EUNPACK
A CONFLICT SENSITIVE UNPACKING OF
THE EU COMPREHENSIVE APPROACH
TO CONFLICT AND CRISES MECHANISM

Best practices in EU crisis response and policy implementation

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Authors:	Jozef Bátora, Steven Blockmans, Enver Ferhatovic, Ingo Peters, Pernille Rieker, Eva Stambøl, Siri Strand
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1. Introduction

Evaluations of EU crisis-response capacity have indicated that the EU should pay more attention to decreasing the distance between Brussels and the field, to ensure proper information flows and learning from experience (Bossong 2013; European Parliament 2012). The EU increasingly regards knowledge-management and lessons-learned processes in external crisis response as important, and these mechanisms have become an integral part of EU crisis response policy. As stated in *The EU's comprehensive approach to external conflicts and crisis* (European Commission 2013a), EU missions should aim to 'take stock of lessons learned, including within the EU institutions, with Member States and external actors, and feed them back into the comprehensive approach cycle starting from early warning and including prevention efforts, training and exercises' (European Commission 2013a). Hence, the EU has developed its own policy cycle, with feedback mechanisms. Serious efforts have been made to improve lessons-learned procedures, including studies of the efficiency of these initiatives. While having procedures for institutional learning is important, these must be used and fed back into the planning of new missions and operations. This report focuses on the procedures; forthcoming case studies under the EUNPACK project will cover the practices as well.

The aim of the present report is twofold. First, to take stock of how the Europen External Action Sercvice (EEAS) and the Commission have *institutionalized lessons-learned mechanism*. Second, to discuss the extent to which th*ese mechanisms and practices incorporate the EU's ambitions for a 'conflict-sensitive' and 'comprehensive' crisis-response approach*. In this sense, this report will serve as a point of departure for case-study research to be undertaken within the framework of Work Packages 5–7 of the EUNPACK project, on whether there is a gap between policy and practice with regard to institutional learning.

2. Conceptual clarifications

In evaluating EU missions, the aim is to identify lessons and best practices that will help to improve procedures, for greater success in later missions. The terms 'lessons learned' and 'best practices' have positive connotations and are widely used, but not always in the same way. This is why it is essential to start with some conceptual clarifications. As noted by Giovanni Cremonini (2015), a precise definition, often used by lessons specialists and people from the
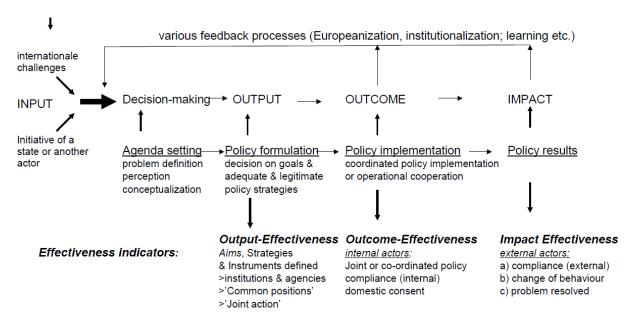
military domain, define a 'lesson' as 'any occurrence or finding that has an impact, which requires further development or monitoring' (Rehrl & Glume 2015). After proper analysis and validation, a 'lesson observed' becomes a 'lesson identified, which is followed by remedial actions like modifying of concepts, development of planning and training documents, and guidelines that reflect the lesson. Further, the 'lesson identified' becomes a 'lesson learnt' only after remedial action has been taken and the lesson has been *acted on*. According to Cremonini, the term 'best practice' refers to 'a successful practice that should be replicated'. It can be classified as a positive lesson, and in this context replication takes the place of remedial action (Cremonini 2015).

Another term closely related to self–assessment procedures is *success*. Measuring success is difficult; and what is seen as successful by some will not necessarily be so for others. It has been argued that there is a lack of focus on how to define and evaluate *success* in EU operations (Rodt 2014: 181). However, the problem of which perspective to adopt when defining success is not confined to the evaluations of EU crisis-response capacity. Referring to the work of Pushkina (2006) and Baldwin (2000), Rodt notes the question of whether to evaluate success from the perspective of the policy actor, the target – or according to theoretically defined standards in international peacekeeping or foreign policy analysis. She argues that the understanding of success must incorporate both internal and external perspectives on success, to reflect the interest of the intervener (the EU), the target (the conflict) and the purpose of this type of operation (conflict management) (Rodt, 2015: 185). Failure to specify 'what is success' and 'how to succeed' may lead to misunderstandings and less satisfactory outcomes. The interests of the intervener are often clearly described in the mandate or strategy documents, with less attention to the interests of the target. For proper conflict sensitivity, the interests of the target need to be included in mission planning, and also be part of the evaluation and identification of lessons management.

In his recent edited volume, Ingo Peters (2016) offers a suggestion that builds on the seminal work of Underdal (2002) and Young (2004) on effectiveness of environmental regimes. Peters adapts their five-step policy cycle which allows for distinguishing output, outcome and impact performance/effectiveness. By using these steps as yardsticks to evaluate the success of failure of any given policy actor, a useful comparative design for evaluating effectiveness or success across cases and policy sectors can be developed (Peters 2016: 27–30).

Figure 1,

Source: Peters 2016: 27

This policy cycle model could serve as a framework for identifying useful analytical factors to study in the forthcoming case studies in the EUNPACK project. However, we should also be mindful of organization theory research indicating that learning processes in organizations may be imperfect, and may involve indirect or cut feedback loops and loose couplings between individual actions, reporting mechanisms, organizational action, environmental responses and individual and organizational reactions to those (March and Olsen 1975). Further, learning in organizations is informed and narrowed down by exploiting established practices and procedures and/or is exposed to high risks when organizations are involved in open and free search and exploration of functioning solutions (March 1991). The analytical challenge for the empirical case studies in EUNPACK lies precisely in identifying gaps between formally stated procedures and goals of organizational learning in the EU's crisis-management apparatus, on the one hand, and actual practices and performances of such learning processes on the other.

3. Existing learning processes: overview

As noted in the Council Conclusions on Security and Development (Council of the EU 2007), Security/conflict sensitive assessments and conflict analysis should be carried out in the preparation of country and regional strategies and programmes. Various actors are involved in the comprehensive EU crisis management structure, and their procedures for learning processes takes different forms and emphasizes different aspects of a mission, also when it comes to *conflict sensitivity*. The following section reviews some main actors involved in EU crisis management missions and their procedures for identifying and implementing best practices and lessons learned.

3.1 EEAS and existing procedures for lessons learned

3.1.1 Lessons learned in the framework of CSDP
While the military part of the EU's Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) missions seems to have an established tradition of self-assessments, drawing heavily on pre-existing assessment procedures developed as part of member-states' military doctrines and by NATO, the first EU document that set out the standards for lessons-learned procedures for CSDP civilian missions was issued in 2008 (Council of the EU 2008). Since then, the EEAS has developed an intricate system of procedures for improvement.

Currently, the CSDP consists of three structures, each with its own internal lessons-learned procedures. The Crisis Management Planning Directorate (CMPD) collects lessons from political strategic planning of CSDP missions and operations and from the related strategic reviews. The Civilian Planning and Conduct Capability (CPCC) collects lessons from operational planning, conduct and of civilian missions as well as support to mixed military–civilian CSDP missions. The EU Military Staff (EUMS) collects lessons from advance planning and support to military HQ and from reports from missions and operations (Rehrl & Glume 2015).

The procedures of these three will be presented in turn, but since certain lessons identified by CMPD, CPCC or EUMS cannot be implemented by these structures on their own, we start with a fourth structure: the two-level *CSDP Lessons Management Group/Lessons*

Working Group, tasked with identifying and discussing certain overarching lessons (Rehrl & Glume 2015).

3.1.4 CSDP Lessons Management Group/Lessons Working Group

The CSDP Lessons Management Group/Lessons Working Group has the three structures mentioned above, as well as other CSDP stakeholders. These include: the EU Intelligence Analysis Centre (EU INTCEN), Security Policy and Conflict Prevention, the Managing Department for Crisis Response and Operational Coordination (MD CR&OC), the Committee for Civilian Aspects of Crisis Management (CivCom), the European Union Military Committee (EUMC), chairs of the Politico-Military Group (PMG) and relevant geographic and thematic departments, as well as the Commission's Directorate-General for Internal Cooperation and Development (DG DEVCO), the Commission's Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection department (ECHO) and the Commission's Service for Foreign Policy Instruments (FPI). The CSDP Lessons Management Group is made up of the heads of these bodies and is chaired by a member of the Corporate Board of the EEAS (Rehrl & Glume 2015).

Every year, the CSDP Lessons Management Group identifies up to five broad, overarching issues or key lessons, and submits them to the Political and Security Committee (PSC) for endorsement. These key lessons are presented in an Annual CSDP Lessons Report, and a summary of this report is made available to the public on the EEAS website.[1] The summary of the annual 2014 report stressed that good progress had been made with the 2013 key lessons, identified as the following:

1) *A Comprehensive Approach improves efficiency and sustainability of mission results.*
2) *A common foundation of pre-deployment training for all CSPD mission staff can greatly enhance mission effectiveness and coherence.*
3) *Ownership and support by the host country is necessary if the mission is to be truly successful and sustainable.*
4) *The use of 'preparatory measures' proved to be a useful tool.*
5) *Lessons should be taken into account systematically when preparing new missions.*

The following year, the annual report addressed implementation of these five key lessons. With regard to the third lesson, which is especially relevant for the EUNPACK project, it was argued

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[1] For an overview of CSDP Annual Lessons Reports or summaries of the reports, see:
http://eeas.europa.eu/search/index_en.htm?q=Annual%20CSDP%20Lessons%20Report

that 'transition strategies and local ownership also require continued attention'. The report also included 15 key recommendations that refer to the five key lessons and describe concrete steps to be taken to implement each of them (Council of the EU 2015). On this specific lesson, it further emphasised the need for the EEAS to (1) devise targeted messages to strengthen local ownership at an early stage; (2) to invite key political figures of host countries to Brussels for face-to-face meetings with the PSC to raise the profile of CSDP missions and to underline the importance of political accountability; (3) start work on a Status of Mission Agreement (SOMA) as early as possible after the adoption of the CMC, with the aim of concluding it prior to mission deployment; and (4) through CSDP missions and EU Delegations, survey the opinion of the local population about CSDP missions and monitor support by the host-country authorities.

While this indicates that local ownership is yet to be achieved in implementing CSDP operations, the 2014 report (Council of the EU 2015): 12–16) also identifies five new lessons were suggested to be followed up in 2015 report (not yet available):

1) *The Political Framework for Crisis Approach (PFCA) showed its potential but could be further improved.*

2) *The revised Crisis Management Procedures (CMP) proved their worth but need further analysis to avoid delays in mission launch.*

3) *Staff in Brussels and in EU Delegations would benefit from more systematic CSDP training.*

4) *There is insufficient secure communication capability.*

5) *Coordination and cooperation between EU Delegations and CSDP missions can be enhanced.*

In the EUNPACK upcoming case studies of EU crisis response in Kosovo/Serbia, Ukraine, Libya, Afghanistan, Iraq and Mali we will examine the process of addressing how these key lessons in general, and in particular those relating to local ownership. One way of doing this is to apply the policy cycle model developed by Peters (2016: 4)

3.1.2 The Crisis Management Planning Directorate (CMPD)
The Crisis Management Planning Directorate was created in 2009, following the European Council's conclusions encouraging the establishment of a new single civilian–military strategic

planning structure for EU peace-keeping and humanitarian operations and missions. Activities of the CMPD include preparing strategic reviews of existing CSDP missions and operations, examining their mandate, objectives, size and sustainability. The CMPD is to pay particular attention to mission effectiveness, as well as the cooperation and coherence with other EU instruments, bilateral actions by member-states and other internal actors, taking into account the changing strategic contexts and local or international political situations.[2]

The CMPD has authored the main lessons-learned reports at the political and strategic level, such as the annual reports and the thematic reports. It can also initiate mission-specific lessons reports, as appropriate. Because many lessons are highly context-specific, the CMPD has produced various thematic reports aimed at providing more widely transferable lessons (European Parliament 2012). The first thematic report concerned Human Rights and Gender Mainstreaming (Council Document 17138/1/10).

A study of the CSDP lessons-learned processes, commissioned by the Directorate-General for External Policies of the Union (European Parliament 2012),[3] extensively describes the procedures of lessons management. The process starts with the CMPD sending a notification to all relevant parties, informing them that a lessons-learned process is being initiated. Other EEAS bodies are invited to discuss the aim of the report; and, during the process, meetings are conducted with the relevant EEAS bodies, the Council, the Commission as well as civil society organisations with specific expertise on the country or region in question. To collect the lessons, a questionnaire is sent to those participating in the mission(s); additionally, a team of CMPD officers visits the field to meet with as many key parties as possible, including other international organizations, like NATO or UN, as well as local and national stakeholders and NGO's. The CMPD also collects from other EU bodies lessons learned which might be relevant to the report. When the report is ready, it is submitted to the PSC for review and approval (European Parliament 2012)

As part of the lessons process, the CMPD employs checklists in the planning phase of a new mission to ensure that key principles and best practices are taken into consideration (European Parliament 2012). Moreover, the CMPD is in charge of identifying the type of

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[2] Source: EEAS websites: http://eeas.europa.eu/csdp/structures-instruments-agencies/cmpd/index_en.htm#sr

[3] Report based on a study commissioned by the European Parliament's Subcommittee on Security and Defence: 'CSDP Missions and Operations: Lessons Learned Processes' (2012). The report was written by researchers at the Netherlands Institute of International Relations, 'Clingendael', Conflict Research Unit and the Trans European Policy Studies Association (TEPSA).

training needed for each mission, thereby getting an opportunity to safeguard the implementation of lessons identified from previous missions (European Parliament 2012). However, the curriculum of training courses and the training of the mission staff are the responsibility of the member-states.

When the comprehensive report on CSDP lessons-learned procedures was written in 2012 (European Parliament 2012), the CMPD was involved developing a *resource database*, CiLMA, to contain all lessons identified from civil operations. This application was intended to contribute to better sharing of lessons learned and best practices. It was pointed out in the study that the CMPD at that point lacked the human resources needed to enter all existing lessons into one database. No further information has been found about the CiLMA project.

In the conclusions from the report for the DG for External Policies of the Union (2012), it is argued that CMPD lessons-learned officers do not systematically receive the six-monthly reports from the Heads of Mission or from CPCC, nor lessons-learned documents from military operations. As that was written in 2012, this flaw might have been remedied since then, but evidence is lacking. Moreover, according to the 2012 report, 'No document to date describes the division of labour between CMPD and CPCC or their specific tasks regarding lessons learned processes'. It should be explored, through interviews, whether this is still the case.
In the lessons-learned procedures of the CMPD, *conflict sensitivity* involves merely including civil society groups of the host society in the lessons processes. The findings of the report from the DG for External Policies of the Union (2012) reflect this only partly. The focus seems to be on coordination among the various EU institutions, and horizontal exchange of practices. Moreover, noting the gap between mission level and lessons-learned actors in Brussels, the report points out the need to address this issue, and calls for further research to identify ways of improving the situation.

3.1.3 Civilian Planning and Conduct Capability (CPCC)
The CPCC is the body within the EEAS that manages the operational planning and conduct of CSDP civilian missions – which represent the largest portion of CSDP interventions. Lessons from the civilian missions are collected after the planning phase as well as after mission end. The six-monthly reports delivered by the heads of the civilian missions, which they are required to provide according to the mission(s) mandate, are to include a section on lessons learned. Best practices and lessons learnt from the conduct of missions are also discussed at the monthly

meetings held between the Head of Operations and each mission, and at weekly CPCC meetings between the Head of Operation and the Head of Section. Lessons discussed at these meetings are passed to the Committee for Civilian Aspects of Crisis Management (CivCom) for discussion and member-state approval. Finally, the lessons-learned materials are forwarded to the CMPD to inform the Annual Report on Lessons Learned and the Thematic Reports. According to the study requested by the DG for External Policies of the Union (European Parliament 2012), this process has become increasingly systematic.

It has been held that the CPCC does not share with the CMPD all the lessons identified. According to European Parliament (2012), the decision on what to be shared depends on whether the lesson is considered to be for internal technical use only, its perceived relevance to CMPD, and if it is exclusively an internal technical issue. Moreover, not all lessons are passed on to the CMPD, because of political reasons: this applies to discussions in CivCom and matters concerning member-state approval (European Parliament 2012). The extensive 2012 study on lessons-learned processes pointed out that the practice of having the member states approve the lessons 'results in a significant watering down of content of the lessons learned', and that 'the lessons that CMPD ultimately receives might be heavily edited and, at times, censored' (European Parliament 2012). The study noted that this seemed particularly true for political lessons, which entail a higher level of sensitivity for the member-states.

As to information sharing between missions and the CPCC, the study requested by EU DG for External Policies (2012) states that lessons concerning the operational level tend to stay within mission, while the lessons that are shared seems to be those concerning strategic issues, where the bodies in Brussels can have an impact. According to the study, this reluctance to share experience prevents opportunities for learning horizontally among missions.

As mentioned, the six-monthly reports from the heads of civilian missions include a section on lessons learned. According to the study on CSDP lessons-learned processes by the European Parliament (2012), in the six-monthly reports the section on lessons learnt does not include a pre-determined template for what kind of lessons the component should contain. The authors note that this leaves space for some flexibility, but also entails the risk of excluding lessons regarding specific topics, like gender (European Parliament 2012).

Interviews with CSDP officers in connection with the study of CSDP lessons-learned processes in 2012 indicated that those involved in planning and conduct of a mission relied more on what they remembers from lessons identified in previous missions, and that this

personal knowledge was shared informally with other colleagues. An example of this kind of informal information-sharing was seen during the mission in South Sudan (AMIS), where communication was promoted between those involved in the planning of the mission and officers involved in a similar mission in Afghanistan (European Parliament 2012). When the study was undertaken in 2012, the CPCC was working to 'formalize' such informal communication, by launching an internal chat-room where the staff could share experiences, lessons and best practices. An officer interviewed during the study opined that this informal system would be valuable, as it would allow the discussion of sensitive issues that might otherwise be censored out of official lessons-learned documents (European Parliament 2012).

Regarding CPCC and lessons-learned processes, the report (European Parliament 2012) indicates that the formal structures for information sharing within the CPCC are well-established, and that new initiatives, like the internal chat-room mentioned above, are being developed. However, the report notes some challenges, including the problem of lessons that get 'censored' by member-states before they are delivered from the CCPC to the CMPD, for political reasons. Also mentioned is the lack of structure/indicators for the lessons-learned section in the six-monthly reports. Further, the 2012 report argues that the lack of resources in the CCPC is a major obstacle to a more systematic process of learning lessons, highlighting the lack of Lessons-Learned/Best-Practice Officers in CCPC who can focus fully on lessons management; at mission level, Best-Practice Officers are rarely appointed. To capture the sensitivities of a conflict, an important step could be to appoint Best-Practice Officers in the field, where mission activities take place.

3.1.3 European Union Military Staff (EUMS)

The general view is that the European Union Military Staff (EUMS) has identified and integrated the lessons-learned procedures more methodologically than in the case of civilian missions. EUMS procedures are based on military experience in conducting evaluations and lesson learning processes, with many of them adopted from NATO. Horizontal exchange of experience and lessons sharing is also facilitated by the fact that military personnel train together on their specific area of expertise (European Parliament 2012).

The EUMS has developed an advanced lessons-sharing database, the *European Lessons Management Application* (ELMA), which has facilitated and streamlined the process since it was launched in 2007. The database follows a lesson from once it is identified, to when it is

analysed (when the root causes of the problem are assessed and identified), and to implementation and integration (European Parliament 2012). In the first stages, lessons observed are sent to the EU Military Committee (EUMC), where each lesson must be agreed upon by member-state representatives. The database tracks the cycle of each lesson, including the action plan developed for dealing with the problem identified. The ELMA system also facilitates dividing lessons into categories – concepts, training, systems, personnel, etc. This facilitate finding lessons identified and measures implemented related to an area where change is necessary.

Although this well-developed system of identifying, analysing and implementing lessons seems to be functional and working well, the weakest part of the lesson cycle would appear to be the planning phase. As noted in the report on CSDP lessons-learned procedures (European Parliament 2012), 'It was reflected by EEAS interviewees that, during the planning phases, there is no time to conduct lessons cycles or consult lessons learned documents'; officers involved in the planning phases 'have the lessons in their minds' (European Parliament 2012). If previous lessons are not implemented in the creation of new military plans and strategies, they lose their value.

Concerning *conflict sensitivity*, the report (European Parliament 2012), does not mention whether and how conflict sensitivity is captured in the procedures for lessons learned within EUMS, or whether this issue is emphasised in the ELMA database. There seems to have been little research on lessons learned concerning conflict sensitivity and military missions.

The military and the civilian operations of the CSDP have developed more standardized and coherent learning mechanisms in recent years. On the civilian side, the CPCC is an important body in the lessons- learned process, focusing on the operational aspects of missions, the strategic reviews, and the supporting mission's lessons-learning process. The six-monthly lessons report provided by the CPCC creates the baseline for the process of best practices and lessons learned in CSDP missions, but, in these reports, scant attention has been paid to *conflict sensitivity* as such. Although these reports contain a section on lessons learned, the study conducted for the EU DG for External Policies (European Parliament 2012), holds that the criteria for the kinds of lessons to be reported seem vague. This makes it difficult to ascertain whether gender aspects and aspects of conflict sensitivity are being included in the cycles of lessons learned.

The recommendations in the report *CSDP Missions and Operations: Lessons Learned Processes* (European Parliament 2012: 108) might be valuable as a point of departure for the EUNPACK project. As these recommendations were given in 2012, it would be of interest to see to what extent they have actually been followed up. Thus, the recommendations could be used as a background for questions directed to SCDP representatives during the interviews:

- The EUMS and CMPD could identify the target audience of the lessons-learned documents, to improve the strategy for disseminating such lessons. A proactive approach would be to send relevant lessons reports to specific officers who can apply them directly in their work.
- Including best practices in lessons-learned reports could help to counter negative perceptions of lessons-learned processes as a blaming and shaming exercise.
- Aligning lessons-learned concepts used by the various bodies within the EEAS and adopting common definitions could enhance civilian and military coordination, and serve to promote a more comprehensive approach. Joint training on learning methodologies and tools for EUMS, CPCC and CMPD Best-Practice and Lessons Officers could further promote a common approach.
- Formalizing the analysis of the root causes underpinning lessons identified as well as proposing solutions to the problems could help to ensure implementation of the lessons in procedures and policies.
- Given its special relevance to the lessons on financial procedures, the Commission's Service for Foreign Policy Instruments (FPI) could be more formally integrated into the lessons learned process of CPCC, similar to the way ATHENA is involved in the lessons learned cycle of EUMS.
- Clarifying the division of labour between CPCC and CMPD with regard to lessons learned could help to establish a more structured, comprehensible and cooperative system for such lessons.
- Exercises that involve all levels of actors, from Brussels to the missions, could improve the shared understanding of the actors' respective roles and encourage greater accountability. Also joint training of personnel from the CPCC, the CMPD and missions could promote harmonization and deeper understanding of the dynamics at play at each working level.

- In order to improve the framework for learning lessons at the political-strategic level, consideration should be given to systematizing and developing informal tools for sharing and learning, such as EUISS seminars, workshops and exercises. This could also involve the actors responsible for the political-strategic aspect of CSDP, providing a new (and possibly less political) forum for discussion.
- Mission staff, such as the Political Adviser to the missions or the Best-Practices Officer, could be included in strategic evaluations, discussions and analysis of CSDP performance at the Brussels level.
- Designating a Lessons-Learned and Best-Practices Officer per mission as suggested in the 2008 Guidelines (Council of the EU 2008) could lead to building a network of best-practices officers. Specialized training could also be provided to all officers involved in lessons-learned processes, at mission and at Brussels level.
- Allowing Europe's New Training Initiative for Civilian Crisis Management (ENTRi) and its training institutes to use lessons-learned and best-practices documents in the development of course curricula may be a very cost-effective method.

3.2 The Commission's learning processes

This section presents an overview of the Commission's learning structures and processes regarding crisis-response mechanisms. As this project is concerned with the EU's responses throughout the crisis cycle – from conflict prevention to post-conflict stabilization – main institutions to examine are the Commission's Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection department (ECHO) and the newer Commission Service for Foreign Policy Instruments (FPI), set up in parallel to the EEAS in 2011 to take over responsibility for operational expenditures.

3.2.1 The Commission's Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection Department (ECHO)
The general assignment of ECHO is to save and preserve lives, prevent and reduce human suffering and safeguard the situation of those affected by natural disasters and man-made crisis. Headquartered in Brussels, ECHO has a global network of field officers to provide assistance in crisis through two main instruments: humanitarian aid and civil protection.

Independent evaluations carried out by independent experts are an essential part of the Commission's decision-making process on ECHO's activities. Their conclusions and recommendations are fed into ECHO's strategic planning, programming and communication policy, as well as into the budgetary cycle. These are either geographic evaluations or thematic evaluations, to be conducted in line with EU evaluation standards.[4] According to these standards, 'Evaluation results should be communicated in such a way that it ensures the maximum use of the results and that they meet the needs of decision-makers and stakeholders'.[5]

Humanitarian aid

ECHO is primarily a humanitarian aid donor, and its interventions involved mainly programmes and budget execution, with funding channelled through individual agreements with partner organizations. Since the Commission does not intervene directly on the ground, the humanitarian programmes are implemented through partner organizations that share common general objectives with the DG ECHO. Partner organizations are selected among UN relief agencies, members of the Red Cross and Red Crescent movement, international organizations, and non-governmental organizations (ECHO Strategic Plan 2016–2020).[6] ECHO is fully involved in planning aspects and policy development, but has also a strong presence in the field and works closely with partner organizations. The activities of ECHO are documented in Annual Reports which are publicly available.[7] The ECHO Strategic Report 2016–2020 lays out the main strategies and objectives of the organization's work, including strategies for coherence between the EU, its member-states and its donor partners.

According to the EU Humanitarian Aid Regulation, the Commission must *'regularly assess humanitarian aid operations financed by the Community in order to establish whether they have achieved their declared objectives and to produce guidelines for improving the effectiveness of subsequent operations'* (European Commission 1996).

A study financed by the EU Commission on 'Improving Humanitarian Assistance' (Steets et al. 2009) outlines the lessons procedures of ECHO. An identified lesson regarding a definite policy measure is handed over to the DG ECHO policymakers, who evaluate the lesson and if

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[4] These standards can be found at: http://ec.europa.eu/smart-regulation/evaluation/docs/standards_c_2002_5267_final_en.pdf
[5] http://ec.europa.eu/echo/funding-evaluations/evaluations_en
[6] http://dgecho-partners-helpdesk.eu/partnership/start
[7] http://ec.europa.eu/echo/who/accountability/annual-reports_en

deemed appropriate followed up with a thematic evaluation across similar cases. The evaluation involves assessment of what has been done previously to address the topic, within the Commission and other relevant bodies. Based on the result of this assessment, the Policy Unit, together with the Operational Unit and DG ECHO field experts, turns the lesson into a policy. The policy gets prioritized once it finds its way into the annual operation strategy, either through a country strategy or a horizontal priority/sectoral policy (Steets et al. 2009).

These evaluations include an assessment of the implementation of earlier lessons learned. The evaluation units create up to 12 external evaluations a year, on operations, partnerships and sectoral policies. Evaluation results are shared systematically with senior management and implementing partners. The question of a necessary exit strategy for all areas of humanitarian intervention is reviewed twice a year: when funds are initially allocated, and then at mid-term review. The latter offers the opportunity to review and adjust the priorities for remaining funds in line with possible changes in the situation (ECHO Strategic Plan 2016–2020).

In its attempt to improve the lessons-learned procedures for humanitarian crisis management, ECHO has organized various meetings and workshops on lessons learned and best practices in humanitarian crises. A 'Technical Level Lessons Learned Meeting', held in 2013, focused on 'slow onset humanitarian crises', and was summarized in a report that identified detailed lessons drawn from various stakeholders involved in humanitarian crisis management (European Commission 2013b). The lessons identified clearly call for better understanding of the nature of the crisis, indicating the need for better transfer of knowledge among mission teams, better information on existing local humanitarian efforts, and assistance tailored to the response (for instance, if it is anticipated that refugees must stay in a camp for some time, single-use items are not appropriate) (European Commission 2013b). This can be seen as a call for better *crisis sensitivity*.

Regarding *gender sensitivity*, Andrea Binder (2009) offers some perspectives on the problems of implementing lessons learned. One criticism mentioned is that DG ECHO's Global Needs Assessment was not based on sex and age-disaggregated data, which turned the decision-making process into a gender- and age-blind process (Binder 2009). This criticism appears to have been taken seriously by the Commission, as the new ECHO Strategic Plan (2016–2020) states: 'In its commitment to quality programming, ECHO has developed several assessment parameters, one of them being the Gender–Age Marker', which is a tool that measures to what extent humanitarian actions integrates gender and age considerations. Furthermore, the

Strategic Plan states that key results indicators on gender and age will be emphasized in the operational guidelines, through systematic monitoring of implementation processes.

As noted in a briefing document issued by the *Initiative for Peacebuilding* and *Safer World* and financed by the EU, 'Being conflict-sensitive starts with the recognition that all aid interventions inject new resources into a context, potentially creating losers and winners'. This briefing document sets out four points to be included in a conflict-sensitive approach: 1) understand the context, 2) understand the nature of the intervention, 3) analyse the interaction between the intervention and the context, and 4) act upon this analysis (Safer World 2012).

Beyond the EU, there is the International Dialogue on Peacebuilding and Statebuilding – a forum composed of members of the International Network on Conflict and Fragility (INCAF), the g7+ group of fragile and conflict-affected states, and the Civil Society Platform for Peacebuilding and Statebuilding (CSPPS). It was the first forum for political dialogue to bring together countries affected by conflict and fragility, development partners, and civil society. In a report from 2011 some of the key challenges to equitable and sustainable development: state fragility, conflict and its links with organized crime, poor governance and authoritarian regimes were identified. [8] In order to respond to these specific challenges of conflict and fragility, a group of decision-makers and civil society representatives, as well as donor countries and fragile states, agreed on the 'New Deal for Engagement in Fragile States'. This sets out a framework to guide stakeholder interventions and partnerships, and to mitigate the risks entailed in providing aid in contexts affected by conflict and fragility (see footnote 8). This 'New Deal for Engagement in Fragile States' was reviewed upon request by the EU in 2015. The main conclusion is positive: 'if the New Deal did not already exist, it would need to be invented' (Hearn 2016: 60). However, it also notes that more remains to be done, especially by international partners, who need to coordinate their assistance better, if this deal is to succeed (ibid.: 10).

Summing up, there seem to be well-established processes for lessons learned and evaluations in ECHO, and a strong commitment to develop standards and procedures further. Having evaluations conducted by external reviewers ensures that projects financed by ECHO and carried out by its partners are monitored and evaluated through regular assessments and recommendations. *Conflict sensitivity* appears to be incorporated in the Commission's work on

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[8] On the 'New Deal of Fragile States', see: https://www.pbsbdialogue.org/media/filer_public/07/69/07692de0-3557-494e-918e-18df00e9ef73/the_new_deal.pdf

humanitarian aid. The 'New Deal of Engagement in Fragile States' is also one recent example of attempts to improve the concern and focus on conflict sensitivity. Overall, the general impression is that the humanitarian aid sector of the EU crisis management is fully aware of the need for more focus on conflict sensitivity, but that the required structures and guidelines are not yet fully developed.

Civil protection

In addition to humanitarian aid, ECHO is responsible for assistance to civil protection, consisting of governmental aid delivered in the immediate aftermath of a natural or man-made disaster.

The EU Council highlighted the need for developing procedures for lessons-learned management procedures in this case already in 2007, by tasking the Commission with 'setting up a programme of lessons learnt from the interventions conducted within the framework of the Community civil protection mechanism and disseminating these lessons through the information system' (Council of the EU, 2007).

Since then, the Commission has followed up with various initiatives, including the development of 'The Copenhagen framework on lessons learnt' (Danish Presidency of the Council of the European Union 2012). Within this framework, four phases were identified as vital prerequisites for a comprehensive and effective lessons learnt process: 1) Collecting data and information from interventions, 2) analysing and validating relevant information, 3) disseminating knowledge, and 4) implementing lessons learned. The summary of the workshop also calls for improvement of civil protection programmes, by strengthening the procedures for including lessons and best practices in the planning of strategies (Danish Presidency of the Council of the European Union 2012).

In 2013, the Parliament and the Council launched a decision document on a 'Union Civil Protection Mechanism (Council of the EU 2012). The document includes decisions on various aspects of these mechanisms, including lessons learned and knowledge dissemination (Article 13). It calls for the establishment of a training network of training centres for civil protection and emergency management personnel which, among other tasks, shall aim to 'create synergies among its members through exchange of experience and best practices, relevant research, lessons learnt, courses and workshops, exercises and pilot projects'. The decision document highlights the importance of cooperation with local partners: 'regional and local authorities thus

need to be appropriately involved in the activities carried out under this Decision in accordance with Member States' national structures» (Council of the EU/European Parliament 2013).

3.2.2 EU Foreign Policy Instruments

Alongside the EEAS, the Commission Service for Foreign Policy Instruments (FPI) was established in 2014 under the authority of the High Representative/Vice President (HRVP), to take over responsibility for operational expenditures. The FPI works closely together with the EEAS and EU delegations on tasks like implementation of the CFSP budget, crisis response and prevention measures financed under the Instrument contributing to Stability and Peace (IcSP), as well as the Partnership Instrument (PI), designed to promote the EU's strategic interests worldwide.[9] The FPI disseminates information about their actions public through the Annual Activity Reports.[10]

FPI cooperates with the EU Delegations in its annual planning process, and receives inputs from the Delegations which communicate with Member States at local level as well as with relevant stakeholders such as civil society organizations, chambers of commerce, think thanks, local governments, member-state agencies, EU companies, and other stakeholders seen as relevant partners in the planning and implementation process (FPI Strategic Plan 2016–2020).

The tasks and the objectives of the FPI are described in the FPI Strategic Plan 2016–2020, which is closely aligned with the strategic objectives of the EU Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP), and which sets out clearly how the FPI must act if it is to contribute to achieving the CFSP's objectives. It lists a set of indicators for measuring and monitoring progress and verifying if FPI is on track to reaching the expected results. Further, each objective is accompanied by instructions on how the responsible body/instrument must conduct the reporting exercise. This advanced monitoring system for implementation of strategic goals covers indicators and evaluation procedures for both the Instrument contributing to Stability and Peace (IcSP) and the Partnership Instrument (PI).

Instrument contributing to Stability and Peace (IcSP)

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[9] Service for Foreign Policy Instruments (FPI) websites: http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/fpi/index_en.htm

[10] Annual reports available at: http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/fpi/key-documents/index_en.htm

The IcSP is an assistance instrument set up to enable the EU to take a lead in helping to prevent and respond to actual or emerging crisis around the world. With its broad political objectives, focusing on crisis response, crisis preparedness and conflict prevention, the IcSP is intended to contribute to the EU's comprehensive approach to external conflicts and crises. Working in close collaboration with other services of the European Commission and the European External Action Service (EEAS), the FPI mobilizes the IcSP to provide for urgent short-term actions in response to situations of crisis or emerging crisis, often complementing EU humanitarian assistance, and long-term capacity building of organizations engaged in crisis response and peace-building.[11]

IcSP actions are conducted in conjunction with an existing EU mission in a third country. The IcSP operates with a headquarters-based team, as well as personnel seconded to EU delegations to provide support and to oversee implementation of response measures. Implementing partners for IcSP actions include NGOs, the UN and other international organizations, EU member-state agencies and regional and sub-regional organizations (see footnote 11).

Key documents launched by the FPI concerning the IcSP include the IcSP Annual Reports (2007–2011, 2012–2013), the IcSP Strategic Paper (2016–2020), and the IcSP Annual Action Programme (2016, 2015, 2014, 2013, 2012, 2011, 2010, 2009, 2008, 2007).[12]

According to the Thematic Strategy Paper 2014–2020, several external reviews of previous and current programmes have been undertaken recently. Concerning lessons-learned procedures and strategies for maintaining conflict sensitivity, the Strategy Paper refers to a study from 2009 which gave the following recommendations: increase focus on cross-cutting and/or thematic issues relating to both long-term and short-term conflict prevention and peace-building which demonstrate a clear synergy with other EU-supported activities and policy priorities; increase emphasis on organizations working in various geographical contexts in relation to thematic or cross-cutting issues that support capacity-building of local partners and generate learning benefits for the peace-building sector as a whole; and foster policy dialogue with non-state actors on peace-building issues. The Strategy Paper reports that these recommendations were taken seriously and have been implemented in subsequent Annual Action Programmes (EuropAid 2014–2020).

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[11] FPI websites: http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/fpi/what-we-do/instrument_contributing_to_stability_and_peace_en.htm

[12] Reports available at: http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/fpi/key-documents/index_en.htm

The Partnership Instrument (PI)

Through the Partnership Instrument (PI), introduced in the budget 2014-2020, the EU cooperates with partners around the world to advance the Union's strategic interests and tackle global challenges. The PI is to fund activities that carry forward EU agendas with partner countries, translating political commitments into concrete measures, in various areas of key interest to the EU. This funding is intended to support the external dimension of EU internal policies – in areas like competitiveness, research and innovation, as well as migration – and to help in addressing major global challenges such as energy security, climate change and environmental protection.[13]

An impact assessment of the proposed PI, undertaken in 2011, argued that the PI was designed 'to overcome this limitation of the EU's ability to engage internationally in the most effective way [and] allow [it] to pursue agendas beyond development cooperation with new powers, but also enable [it] to defend the core EU agenda globally with any other partner country if the need arises. The PI has not yet been evaluated, but the EU has initiated a mid-term evaluation of the PI, due in 2017.[14]

Concluding remarks and relevance for future EUNPACK work

This report has surveyed existing arrangements regarding lessons learned and best practices in various parts of the EU's crisis-response activities, as well as indicating the extent to which conflict sensitivity has been a special concern.

After a brief conceptual clarification, we began with an overview showing that lessons learned are a topic of concern to both the EEAS and the Commission. We found that the mechanisms and procedures for learning are particularly well developed within the EEAS in relations with the CSDP, and within the Commission in relations to ECHO. While some evaluations procedures exist also for the FPI, these appear less institutionalized or streamlined as yet. Closer examination of the mechanisms developed for CSDP and ECHO revealed that they lack a clear methodology for conducting evaluations.

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[13] http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/fpi/what-we-do/partnership_instrument_en.htm
[14] http://ec.europa.eu/smart-regulation/roadmaps/docs/2017_fpi_003_evaluation_pi_en.pdf

Here we highlight findings that need to be addressed in the various case studies undertaken within the framework of continuing EUNPACK work. First, even though there are well-developed procedures for lessons learned and internal and external evaluations of EU activities in both the EEAS and the Comission, there is little evidence of whether these lessons in general, and those relating to local ownership and conflict sensitivity in particular, are actually fed back into the planning phase of new missions or activities. To ascertain whether this is the case, the policy-cycle model presented under the *conceptual clarifications* (see p. 4-6) could be useful as an initial framework for mapping formally stated processes of learning. Actual performance of learning in practice should then be studied by gathering in-depth qualitative data in the various case studies, to identify coherence and gaps between formally stated goals and procedures of organizational learning and actual performance and practices of learning in the respective empirical contexts.

Second, it is important to distinguish between the immediate assessment of missions and operations of EU crisis response on the one hand, and, on the other, assessment of the lessons-learnt processes, mechanism and methods on the meta-level, meant to improve how lessons learned are put into practice. While both are important, since lessons will not be followed up unless procedures for doing so are in place, care should be taken to avoid devoting more attention to procedures than to the actual impact.

Finally, we find that the focus seems to be on 'horizontal learning' or learning from crisis response in different regions. While important, such a focus may overshadow aspects of 'conflict sensitivity'. Creating concepts and best practices that can readily be transferred from one crisis or conflict to another may obscure the particularities of each specific conflict.

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