-organized by IPI, the Austrian Federal Ministry of Defence, and the Austrian Federal Ministry for Europe, Integration and Foreign Affairs.

The 2018 seminar focused on lessons from recent European engagement in UN peacekeeping. Its aim was to examine the prospects of sustainable European participation in these operations in the face of ongoing geopolitical shifts and national political pressure and to better understand the impact of European participation on their effectiveness.

This meeting note was drafted by Daniel Forti, Policy Analyst at IPI. The note reflects the rapporteur's interpretation of the meetings and does not necessarily represent the views of all participants.

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Introduction

The International Peace Institute's (IPI) 2018 Vienna Seminar examined diverse perspectives on present and future European engagement in UN peacekeeping. It assessed lessons and experiences that could help better understand Europeans' collective impact on the effectiveness of UN operations and strived to identify different roles European countries can assume in supporting the UN to tackle contemporary challenges across peacekeeping. Juxtaposed against ongoing geopolitical shifts throughout Europe, the Vienna Seminar also reflected on which forms of participation in UN peacekeeping are sustainable for European countries in the immediate and long term.

The 2018 seminar marked the forty-eighth iteration of IPI's annual event and built upon the Vienna Seminar's legacy of grappling with pressing concerns for UN peacekeeping. The seminar convened a high-level group of participants from diverse backgrounds, including the diplomatic, academic, and military communities, as well as representatives from multilateral organizations and civil society institutions.

Participants discussed a range of interconnected issues concerning European engagement in UN peacekeeping. Discussions took place in both a public session on the strategic context and closed-door sessions following the Chatham House rule of non-attribution on recent experiences of European engagement, responses to operational challenges, and prospects of sustainable participation in the future. These discussions ranged from examining the nature of contemporary peacekeeping operations and the impact of global and European geopolitical shifts to identifying the modalities and impact of recent European contributions to specific UN missions.

Strategic Context for Europe's Engagement in UN Peacekeeping

Dynamic geopolitical shifts directly impact European countries' perceptions of, and re-engagement with, UN peacekeeping. Broader international security threats, described by one speaker as "the ring of fire" along Europe's southern and eastern borders, are likely to influence how Europe engages with UN peacekeeping in the coming years:

- To the south, instability and weak states across Africa's Sahel region are drivers of forced migration and terrorism throughout Europe. This has resulted in European countries providing clear military and operational

contributions to the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) and political support for the UN Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL).

- To Europe's southeast, the conflicts in Gaza and Syria raise questions about how Europe can support the adaptation of the UN Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF) and the UN Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) to play a more constructive role in reducing instability across the region.
- To the east, the situation in Ukraine (specifically in Crimea and the Donbass region) was interpreted as "a direct challenge to assumptions about the permanence of European security and European borders." One speaker asserted that any possible peace operation in Donbass would require a strong European troop component at its center led by neutral countries such as Austria, Finland, and Sweden.

Evolving security dynamics have also forced European capitals to grapple with two distinct and opposed trends. On the one hand, the recent rise in isolationist sentiment across Europe has impacted countries' multilateral engagement, including contributions to UN peacekeeping. Buttressed by populist and nationalist electoral success, including the June 2016 vote on Brexit, an increasing number of European countries face wavering domestic support for multilateralism. These sentiments are amplified by continued economic stress from the Eurozone crisis, which has increased budgetary pressure on national governments and, by extension, multilateral organizations.

The implication of these trends, as argued by one participant, is that some European countries are less focused on collective security arrangements focused on conflicts beyond their borders and instead are prioritizing national security. Unease over Russian intentions in Europe have further prompted some countries to refocus their attention on European defense and engagement with NATO, affecting the availability of resources for UN and EU Common Security and Defense Policy (CSDP) missions beyond Europe's borders.

On the other hand, these same political, financial, and security dynamics offer valuable justifications for reinforcing Europe's participation in UN peacekeeping. Recent defense policy reviews in several countries have concluded that the challenges from forced migration and terrorism are inextricably linked with regional conflicts across the Sahel and the Middle East. Therefore, collective security interests—including those pursued through UN peacekeeping—align with national defense priorities.

Contemporary Challenges in UN Peacekeeping

While contemporary UN peacekeeping faces numerous challenges, panelists emphasized the evolution of peacekeeping since the 1990s, when large numbers of European troops last participated in UN operations. Compared with twenty years ago, professionalization and expertise now underpin all aspects of UN peacekeeping. Given the rapid changes in conflict dynamics, peacekeeping has continuously adapted to different demands and constraints; today, no two missions are identical. Even UN missions that have existed for over forty years (e.g., the UN Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus and UNIFIL) have undergone different life cycles reflecting various operating and political contexts. Nonetheless, there are clear challenges facing UN peacekeeping, and the Vienna Seminar reflected on their manifestations and possible solutions based on European experiences.

Security of peacekeepers: UN peacekeepers are increasingly targeted in risky environments affected by armed conflict, terrorism, violent unrest, and crime and where political processes have either failed to gain traction or are eroding. Security concerns cut across the operational and political aspects of UN missions. These concerns are amplified by insufficient training and equipment for operating in risky environments, at times accompanied by risk aversion and caveats from troop-contributing countries. Moreover, mandates authorizing robust interventions, especially to protect civilians, at times risk undermining perceptions of UN impartiality.

Participants discussed constructive solutions, including making mandates clearer and more realistic to reduce the enormous expectations and overstretched demands placed on missions and placing more emphasis on political strategies. Readier employment of strategic pressure—

including from the UN Security Council on the conflict parties and from senior UN leadership on troop- and police-contributing countries concerning their posture and performance—could help UN peacekeeping operations better implement their mandates. The full operationalization of the UN's Action Plan to Implement the Report on Improving Security of Peacekeepers and the Peacekeeping Intelligence Framework would strengthen pre-deployment training, improve the verification of capabilities (with specific emphasis on in-mission training), and enhance the quality of information available for a mission to maintain its situational awareness.

Shortages of high-tech military enablers: UN missions—particularly those operating in volatile, highly insecure environments—often suffer from significant capability gaps. Many troop-contributing countries do not have specialized capabilities or are unable, if not unwilling, to deploy them to UN peacekeeping missions. Missions face the most acute shortfalls in helicopters and strategic airlift capabilities; intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance units; and counter-improved-explosive-device (IED) and anti-mortar technologies. Emerging responses to these shortfalls include more ready employment of multinational rotation systems and increasingly frequent joint deployments between UN and non-UN operations.

Women's participation in peacekeeping: Increasing the number of women deployed in UN peacekeeping missions is important to improving effectiveness across peacekeeping activities. More representative deployments would improve how missions undertake community engagement and planning activities. The communiqué from the 2017 UN Peacekeeping Defense Ministerial Summit (convened in Vancouver, Canada) called on member states to increase the number of women peacekeepers to, at a minimum, 15 percent of military staff officers and observers and 20 percent of contingent and police personnel by 2020.[1]

While this benchmark has not yet been realized by many troop- and police-contributing countries, there is an active push for member states to fulfill their political commitments. Some participants argued that member states, at a minimum, should ensure that their own benchmarks for women's participation in national militaries are systematically reflected in their peacekeeping contributions. Operationalizing national action plans for Security Council Resolution 1325 on women, peace, and security would similarly enable increased gender parity in national troop configurations. Beyond quotas, improving the institutional and social conditions for women in peacekeeping is necessary to maximize their effectiveness.

Strategic communications: Improving how missions engage in strategic communications is critical for the UN to advance the political strategies underpinning peacekeeping operations. Narratives surrounding UN peacekeeping often focus on shortcomings rather than its many successes. Social media, employed by both UN peacekeeping missions and parties to a conflict, plays an outsized role in influencing security and political dynamics and can amplify threats to peacekeepers. Participants argued that the UN needs to better highlight its accomplishments in accurately reporting its daily work. Member states were also encouraged to complement domestic narratives about UN peacekeeping with accurate information and nuanced perspectives to better inform their citizenry.

Mismatches between responsibility and authority at the field level: UN mission leaders are responsible for all aspects of a mission's performance but do not have authority over core financial and administrative processes (including human resources and procurement). As a result, decisions taken at headquarters do not always reflect accurate understanding of the field dynamics. The proposed UN management reform aims to increase decentralization and delegation of financial and other resource-related decisions to the field to address some of these challenges. However, participants indicated that these reforms should be coupled with increased accountability measures.

Challenges of measuring impact: Given the political nature of its work and the diversity of activities undertaken, the UN struggles to measure the real-time impact of the diverse activities that take place within peacekeeping missions. While the

1 Government of Canada, Communique from the 2017 UN Peacekeeping Defence Ministerial Conference, November 14–15, 2017, available at www.canada.ca/en/department-national-defence/campaigns/peacekeeping-defence-ministerial/news/communique.html .

UN Secretariat can draw from ample data on inputs and outputs, accurately capturing impact—for example by isolating specific projects and their impact on political processes, actors, and institutions—is more challenging. Recent efforts to address these concerns include the piloting of a comprehensive framework to assess the performance of missions' civilian, police, and military components. In parallel, the performance measurement framework for UN troops (where all military contingents are evaluated by mission force commanders) allows for the assessment of operational readiness and performance and of what resources are needed to provide assistance. The UN Peacekeeping Capabilities Readiness System (PCRS) offers contingent evaluations (through which thirty European countries have been evaluated), combined with assessment and advisory visits that evaluate preparedness, identify gaps, and match countries with potential contributors.

Assessing European Contributions to UN Peacekeeping

These reflections on Europe's participation in UN peacekeeping come at a time of growing calls for collective action to address its core challenges. The 2015 Report of the High-Level Independent Panel on Peace Operations (HIPPO), the 2017 Report on Improving Security of UN Peacekeepers (commonly known as the Cruz Report), and the 2018 Action for Peacekeeping (A4P) initiative all examine such challenges and propose a range of immediate and long-term solutions. Considerations about the future of UN peacekeeping also feed into the secretary-general's proposed reforms of the UN peace and security pillar, the UN development system, and UN management structures and policies.

After the end of NATO's International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Afghanistan, the UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations took the opportunity to channel increased, specialized contributions from Europe. European pledges at the September 2015 Leaders' Summit on UN Peacekeeping, and subsequent ministerial summits in 2016 and 2017, underscored renewed political engagement by European member states. European member states offer valuable and innovative capabilities to UN peacekeeping through bilateral arrangements, trilateral arrangements (between a European country, a non-European troop-contributing country, and the UN or through multilateral European partnerships), and arrangements led by regional organizations.

Bilateral arrangements: EU member states contribute 6,760 troops to UN peacekeeping (as of May 2018), approximately 7.4 percent of total troop contributions.[2] France, Germany, Italy, and Spain are four of the top ten financial contributors to UN peacekeeping in 2018.[3] Some European countries' deployments to long-standing UN peacekeeping missions trace back decades (e.g., France and Ireland to UNIFIL; see Box 1), representing core interests of their foreign policies.

Recent contributions, however, largely focus on innovative but targeted support to complex multidimensional missions. UN peacekeeping operations draw upon European countries' strategic capabilities and military assets to better operate in dangerous and high-risk environments. European special forces units with expertise in intelligence collection (situational awareness), rapid deployment, and force protection exercises are in high demand. Building on their experiences from NATO exercises in Afghanistan and Iraq, European countries also provide valuable counter-IED and demining tools through the UN Mine Action Services (UNMAS).

Trilateral arrangements: Multinational rotations, a recent innovation where countries collectively commit to providing sustained capabilities over a set interval, enable member states to limit their risk and financial exposure while ensuring missions have the required capabilities. Rotations are increasingly used to provide missions with strategic air capacity (for attack, logistics, and medical evacuation) as well as for UN field hospitals.[4]

2 UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations, "Troop and Police Contributors," available at https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/troop-and-police-contributors .

3 UN General Assembly, *Implementation of General Assembly Resolutions 55/235 and 55/236—Report of the Secretary-General*, UN Doc. A/70/331/Add.1, December 28, 2015.

4 Arthur Boutellis and Jon Karlsrud, "Plug and Play: Multinational Rotation Contributions for UN Peacekeeping Operations," Norwegian Institute of International Affairs (NUPI), 2017.

Box 1. Lebanon

European countries have impacted UNIFIL across diverse strategic areas. From a military perspective, European troops raise the quality of the collective force. Discipline, structured planning processes, and effective staff in European contingents have translated into the mission's improved readiness to undertake wide-ranging tasks. Larger European contingents in UNIFIL mentor smaller European and non-European platoons, effectively introducing new countries to the standards and processes of UN peacekeeping. France contributes invaluable surface-to-air radar capabilities that enable UNIFIL to provide accurate and speedy reporting of any violations along the Blue Line between Lebanon and Israel to the Security Council. European countries were among the first to help create UNIFIL's Maritime Task Force, a unique body first mandated in Security Council Resolution 1701 (2006) to support the Lebanese navy.

European countries also offer valuable support to UNIFIL's nonmilitary priorities. European troop-contributing countries collectively provide diplomatic support to UNIFIL's work engaging the parties in Israel and Lebanon as well as during the mandate renewal process. Strategic communications that seek to support a given strategy can be driven by a peacekeeping mission and reinforced through public and private communications from member states themselves, offer another avenue for UNIFIL to advance the UN's political strategy. Finally, European countries such as France, Italy, and Spain have established constructive economic relationships across south Lebanon, supporting a stable environment for UNIFIL to operate in.

Regional arrangements: The 2015–2018 EU-UN Strategic Partnership on Peacekeeping and Crisis Management (which spans both the headquarters and mission levels) includes six priority areas: information and analysis exchange, support and logistics, rapid response, security sector reform, support to the African Peace and Security Architecture, and sustained national contributions.[5] EU advisory missions and training missions span both civilian and military components and support UN field presences in the Central African Republic (see Box 2), Iraq, Kosovo, Libya, Mali, and Somalia.[6] While the focus of the EU-UN 2019–2021 partnership is still under consideration, some participants said that the proposed priorities so far could include conflict prevention; women, peace, and security; enhanced integration of European civilian capabilities into peacekeeping missions; and support to the UN's Action Plan to Implement the Report on Improving Security of Peacekeepers.

Participants in the Vienna Seminar identified clear areas for improving and sustaining European contributions. As one participant described, "Europeans must adapt to UN peacekeeping, and not the inverse." Driven by national security interests, recent European contributions are logically, if disproportionately, focused on those missions that directly affect regional security concerns related to migration and terrorism. European capitals now confront "intervention fatigue" among their citizenry, which gives them short political horizons for achieving success, making them hesitant to participate in missions with no clear end in sight.

European contributions were also framed to some extent as "risk-averse," with one participant observing that these countries provide short-term support (often for a maximum of two years) to complex multidimensional missions in Africa, compared to their long-standing arrangements (often multiple decades) with comparatively stable UN peacekeeping operations in the Middle East. However, the capacities required for multidimensional peacekeeping missions are scarcer and costlier, and therefore more difficult, for any one country to sustain over an extended period of time.

5 Council of the European Union, *Strengthening the UN-EU Strategic Partnership on Peacekeeping and Crisis Management: Priorities 2015–2018*, EU Doc. EEAS 458/15, March 27, 2015.

6 European External Action Service (EEAS), "Military and Civilian Missions and Operations," May 3, 2016, available at https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/430/military-and-civilian-missions-and-operations_en .

Box 2. Central African Republic

Participants identified diverse benefits from European collaboration in the Central African Republic (CAR). The presence of European troops within and alongside the mission afforded the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in CAR (MINUSCA) the capacity and experience to project force in Bangui from the onset. Comparatively advanced technological resources, including personal gear, weaponry, and transport, enabled all the mission's patrols and operations to perform with greater efficiency. Battalions with experience in non-UN stabilization missions, such as the Portuguese Quick Reaction Force that served in Afghanistan, shared new intelligence techniques. These enabled MINUSCA to better track the movements and location of armed groups and highlighted new avenues of possible growth for the mission.

European countries also offered valuable support to MINUSCA's political strategy. As one example, the EU Military Advisory Mission (EUMAM) and its successor, the EU Training Mission (EUTM), positioned Europe as a leading partner in operationalizing the security sector reform components of MINUSCA's mandate. The additional capacity and resources filled a critical gap within MINUSCA and facilitated systematic progress on rebuilding CAR's fledgling security forces.

European contingents are not always trained on the UN standards, rules and regulations, and guidelines they will have to implement when in missions. This directly impacts how Europeans integrate into missions as well as their command-and-control processes. The rotational partnership system increasingly preferred by European countries, while successful in reducing burdens placed upon any single member state, is logistically inefficient and difficult to coordinate and manage.

Conclusion: Sustaining European Involvement in UN Peacekeeping

European countries will continue contributing to UN peacekeeping by offering a range of diplomatic, political, technical, and financial resources. Participants at the 2018 Vienna Seminar identified clear takeaways on the direction and character of future support.

Crises will influence how Europe sustains its support to UN peacekeeping. Recent trends suggest that European countries will continue to favor tailor-made, "plug-and-play" arrangements, providing specific capabilities in cooperation with or in support of bilateral and multilateral partners. There appears to be little domestic appetite for large-scale troop deployments, especially to countries where Europeans do not perceive threats to their core national interests. These conditions increase the importance of the EU and NATO's roles in mobilizing collective capabilities and support moving forward. How these institutions evolve their policies and capabilities to better integrate into the UN's systems may play an outsized role in determining the sustainability of Europe's future contributions.

European countries will also need to continuously assess how they collectively perceive their broader role in UN peace operations. Recent initiatives such as the HIPPO review and A4P initiative emphasize that member states should go beyond crisis management, taking a "whole-of-system approach" to conflict situations, including through election support; security sector reform; disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration; and activities for peacebuilding and sustaining peace. Promoting comprehensive approaches to managing conflicts, and thereby reducing the burdens placed on peacekeeping operations, may require European politicians to confront the growing tendency toward nationalism and isolationism. Facing "intervention fatigue," governments across Europe will need to rally domestic support for UN peacekeeping prior to increasing their commitments.

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