9. EU missions and operations: practices of learning lessons in the CSDP

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THE EVOLUTION OF THE CSDP

Following the Saint-Malo declaration issued by France and the United Kingdom (UK), the European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP) was established in 1999 with the aim of granting the European Union (EU) an operational capacity to deploy both civilian missions and military operations (Howorth, 2014). The experience of the devastating civil wars in the Western Balkans in the 1990s led the member states to agree that the EU should plan and conduct its own missions and operations in response to international crises.¹ After setting up decision-making bodies, planning structures and command-and-control arrangements, the EU launched its first civilian European Union Police Mission, Bosnia and Herzegovina (EUPM/BiH) and its first military operation in Macedonia (Concordia) in 2003. Since then, the EU has launched 36 interventions (21 civilian and 15 military) to meet an increasing demand for EU assistance. To date, the largest military operation

¹ The ESDP meant that European security and defence cooperation, as opposed to Euro-Atlantic cooperation, could advance further than it had done since the Second World War. The key was that the UK accepted that the EU should develop a military component, separable but not separate from the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), and France accepted NATO as a cornerstone of European (and not only Euro-Atlantic) cooperation on security and defence. It has also been suggested that the 1998 Saint-Malo declaration was in many ways the product of a 'constructive misunderstanding' as the result of the French government seeing ESDP 'as a tool in which to further the construction of "Europe politique" [while] it was viewed in London as an instrument designed to improve military capabilities and that would also revitalize NATO' (Bickerton et al., 2011, p. 3). Others have suggested that it was part of a British-French pre-emptive strategy to 'entangle' a reunified Germany (Hyde-Price, 2007) or that it should rather be seen as part of long-standing French attempts to undermine the United States-dominated NATO that happened to be successful because the UK Prime Minister at the time, Tony Blair, was caught off-guard (Howorth, 2007, pp. 38–45).

launched by the EU is the European Union Force Bosnia and Herzegovina (EUFOR Althea), which took over from NATO's Stabilization Force (SFOR) in 2004 and is still in effect. Other military operations include the naval operations European Union Naval Force Somalia (EUNAVFOR Atalanta), which was launched in 2008 to counter piracy off the Horn of Africa; the European Union Naval Force Mediterranean (EUNAVFOR MED) Sophia, which was launched in 2015 to counter human trafficking in the Mediterranean; and military training missions in Somalia (since 2010), Mali (since 2013), and the Central African Republic (since 2016). The civilian missions have become an increasingly important part of EU foreign and security policy, and the largest mission to date is the European Union Rule of Law Mission in Kosovo (EULEX Kosovo), which was launched in 2008 to support the development of rule of law institutions in the country. Other civilian missions include EU Border Assistance Management missions in Moldova (since 2005), Ukraine (since 2005), Palestine (since 2005), Georgia (since 2008) and Libya (since 2013).

The gradual and at times seemingly haphazard development of the EU's capacity to plan, deploy and conduct civilian missions and military operations has both been seen as a reflection of the EU's ambition to strengthen its global role, and as an attempt to promote stability and security in the EU's wider neighbourhood. This rapid expansion has resulted in and from continuous waves of institutional reforms that have produced a complex web of organizational structures supporting the EU's external action. In 2009, the Lisbon Treaty introduced the current name, the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP), and established the European External Action Service (EEAS) with the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and Vice-President of the European Commission (HR/VP) as its head (see Chapter 7). The continuous enhancement of the EU's operational capacity as well as experiences on the local levels of implementation have spurred a need for institutionalizing 'lessons learned mechanisms' to effectively learn how best to do EU foreign and security policy through learning-by-doing (see Keohane, 2011; Bossong, 2013; Kirchner, 2013; Faleg, 2017).

The varied conditions under which the missions and operations have been deployed, carried out and evaluated have led to disputes over inconsistencies and (the lack of) strategic guidance (Duke, 2011b; Portela and Raube, 2012). Therefore, a key incentive for the EU has been to better coordinate and assist in the missions and operations without jeopardizing local ownership. CSDP missions and operations have been challenged by resource shortages, intermittent political support from EU member states, and a general lack of coordination between EU actors (Keohane, 2011). In addition, changes to the external security context have profoundly shaped the trajectory of the CSDP.

CSDP missions and operations also include the participation of international partners. Non-member states such as Albania, Chile, Morocco, Switzerland and Turkey have contributed military personnel for EU-led operations (Bremberg, 2016a). The EU cooperates with several international organizations in the field of security, most notably the United Nations (UN) and NATO as well as others such as the African Union (AU), G5 Sahel (for example, the EU Capacity Building Mission in Niger), and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE). It should also be noted that the EU relied heavily on NATO resources and capabilities in the early stages of the CSDP's development and for the military operations in the Western Balkans, including EUFOR Althea, in which 'NATO procedures are used [and] the operation builds on interoperability standards of NATO and suits the professional practices associated to NATO' (Mérand, 2010, p. 371). The relationship to NATO was initially seen as potentially competitive, especially in the United States (Hofmann, 2010; Duke, 2016). The resulting close cooperation has instead been considered to contribute to closer ties with NATO. The cooperation with international organizations as well as the cooperation within the EU have developed over time, adding to the complexity of ties and institutional relationships in the fields of peace-building and crisis management.²

However, at times, conflicting ambitions have contributed to contestation over the CSDP. EU member states have sometimes opted to commit to missions outside of the CSDP framework. Moreover, EU member states have even chosen to launch new frameworks, such as the French-led European Intervention Initiative, a joint military project between 13 European states launched outside of existing NATO and CSDP structures. In addition, the UK-led Joint Expeditionary Force that was launched as a NATO initiative between ten European states includes both non-NATO states (Sweden) as well as non-EU member states (Iceland). Accordingly, the unique contribution of the CSDP has often been questioned in ways that highlight diverging perceptions on the role of European autonomy in the transatlantic partnership (Smith, 2012). Therefore, the missions and operations are also sensitive sites in EU foreign policy-making, and have at times sparked controversy within the EU as well as with its international partners. Nonetheless, the operational existence of the CSDP has established the EU as a global crisis manager and strengthened its role as a regional security actor both by serving as a long-term partner of the UN and through a relatively stable coexistence with NATO (Faleg, 2017, p. 186).

² For example, the first High Representative of the CFSP, Javier Solana, had previously served as Secretary General of NATO; and the Secretary General of the OSCE, Helga Schmid, has previously served as Secretary General of the EEAS.

Research on the CSDP missions and operations has followed the general lines of EU studies (Chapter 3). Realist and rationalist approaches have focused on the strategic role of the CSDP and the capacity-building functions of missions and operations (Hyde-Price, 2007; Engelbrekt, 2008). The CSDP is often debated in relation to whether and how the EU can develop greater strategic autonomy. Moreover, the effectiveness of EU missions and operations are often compared to and measured against those of the UN, OSCE and NATO (see Dijkstra et al., 2019). A key concern has been to balance the top-down directions and management of EU mandates with ambitions of local ownership (Ejdus, 2017). In the wake of the first operational experiences (2003–2009), many studies have assessed EU missions and operations (e.g., Merlingen and Ostrauskaite, 2005; Emerson and Gross, 2007; Tardy, 2011, 2015).

Scholars drawing on social constructivism have focused on the role of norms and identities in shaping cooperation in EU foreign and security policy, including whether an EU strategic culture can emerge around the CSDP (see Meyer, 2006; Juncos, 2010). Moreover, scholars drawing on practice approaches have explored EU missions and operations as emerging sites and communities of routinized interaction and practice in EU foreign and security policy (Faleg, 2017). In this perspective, CSDP missions and operations enable micro-processes of EU integration, and the resulting practices become entry points into the social and political life of EU foreign policy (Klossek, 2020).

This chapter draws broadly on the scholarship on communities of practice that emerged in connection to large-scale EU civilian and military operations within the CSDP. We build on previous contributions to map and grasp how the CSDP enables new practices of EU foreign policy that result from the practical management of political contestation (Chapter 4). Græger (2016, 2017), for example, has shown how EU–NATO cooperation in the field of peace-building and crisis management advances despite gridlocks on the political level due to informal interactions among EU and NATO officials alongside with military and civilian practitioners in an emerging community of practice:

Shared or similar education, training, and career patterns among EU and NATO staff, in Brussels and in field missions, are particularly important for developing specific dispositions to act and think in a particular way ... The exchange of personnel between field missions and headquarters, as well as diplomatic and military postings across organisations, also facilitate the development of a shared repertoire among EU and NATO staff. (Græger, 2016, p. 495)

The chapter first situates the role of the CSDP missions and operations within the wider field of everyday making of EU foreign and security policy, by comparing the conditions for the development of new practices in missions and operations with other organizational grounds. The chapter then discusses

missions and operations as central sites for social learning through practices of cooperation. Faleg (2017) has demonstrated how the EU has learned to be a security provider through so-called learning communities during the evolution of the CSDP. Faleg's study, focusing on the Security Sector Reform (SSR) and Civilian Crisis Management (CCM), pinpoints why and how learning processes have fostered change in the CSDP. We consider Faleg's notion of learning communities in relation to recent developments in knowledge management. Specifically, the chapter analyses the increased importance of coherent practices of learning lessons from past and ongoing CSDP missions among officials taking part in these operations, as well as between them (the agents) and the headquarters (CSDP officials) in Brussels. That is, this chapter maps the new practices of knowledge management across the institutional bodies involved in the CSDP since 2016. Here, we also illustrate the key dynamics of these practices and discuss the processes of lessons learned from the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020–2021. The analysis of processes and practices of lessons learned draws on a review of secondary sources and a qualitative survey, including nine officials with key responsibilities in the units involved in the planning, implementation and assessment of CSDP missions and operations.³ We also conducted in-depth interviews with key personnel in the Integrated Approach for Security and Peace Directorate (ISPD). Since its creation in March 2019, the ISPD has become the main coordination hub for knowledge management and learning lessons.

THE ROLE, POSITION AND INSTITUTIONAL ARCHITECTURE OF THE CSDP

EU missions and operations differ from the other aspects and organs of EU foreign and security policy discussed in the chapters of this book, as EU missions and operations are the practical arenas for the implementation of security cooperation and crisis management. As such, EU missions and operations are the most visible activities of the EU as an international security actor. The main goal of the common security and defence framework is to develop EU autonomy and the capacity to act. Therefore, the role and position of the CSDP has reflected the status of EU civilian and military capability,

³ These included the Political and Security Committee (PSC), the Politico-Military Group (PMG), the Committee for Civilian Aspects of Crisis Management (CivCom), the Crisis Management and Planning Directorate (CMPD), the Civilian Planning and Conduct Capability (CPCC), the Military Planning and Conduct Capability (MPCC), the European Union Military Committee (EUMC), the EU Military Staff (EUMS), the Integrated Approach for Security and Peace Directorate (ISPD), the European Institute for Security Studies (EUISS) and the European Security and Defence College (ESDC).

which has gradually been expanded.⁴ At its inception, the European Council declared an aim (the Helsinki Headline Goal) of creating a rapid response force with the ability to deploy up to 60 000 personnel within 60 days and to sustain this deployment for up to a year, by 2003 (European Council, 1999). Mimicking practices within NATO, this aim was to be achieved on the basis of intergovernmental cooperation, with member state contributions to be made voluntarily at annual Capabilities Commitment Conferences in Brussels and monitored by the Council. Although the CSDP has evolved significantly since its inception, the Helsinki Headline Goal was never achieved. In 2004, the CSDP was instead complemented by the concept of EU Battlegroups, tactical forces (1500 troops), provided either by single nations or by groups of nations (known as the Headline Goal 2010). The EU Battlegroup concept was made operational in 2007, but it has never been put into practice.

Since 1999, the growth of CSDP capabilities has produced a network of governance bodies and processes. The institutional architecture of the CSDP has been described as ‘intertwined and complex’ (Hofmann, 2010). The entanglement refers to how EU policy in this area overlaps with both member states’ policies and overarching frameworks for international cooperation. Although the CSDP remains fully intergovernmental (that is, all decisions require consensus among EU member states), the missions and operations are governed and overseen by and through organs and units that are supranational and bureaucratic (Faleg, 2017, p. 66; see Howorth, 2014). The complexity refers to how multiple bodies involved in the governance of missions and operations are stretched over and across political, strategic and operational levels. In addition, the institutional architecture has evolved rapidly to meet current and future challenges. The committees and units are composed of many permanent representatives, experts and civil servants who are seconded by the member states or have temporary contracts in Brussels. As a result, the CSDP is in many ways a site of tension between national governments and supranational institutions. Attempts to label the governance structure and certain centralizing tendencies often revolve around the need to understand and explain an increasingly complex reality that is not necessarily captured by the classic theories of EU integration. This can be seen, for example, in suggested conceptualizations of the CSDP as ‘supranational intergovernmentalism’ (Howorth, 2012a).

The process of developing new forms of EU capacity required the development of new security and defence structures. Owing to the intergovernmental nature of the CSDP, these structures were initially located within

⁴ The CSDP is defined by the Treaty on European Union (TEU) (Articles 41, 42–46 in Chapter 2, Section 2 of Title V (Provisions on the Common Security and Defence Policy), and in Protocols 1, 10, and 11 and Declarations 13 and 14.

the General Secretariat of the Council of the EU. This process resulted in several central institutional bodies such as the Senior Council Group and the Political and Security Committee (PSC) (Chapter 6) and supporting units such as the European Union Military Committee (EUMC), the Politico-Military Group (PMG) (Chapter 5), and the Committee for Civilian Aspects of Crisis Management (CivCom). The role of these bodies in preparing Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) and CSDP work within the Council was initially viewed with some reservations by the Committee of Permanent Representatives (Coreper). Coreper had previously been alone in the task of overseeing the institutional complexity of EU foreign policy (Serrano, 2020, p. 19). In 2003, the European Security Strategy provided new direction, and the Berlin Plus agreements established EU–NATO cooperation by enabling the EU to use NATO’s military crisis management capabilities (Adler, 2008).

The Treaty of Lisbon introduced a series of changes, most notably a comprehensive approach to crisis management and intervention in crisis situations, as the new guiding principles for capacity-building and institutional reform. Since 2009, both the CFSP and the CSDP have undergone significant reconfiguration, including the more prominent role of the HR/VP and the EEAS (Chapter 7). The EEAS is currently the principal organizational host of key civilian and military crisis management bodies as well as intergovernmental committees involved in the CSDP (Duke, 2016). Most importantly, these include the Crisis Management and Planning Directorate (CMPD), the Civilian Planning and Conduct Capability (CPCC), and the EU Military Staff (EUMS). Created in 2008, the CMPD deals with strategic planning for CSDP missions and operations and is tasked with creating synergies between their civilian and military aspects. The CPCC covers operational planning and the conduct of CSDP civilian missions. The EUMS carries out early warning, situation assessment and strategic planning for CSDP activities (Faleg, 2017, p. 67). In 2016, the launch of the EU Global Strategy gave impetus to new initiatives within the CSDP as part of a broader so-called Integrated Approach (Dijkstra, 2018).

Furthermore, the European Defence Agency (EDA) was established in 2004 as a platform for EU member states to discuss issues of military modernizing and defence market integration. EU ministers of defence meet regularly in the format of the EDA’s Steering Board, and the HR/VP acts as the Head of EDA.⁵ The Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) was introduced by the Lisbon Treaty, but no decision was made to initiate it until 2017. PESCO is set up as a framework for those member states that are capable and willing to commit to invest, plan and develop common defence capabilities. The aim is to

⁵ This is noteworthy since there is no formal defence council in the Council of the EU, although informal meetings of EU defence ministers are regularly organized.

further develop capabilities of EU member states for national as well as multinational missions and operations (for example, the CSDP, NATO and the UN). PESCO rests on legally binding commitments for the participating member states, and around 40 collaborative projects have been launched in areas such as training and facilities, land, maritime, air and cyber capacities. The EEAS, EUMS and EDA jointly act as the PESCO Secretariat. Interestingly, the European Commission has become more involved in the field of EU security and defence cooperation in recent years, including the European Defence Fund (EDF), which aims to support cooperation among member states' defence industries. However, European defence market integration has become more complicated as a result of Brexit, since the UK is one of Europe's leading military and defence industry powers, and it is hard to imagine that EU member states would be able to launch a major military operation or meaningfully enhance their defence capabilities without somehow involving the UK and the British defence industry (Blockmans and Crosson, 2019).

Planning, Launching and Implementing Missions and Operations

Most decisions made by the European Council and the Council of the EU related to the CSDP must be unanimous (TEU Article 42). There are some notable exceptions relating to the EDA (TEU Article 45) and PESCO (TEU Article 46), which only require a majority vote. The HR/VP usually issues the proposals for decisions. Missions and operations are coordinated by the PSC, the EUMC and the EUMS. The CCPC is responsible for planning and overseeing civilian CSDP operations. At the beginning of each presidency, the Council evaluates the global environment based on the geographic and thematic working groups, consultation activities, and a watch list regularly updated by the PSC. The PSC is informed by the Commission and the member states and receives regular updates from the EUMC and CivCom. Crisis response planning starts when an emerging crisis is identified by the EU at the political level, but the numerous bodies and structures involved span both the political strategic level and the military strategic and operational level (Xavier and Rehrl, 2017, p. 78).

When a crisis is identified, the EEAS geographic desk, supported by all services and the respective EU delegation, drafts the Political Framework for Crisis Approach (PFCA). The PFCA provides an analysis of options available to the EU and mirrors the comprehensive integrated approach. This phase also involves consultation with international partners (for example, NATO, the UN, and relevant international, regional, and non-governmental organizations). Once a decision to launch a mission or operation has been made, the relevant institutions involved in CSDP action planning (the PSC, CivCom, and CPCC) draft a Crisis Management Concept (CMC), develop the Concept

of Operations (CONOPS) to create a detailed Operation Plan (OPLAN), and a Council decision is made to launch the operation (Xavier and Rehrl, 2017, p. 78–82). The CONOPS and OPLAN are produced under the leadership of the operation commander.⁶ The majority of assets and personnel required for missions and operations are then provided by EU member states.

Each mission and operation has its own chain of command. The EUMC monitors and reports on execution to the PSC. For civilian missions, the Head of Mission reports back to and is accountable to the PSC. For military operations with an executive mandate, an operational headquarters is often provided by the member state acting as a framework nation (for example, Italy in the case of the maritime operation EUNAVFOR MED Irini). It is also possible to use NATO command structures under the Berlin Plus agreements (for example, EUFOR Althea in Bosnia Herzegovina) or activate the European Union Operations Centre (EU OPCEN) (for example, operations in the Horn of Africa since 2012). Moreover, the military training missions in Africa (the Central African Republic, Mali and Somalia) all operate under one command located within the Military Staff of the EEAS in Brussels – that is, the Military Planning and Conduct Capability (MPCC) – with the aim of ensuring better coordination and cooperation between military and civilian actors. The CMC is regularly evaluated and revised by the PSC. Missions and operations are terminated according to the end date specified by the Council or through a new Council decision.

LESSONS LEARNED AND COMMUNITIES OF PRACTICE IN CSDP

The remainder of this chapter seeks to explain and understand the production of EU foreign and security policy as an expanding repertoire of actions undertaken by the EU in this field, by examining lessons learned from CSDP missions and operations. Practices of lessons learned in and from CSDP missions and operations have been explored in previous research. One lesson that EU member states are said to have agreed on from the early phase of CSDP, in particular EUFOR Althea, is that military operations should always include an end date in their mandates so that the operation can only be prolonged if all member states agree (Palm, 2017, p. 81). This can be seen as an example of learning from past experiences at the highest political level in the EU, but it

⁶ For military operations, the procedure is slightly different. The Initiating Military Directive (IMD) is developed by the EUMS and guides the operation commander in the development of the CONOPS, the Statement of Requirements (SOR) and the OPLAN. It is then up to the PSC to approve the IMD and request the authorization of the EUMC.

also suggests that decision-making regarding the use of military force continues to be a considerably sensitive issue among EU member states (Palm, 2017, p. 81). However, there are numerous examples of practical lessons learned from one mission and applied to another, such as lessons from European Union Training Mission (EUTM) Somalia being used in EUTM Mali ‘to build a more effective relationship between its mission commander and the local authorities’ (Minard, 2017, p. 90).

The EU has created procedures for learning lessons in the CSDP such as annual reports summarizing experiences and providing recommendations (Dijkstra et al., 2019, p. 536). It has been suggested that the complex institutional structure and the fact that it often takes time for EU member states to agree on new initiatives have led EU officials to use existing rules as flexibly as possible to fit the practical needs that they have identified as a result of their everyday work. This is particularly noticeable ‘in the financial domain, where budgetary officials have relaxed the EU rules’ (Dijkstra et al., 2019, p. 537). Moreover, research on learning in the CSDP has gradually come to focus on broader themes related to how local experiences from missions and operations are transferred to the level of planning at the EEAS, and political negotiation and decision-making at the level of the PSC and Foreign Affairs Council (FAC), as well as how and to what extent this process supports self-reflexive institutional reforms in the EU (Smith, 2018). Of particular interest here is how various lessons are transformed into policy-relevant knowledge through different feedback and training processes, and whether such knowledge is applied in the planning and decision-making ahead of future missions and operations. Summarizing the results from an EU-funded research project about the EU’s capabilities in conflict prevention and peace-building (EU-CIVCAP, 2016–2018), Smith (2018, p. 219) suggests that there is an emerging ‘complex learning culture’ within the CSDP and that it has helped to improve the conduct of peace-building tasks by the EU and its partners. Nonetheless, the ‘mission approach’ (that is, that each new CSDP mission involves the recruitment of new personnel both from EU institutions in Brussels and from member states) is said to present an obstacle for learning from past missions and for fostering a specific learning culture in the EU. Despite this obstacle, the CSDP in many ways is said to rest on a broader ‘network of professionals who rely on the same policy-relevant knowledge base and who share the same views regarding a specific policy domain’ (Smith, 2018, pp. 220–221; see Græger, 2016, 2017; Mérand, 2010).

In the following analysis, we take a slightly different approach to institutional learning in the CSDP, guided by the analytical framework presented in Chapter 4. First, we assume that EU missions and operations or even the institutional units that coordinate or monitor them are staffed with officials and personnel who rely on their previous knowledge and lived experience as

well as established networks from previous posts. That is, we do not consider missions and operations to be blank slates for new practices to develop. Rather, the complex learning of enacting EU foreign policy in CSDP missions and operations highly depends on the many institutional legacies and different dispositions of the individuals involved. Second, we assume that the communities of learning in the CSDP engage in reflection of how their practices are shaped and contribute to shaping EU foreign and security policy. These preconditions for lessons learned can be observed in the ways in which the informal learning has been institutionalized in the EU and in the emerging epistemology of CSDP knowledge management.

Formalizing Informal Learning

In the history of the CSDP, learning lessons has always been emphasized. Early on, it became clear that the EU would need to learn from its past experiences to improve its capacity and efficiency as a security provider. In the first years of missions and operations, there were no formalized processes for recording or sharing lessons. Instead, the field of the CSDP organically developed multiple, contextual and fluid learning communities (Faleg, 2017). These communities of practice stemmed from both the composition of new groups of experts and practitioners in civilian missions or military operations as well as from pre-existing networks shaped through the institutional legacies of the staff involved. Learning in these communities relied foremost on informal mechanisms through personal relationships, corridor talk and information-sharing. EU officials working on the CSDP (henceforth CSDP officials) are well aware of these communities and the continued difficulty in facilitating shared learning (EEAS-1, 2021; ESDC-1, 2021; EEAS-5, 2021; EEAS-6, 2021). The gradual efforts of formalizing learning lessons have attempted to institutionalize these communities and their practices as essential activities in the making of EU foreign policy, to better allow experience to guide future actions. A key ambition has been to move knowledge management from ad hoc activities to a systematic process that can be used to produce deliverables (EEAS-4, 2021). Efforts to formalize learning lessons date to the beginning of the first missions and operations (2003), but the most notable stint of institutionalization resulted from the commitment to the Integrated Approach in 2009 (EEAS-5, 2021; EEAS-7, 2021).

The process of formalizing informal learning has resulted in new processes and mandates, but recording these insights remains difficult. One of the challenges to integrating a systematic approach to learning lessons has been to capture the role of situated practical understandings. CSDP officials have dispositions and previous experience that guide them in how they identify and make sense of learning lessons. This constraint has become more apparent and

therefore more reflected on since the EU Global Strategy (EUGS) introduced knowledge management and learning lessons as explicit deliverables in EU foreign policy (EEAS-3, 2021).

Practices of Learning Lessons

The formal lessons process follows the phases of CSDP decision-making. The CMPD, CPCC and EUMS each have had their own system for learning lessons. These processes build on some efforts of cooperation and exchange, but remain fluid (Faleg, 2017). The lessons learned processes are generally similar to NATO methodology; a result of close cooperation and the military background of many CSDP officials (EEAS-3, 2021). The process looks different for civilian missions, as the military processes are more comprehensive and led by the EUMS (European Parliament, 2012; EEAS-4, 2021). It has been suggested that the sensitive nature of various aspects of CSDP tend to hamper the dissemination of practical lessons and experiences from missions and operations throughout the organizational structures of EU foreign and security policy. This is often portrayed as stemming from a range of political sensitivities that EU member states might have in terms of where, how and what CSDP missions and operations should be launched, and that some issues are not being discussed at the level of the PSC or in the FAC even though other CSDP units might do so (Minard, 2017, pp. 88–89). In this regard, flexible and fluid processes have been used to manage and circumvent contestation in learning lessons.

In terms of routines, CSDP officials engage in multiple structured practices of learning such as working groups, shared evaluations, workshops and writing reports. CSDP lesson learning practices can be divided into three broad categories: collecting lessons, knowledge exchange and training efforts. These activities take place in multiple venues and across the political and tactical levels.

The records of lessons learned are collected from all missions and operations and are archived in the lessons database (EEAS-1, 2021; EEAS-7, 2021) and used to produce annual reports. A key problem has been the lack of systematic contributions to the database, as reported lessons seem to be random and focused on successes rather than failures (EEAS-3, 2021). In addition, there are many identification tools used in the process that are either connected to the specific mandate of missions or operations, or to the institutional backgrounds of the individuals reporting them. At the level of specific missions or operations, the collection of lessons is often related to needs assessments. Therefore, the information that goes into the lessons database does not allow for any systematic analysis, but the fact that it can be used to produce the annual report was seen as valuable, as doing something rather than nothing seems to be acceptable if not encouraged (EEAS-7, 2021).

The annual lessons report is presented to EUMC and as an annex to the EEAS annual Conflict Prevention and Crisis Response (CPCR) Report, and finally presented to the PSC (EEAS-3, 2021). This process, however, has been undergoing some changes recently. The report was produced by the CMPD between 2013 and 2016. In 2017 and 2018, the CPSS and EUMS presented their own CSDP Lessons Reports. Since 2019, the new EEAS Integrated Approach for Security and Peace Directorate (ISPD) (with an explicit knowledge management mandate) has taken over the responsibility for the overarching annual EEAS CPCR Lessons Report (essentially by putting together the different reports) (EEAS-3, 2021).

The ISPD now hosts the knowledge management process and it attempts to record all lessons learned, but the CSDP officials engaged in this process often look for different lessons depending on their own institutional position. In addition to the civilian–military divide, lessons are distinguished by the level of their (political/strategic) impact, and prioritized areas or specific mandates such as security sector reform and gender aspects (EEAS-3, 2021). The main advantage of the annual EEAS CPCR Lessons Report was described as the visibility that the broadness of the report brings, and therefore also the attention it generates from the PSC.

Although the general view was that the state of the lessons collection process is problematic, several respondents highlighted the lessons process following the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 as a success (EEAS-2, 2021; EEAS-3, 2021; EEAS-4, 2021; EEAS-7, 2021). The respondents described how the timing of the pandemic meant that they were already equipped to start the lessons process on the CSDP and COVID-19. The EEAS facilitated a task force with members from the CCPC, EUMS and ‘all other relevant actors’ that started to collect lessons both from a headquarters (HQ) perspective (decision-making) and on the ground (EEAS-3, 2021). Lessons on key issues such as duty of care towards the personnel deployed in EU missions and operations allowed better preparation for the second wave. The response to the COVID-19 pandemic was seen as proof that, although not perfect, the new institutional processes and a shared methodology for learning lessons could produce useful results. Representatives from the ISPD spoke of the pandemic as a moment that raised the profile for knowledge management in the CSDP (EEAS-3, 2021; EEAS-7, 2021).

CSDP officials also engage in efforts to capture lessons through structured opportunities of talking to others involved in other aspects of missions and operations. The activities include conferences, seminars, panels and workshops. Some of these activities are organized in Brussels by the CSDP officials themselves, but many are organized in the member states and by other organizations. Despite efforts to organize opportunities for knowledge exchange, CSDP officials experienced fragmentation and difficulties finding common

ground. In fact, representatives from the ISPD found that the digitalization resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic improved the coherence in knowledge exchange. In their view, virtual meetings had facilitated the process of exchanging information ‘from one island to another’ (EEAS-7, 2021; EEAS-6, 2021). CSDP officials are busy, and learning lessons is only one aspect of their responsibilities. Moreover, the usually crowded Brussels calendar makes it difficult to bring people together for knowledge exchange. Another reason for the difficulty of facilitating knowledge exchange was the rather commonly held view among many CSDP officials that they ‘had already learnt’ the relevant lessons; a disposition that tended to make them hesitant to participate in knowledge exchange exercises (EEAS-3, 2021). Therefore, a key obstacle was to decrease the perceived burden of participation in these exchange processes.

Finally, the lessons process involves workshops and exercises on best practices, such as those organized by the European Security and Defence College (ESDC). For example, the main task of the ESDC’s Working Group on CSDP Missions and Operations Related Training (WG-MOT) is to propose new training activities based on the EEAS lesson learning process. In general, exercises might include military training, concept development and standard operating procedures (EEAS-4, 2021). Training sessions are both standard courses aimed at different personnel, and adapted based on need. This is an area where innovative ways of learning lessons are being explored. With the new knowledge management mandate in the ISPD, training is now more closely linked to concrete deliverables and therefore approached more systematically.

Epistemic Practices

Learning in the context of CSDP missions and operations is also an exercise in learning how to learn the EU way. EU institutional learning is governed by specialized language, frameworks and concepts, so practices of learning are context-based to match the EU model for knowledge management. However, the legacy of multiple learning processes has resulted in disparities across the CSDP institutional landscape, and much effort has been focused on increasing coherence and assuring the recognition of the added value of learning processes themselves. This goal of seeking agreement around what constitutes knowledge, or how lessons are identified and best captured, has materialized in various epistemic practices (see Bueger, 2016). In this context, epistemic practices establish CSDP lessons learned as a recognized knowledge production. In this way, learning how to engage in learning is a way of becoming socialized into the institutions by sharing a pragmatic understanding on the need to identify lessons and to act on them. Since the inception of the EEAS, a key ambition has been to align concepts and common definitions in the Comprehensive Approach, which refers to efforts to increase coherency in the

EU's external relations (see Chapter 7). In the context of the CSDP, this has been done through joint training sessions on learning methodologies and tools for the EUMS, CPCC and CMPD (EEAS-3, 2021).

The ISPD representative reflected on how it was easier to talk about lesson learning processes that were different but had some similarities, than to receive recognition for their mandate to do knowledge management, which they said was often confused with information management (EEAS-3, 2021). This was seen as an obstacle because the EUGS framed knowledge management in relation to leveraging objectives (that is, lessons leading to change). Moreover, CSDP officials shared a common understanding of the importance of developing the lesson learning processes.

Although the EU lesson learning approach has succeeded in formalizing some of the practices of shared learning, communities of practice and their informal mechanisms still exist outside the institutionalized framework of knowledge management. The continued separation between formal and informal practices of learning is notable in the formal record of lessons. When asked about successful processes of lessons learned from the CSDP, the respondents of our survey often referred to knowledge gaps that could be addressed through additional training.⁷ Moreover, the lesson learning processes have developed from an expressed wish to avoid 'shaming and blaming exercises', as these often discourage cooperation (European Parliament, 2012). In the shared understanding of what constitutes learning lessons, how to avoid tensions remained important; CSDP officials emphasized the importance of delivering 'quick wins' (EEAS-7, 2021). They also, however, reflected on the possibility that the fear of issues being too politically sensitive (and therefore risking push-back from the member states) is sometimes overestimated within EU institutions. Being overly sensitive to the political red lines was seen as a constraint to developing lesson learning processes (EEAS-3, 2021). These practices of contestation management were perceived as a shared repertoire but still resisted among some of the officials. Although the resistance was not loud and vocal, they described how at times they would try to see whether something new 'would pass', and how they were often surprised when it did (EEAS-7, 2021).

The emphasis on the lesson learning process and efforts to strengthen CSDP knowledge management in some ways appeared more important than actually learning from past experiences, as the processes were heavily constrained by

⁷ This is likely also a reflection of the restricted access to lessons documents that may identify more sensitive lessons at the strategic or political level.

the institutional boundaries and restrictions for information-sharing. Several success stories referred to attempts of improving the lesson learning process:

EU military missions and ops Force HQs did not have access to share knowledge from lessons among each other and from other CSDP stakeholders given that they could not use the classified lessons database in restricted network. As an outcome EEAS information technology in close cooperation with EUMS and other EEAS stakeholders developed a project and established the unclassified CSDP lessons database and online tool. All missions and ops could request for access to learn from past lessons learned, to upload their lessons, to share with others. (EEAS-4, 2021)

Here, being able to learn together from past experiences was recognized as a first step towards establishing the common grounds of a learning community centred around the CSDP.

CONCLUSIONS

This chapter has examined the development of the CSDP, the institutional architecture surrounding EU missions and operations, and the practices of learning lessons. The CSDP is an institutionally complex landscape, and EU missions and operations constitute a field in which practices of EU foreign and security policy are intertwined in the cultures of cooperation across the EU's participation in international security frameworks, most notably the UN and NATO. As previous research has demonstrated, EU missions and operations draw together communities of practice with shared understandings of what it means to enact EU foreign and security policy. These communities of practice differ from others explored in this book, because of the role of military institutional legacies. CSDP officials engage in practices that largely build on previous military practices that have been adapted and evolved through the interaction with civilian staff. From an institutional learning perspective, it has been difficult to record or institutionalize the emergence of these micro-processes of EU integration. There is consensus among CSDP officials that learning processes take place through informal practices that mainly depend on the dispositions and shared repertoires of the staff. At the same time, formalizing and synthesizing learning has been identified as essential to knowledge management in the Integrated Approach, especially since the aim is to use the EU's foreign policy instruments more wisely. Although a general socialization in matters of CSDP learning appears absent, there is strong commitment to learning-by-doing as a guiding ethos in the field.

The communities of practice that have emerged from EU missions and operations are to some extent mirrored by learning communities that engage in multiple lesson learning processes (Faleg, 2017). Attempts to coordinate shared learning have resulted in practices of knowledge management that

are not widely recognized and established. As a result, activities of learning lessons and the knowledge they produce are far from systematic, and largely depend on the cooperation and commitment of the actors that engage in them and their previous experience. Moreover, learning activities are hampered by the political sensitivities in the CSDP. Therefore, lessons recorded often reflect a desire to avoid contestation and emphasize identifying practical change that can easily be achieved. This has led to an overrepresentation of lessons of knowledge gaps that can be addressed through training efforts.

Despite the difficulty in assessing the impact of institutional learning in the CSDP, the COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated the value of established practices for learning lessons. During the first wave of the pandemic, lessons learned were immediately recorded through the working routines developed through the gradual formalization of learning activities. Once analysed, these lessons resulted in tangible efforts to better prepare EU missions and operations for future waves. The successful implementation of learning processes in 2020–2021 signals that the institutional processes were mature enough to produce coordinated practices in the face of new crises, despite the fragmentation of practices in this field.

These findings are highly interesting in relation to our book's focus on the everyday making of EU foreign and security policy. The multitude of experience that EU officials and personnel have gathered in the course of almost 20 years of planning and conducting CSDP civilian missions and military operations provides a rich repertoire of practical understandings on what works (and what does not) when it comes to EU actions vis-à-vis a wide range of tasks (for example, peace-building, counter-piracy, border management, military training and promoting the rule of law). The analysis of the lesson learning processes and epistemic practices that have emerged in the CSDP suggests that EU institutions primarily (albeit not exclusively) related to the EEAS are increasingly sites where various communities of practice in the field of military and civilian crisis management are brought together, and this is a resource that in many ways makes EU actions possible.

Therefore, rather than focusing on, for instance, diverging preferences among EU member states, the rivalry between the EU and other international organizations in the field, or the lack of common EU military and defence capacities as possible obstacles to forming a coherent or effective EU foreign and security policy, as many contributions in international relations and EU studies often tend to do, our analysis advances knowledge on how practical dispositions and situated understandings among CSDP officials in Brussels and elsewhere have changed as a result of an increasingly institutionalized practice of learning from past EU mission and operations. That is, this analysis helps to reveal what these officials 'think from' rather than 'think about' when it comes to future EU actions in the field of foreign and security policy. As

the CSDP has evolved, it has become clear that what is increasingly at stake is the struggle to define the lessons learned from past missions and operations. Although CSDP officials certainly do not always agree on exactly what lessons to draw, they are increasingly interacting on the basis of common epistemic practices of 'learning the EU way'. This also seems to be incrementally changing what it is that is perceived to make the CSDP work in practice.