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Women in the CSDP: strengthening the EU's effectiveness as an international player

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Abstract Security and defence cooperation in the EU is being upgraded, and therefore the importance of the civilian missions and military operations launched in the framework of the Union's Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) is likely to increase. This article argues that much can be gained by improving the gender balance in CSDP missions and operations. The participation of female personnel in crisis management has a positive effect on operational effectiveness and contributes to the acceptance of the mission by the local population. Moreover, women deployed abroad play an important role in overcoming gender stereotypes and demonstrating the EU's commitment to gender equality. This article explores the reasons for the low number of women in CSDP missions and operations. It suggests ways to improve the gender balance at the national and EU levels, which would increase the EU's chances of resolving foreign affairs issues abroad.

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Introduction

The EU operates in an increasingly difficult security environment. The nature of conflicts is changing, as can be seen in the rise of hybrid and cyberthreats, the multiplication of non-state players and the increase in the interaction between security forces, civilian personnel and populations. These changes make international conflict management even more challenging.

Against this backdrop, the EU's Global Strategy—which was presented by High Representative Federica Mogherini in June 2016—makes it clear that the EU's importance as a foreign and security policy player is growing:

The purpose, even existence, of our Union is being questioned. Yet, our citizens and the world need a strong European Union like never before. Our wider region has become more unstable and more insecure. The crises within and beyond our borders are affecting directly our citizens' lives. In challenging times, a strong Union is one that thinks strategically, shares a vision and acts together. (European External Action Service 2016a, 3)

To be able to play this growing security role internally and externally, the EU is stepping up its security and defence work considerably. EU policies, coupled with implementation mechanisms and financial allocations, are under pressure due to the need to address the above-mentioned threats and conflicts. The success of these policies is not only about the capability to produce the desired results but also about the legitimacy of the EU as an international player.

The civilian missions and military operations that the EU deploys in the framework of its Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) are among its most visible tools for external action. They focus on a range of peace-building issues, including capacity building, training, reforming the security and justice sectors, supporting border management, enhancing maritime security and monitoring ceasefire agreements. Thus far in 2017, the EU has maintained 15 missions and operations worldwide. All missions and operations should mainstream human rights and gender throughout their work. Therefore, although limited in time and in scope, CSDP missions can contribute to the implementation of the EU's commitments to promote women's role in peace-building and conflict prevention (Hörst et al. forthcoming). This article argues that women's participation in crisis management both contributes to the effectiveness of missions and promotes the EU's credibility and image as a defender of human rights. It is about making compliance not merely a matter of rhetoric but actually implementing policies in measurable ways. It is about humanitarian agencies, civilian police and academics, as well as the military and defence, diplomacy, and development sectors engaging in new and better ways to measure and achieve operational effectiveness. 'Effectiveness is the term commonly used to refer to the goal-attainment of a measure, thus relating the

outcome of a process to its original goals. In other words, an intervention is said to be effective if the outcomes match with the goals' (Meharg 2009, 1).

Why is gender balance in CSDP missions and operations important?

Gender balance increases the operational success of missions and operations. Numerous studies have shown that diverse teams perform better than homogenous ones (Chen and Levine 2016; Hunt et al. 2015; Hoogendoorn et al. 2013). This evidence holds true both for police forces (Asquith 2016; Miller and Segal 2013) and for military teams (Hörst et al. forthcoming, 18–21). It is important to note that the argument here is not about women being more peaceful than men but about women bringing a different perspective and skill set to the table. For example, when deployed on missions abroad, female soldiers are able to liaise with segments of the host nation society to which their male colleagues often have no access at all: to women who are in some cultures are not allowed to talk to men outside their families. In Afghanistan, for example, NATO has set up Female Engagement Teams, Cultural Support Teams and Foreign Area Specialists. Their roles include gaining a better understanding of the local security situation and insurgent activities, and gathering information by engaging with the female population (Tzemach Lemmon 2015; Lackenbauer and Langlais 2013). To address security concerns more effectively, the institutions handling security should reflect the societies they are intended to protect.

Engaging female personnel in training efforts also increases the effectiveness of missions and operations significantly (Hörst et al. forthcoming, 19). According to the first annual CSDP report, of the 9,000 people trained by civilian CSDP missions in 2016, at least 1,300 were women (European External Action Service 2016b, 4). Including more female trainers could lead to more female personnel being trained and thereby broaden the outreach of the EU's training efforts. A more holistic approach enables the mission to address security concerns more effectively and demonstrates that it is accountable to the EU's own standards of diversity. Furthermore, role modelling in training is a way to change mind-sets. Mixed training teams do not only teach skills. They also showcase patterns of behaviour, for example, how a male team leader should treat his female colleagues on patrol or when making decisions (Hörst et al. forthcoming, 18).

Furthermore, the presence of women on missions and operations contributes to the acceptance of the mission by the local population, as female personnel can reach out to both men and women in the host nations.¹ This in turn contributes to the implementation

¹ When deployed in Afghanistan, the US Army found that female soldiers are often perceived as a 'third gender' by Afghan men. While strict honour and tribal codes might prohibit Afghan men from sharing information with other men or Afghan women (to whom they are not allowed to talk if there is no family connection), the American women—and foreign women in general—were placed outside the strict moral codes, which made talking to them easier for many Afghan men (Tzemach Lemmon 2015).

of the mission mandate. In Georgia no women serve at the check-points along the Administrative Boundary Line that divides the conflict areas. As a consequence, local women preferred to talk to female personnel on the mission's patrols rather than to local security officers (Hörst et al. forthcoming, 19).

If a core aspect of a mission's mandate is to promote human rights and women's rights, then one of the best ways of accomplishing this is to showcase in practice how it can be done. The very presence of women on missions and operations challenges any stereotypes held by those in the host countries (and unfortunately, often by the women's own male colleagues as well). Women functioning as patrol leaders or heads of missions—or in more general terms, women performing traditional military duties such as security checks or carrying out special forces assignments—send a strong signal about the professional roles women can play. This demonstrates the EU's ability to hold itself accountable to its own standards on gender parity in employment and shows that its compliance leads to actual change on the ground.

Moreover, when deploying women to crisis-management duties, it is also important not to create or reinforce stereotypes and to ensure that women are strategically placed. For example, in Ukraine a community policing team consisted solely of women. This situation led the local population and counterparts to consider community policing a soft area and not as important as the mission's other focus areas (Hörst et al. forthcoming, 18).

The presence of women in leadership positions is equally important. On the one hand, women in leadership positions serve as role models for other women that aspire to such roles. On the other hand, women leaders are more sensitive to issues of discrimination and sexual harassment and can contribute to creating a safer environment in which women working in the missions can feel more comfortable to speak out on issues such as (sexual) harassment. For example, it is reported that female managers contribute to a more positive working environment, with many women working in the missions and operations reporting feeling safer and more comfortable about discussing (sexual) harassment issues with a female manager (Hörst et al. forthcoming, 21). Diverse and inclusive leadership is key in implementing a mission's directive. Thus it makes EU policies more effective when it comes both to addressing threats and conflicts on the ground and to showing that the EU adheres to its own democratic principles.

Finally, aside from the argument that (gender) diverse work forces perform better, women's rights are also workers' rights, as set forth in the Treaty of Rome (Articles 118–19). Women should thus have access to equal rights in every aspect of life, including work. But CSDP missions are not only employment opportunities: they serve as 'the face of the EU' in host countries. Their composition in terms of diversity on all levels can further enhance the democratic principles and the legitimacy of the EU. Including more women in those missions and making them more visible would send a powerful message about EU principles of non-discrimination and gender equality. It would make the

standards set out in UN Security Council Resolution 1325 more credible.² This resolution states that women play an important role in the prevention and resolution of conflicts, in peace negotiations, in peace-building and in peacekeeping. These declarations address all players. Thus, a diverse EU mission team leads by example.

Why are so few women deployed on CSDP missions and operations?

EU member states provide the majority of CSDP personnel. For civilian missions there is a degree of flexibility as member states nominate candidates but each individual mission selects its own personnel from those proposed. Missions have used this flexibility to proactively recruit women. However, it is the member states that provide personnel for military operations. And with personnel selection being dependent on the policies of the individual member states involved, personnel tend to be predominantly male. In 2015 women made up 10.8% of the personnel in NATO's armed forces (compared to 10.3% in 2014).³ It is thus not surprising that the number of female soldiers deployed in CSDP operations is low.

Moreover, women seeking to join CSDP missions face other obstacles. In European societies, despite gender equality policies, soldiering is still largely perceived as a 'man's job'. While women have fought their way into European armies, military command has often only opened up positions to women when forced to do so by court rulings. Although women can join the military, many of their fellow soldiers and large parts of society continue to believe that women are (physically) unable to do the job. In a recent study commissioned by the European Parliament, women who were interviewed acknowledged facing more prejudice from the men working inside the EU institutions and member states than from their male counterparts in the host nations. Many mentioned that their ability to do the job in conflict environments or in male-dominated fields such as the police force had occasionally been put in doubt by their own colleagues. Women from civilian backgrounds faced even greater prejudice. The reality of the situation, however, is that women have led and currently lead some of the EU missions with the highest security risks, such as missions in Afghanistan, Mali and Niger. This contradicts the misconception that women cannot take on challenging roles or are less capable than their male colleagues (Hörst et al. forthcoming).

Additionally, the military structure and culture are highly vulnerable to the phenomenon of 'toxic masculinity', an extreme form of masculine behaviour which leads people

² UN Security Council Resolution 1325 is the first act passed by the UN that specifically addresses the role of women in peace and security. The resolution emphasises that women bear the brunt of conflict violence and that more should be done to prevent sexual and gender-based violence and to prosecute those who carry it out. It also clearly indicates that women have a role to play in contributing to peace and stability.

³ NATO member states are expected to report yearly on the numbers of male and female personnel serving in their armed forces (NATO 2015, 9).

to take unreasonable risks and makes them averse to admitting error. Toxic masculine behaviour often leads to contests among men eager to prove to themselves and others how masculine they are. It cannot accept a situation where women do the same job as men and perform just as well (Haffner 2017).

Neither men nor women find it easy to combine a military profession, in particular deployments, with a family life. Working hours can be unsocial and unpredictable, and training and missions may regularly require long absences from home. As family and childcare are still widely considered a female domain, women face more problems than men when being deployed on missions. After her appointment in 2013, German Defence Minister Ursula von der Leyen caused a good deal of furore when she openly discussed the need to improve military personnel's work–life balance.

Furthermore, positive narratives and widely known examples of mothers 'leaving their children behind' to go on a military mission are still rare. A German soldier addressed that gap and wrote a children's book explaining to her three-year-old daughter what she was doing so far away from home and why it was necessary. The positive feedback and demand for the book⁴ clearly show the need for more such stories—and for deployed women to become the norm for their own families and for society at large. Having more men in the military speaking up about their wish to serve their country and about their desire to be present in their children's life would be another way of breaking traditional gender stereotypes.

How to involve more women in CSDP missions

As most personnel on CSDP missions are seconded by EU member states, the solution to the shortage of women lays primarily at the national level. There are good practices from which countries could certainly learn.⁵

Sweden is reintroducing conscription, and in connection with this, Defence Minister Peter Hultqvist has stated, 'It's very important to emphasise that military service is for girls and guys', and 'it is important for the military to have a gender equal profile' (Oltermann 2017). Emphasising gender equality when it comes to conscription both sends a very important signal to society at large and is a great opportunity for young women to learn more about a possible career in the armed forces—which they might not consider without conscription. Sweden was not the first country in Europe to call women to service: Norway introduced female conscription in 2016.

⁴ According to the author's Facebook page, about 200 copies have been sold so far: <https://www.facebook.com/meinemamaistsoldat/>.

⁵ A resolution of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe recently summarised concrete best practices and recommendations with regard to hiring and retaining women in the armed forces and ending gender-based violence (Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe 2016).

It makes a difference when leaders communicate clearly and openly about the importance both of equality between men and women and of diversity. The Irish Defence Forces chief of staff, for example, made the case for diversity, emphasising the benefits of diverse teams, such as greater innovation and better decision-making. In view of the complex problems militaries face today, a gender perspective—a more holistic approach that takes into account the different needs of men and women and the value of greater gender diversity—should be ‘institutionalised’ (Siggins 2017).

Leadership commitment to equality between men and women must be backed up with concrete policies, and implementation processes should be more than just a ‘tick the box’ exercise. At the European External Action Service (EEAS), two women have been recently appointed as heads of mission, one in the EU’s Capacity Building Mission in Sahel, Mali, and the other in the EU’s Police Mission in Afghanistan. This brings the number of women heads of mission to an unprecedented 4 out of 15 (European External Action Service 2016c). In Germany the minister of defence has implemented the ‘Attractiveness Agenda’, a set of policies that include measures aimed at enhancing flexibility and childcare facilities with the objective of increasing the German Armed Forces’ attractiveness as an employer.

Like any other employer, the armed forces are carefully watching the changing demographics in Europe and preparing for increased competition in attracting and retaining qualified personnel. This is a challenge today, and it is likely to increase in the future. The importance of employers’ ‘diversity image’ was recently highlighted by a Deloitte survey which found that 72% of working Americans might consider leaving their employer for an organisation which they consider more diverse and inclusive (see Deloitte 2017). If similar attitudes are prevalent in Europe, the armed forces will urgently need to move from words to deeds to keep up in the race to become inclusive employers. In times of personnel shortages, armed forces simply cannot afford to exclude potential candidates because of their sex, religion, ethnic background and so on.

Integrating women into the military is one step; creating special female units to use the distinct advantages of having women on the battlefield is another. This Norway has demonstrated by setting up the first all-female military special-forces unit in the world. The special unit was justified by the concrete added value of having women on the front-line. Moreover, Norwegian commanders found that the female unit contributed to troop motivation and ultimately helped to raise the standards of male units as well: where some women performed better than men, the latter would be likely to try harder or adopt more ‘female’ patterns of behaviour such helping other team members (Angerer 2017).

While several positive examples can be found on the national level, the EU should play a stronger role. First and foremost, the EU can continue raising awareness about the importance of equality between men and women on CSDP missions and encourage member states to nominate more women. Furthermore, the EU can adapt job descriptions and family policies to make missions more gender-friendly. Particular attention should be given to ensuring job descriptions are gender-neutral and list skills and experience that are needed to perform the job in the specific working environment involved.

The EU automatically defines all missions and operations as non-family duty stations, and it is assumed that all personnel will work in hostile crisis environments. This, however, is not the case for all EU missions. Exceptions include the Advisory Mission in Ukraine, the Monitoring Mission in Georgia, the Police Mission in the Palestinian Territories, the Border Assistance Mission at the Rafah crossing point between Egypt and the Gaza strip, and the Rule of Law Mission in Kosovo.⁶ In these types of mission, practical measures should be taken to ensure families can and are welcome to join family members working on the mission. (These measures include providing for health coverage and arranging visas.)

The Principal Advisor on Gender and on UNSCR 1325⁷ can play an important role in making the CSDP more gender-friendly. At the request of several member states, the Principle Advisor on Gender recently visited several CSDP missions and operations in an effort to shed light on the important work undertaken by the gender advisors and focal points in the field, work that is often neglected. Furthermore, these types of high-level visit are also a means to bring political pressure to bear on the leadership of the individual missions and operations for more action on gender mainstreaming. Mission personnel working on these topics report feeling more supported by EEAS headquarters when such high-level visits address gender and diversity.

There is also a role for the Informal Task Force on UN Security Council Resolution 1325. It can further support the development of gender equality strategies for missions and operations, as well as for EU departments dealing with crisis management. The EU's Advisory Mission Ukraine has drafted a gender strategy for the mission which attempts to provide a comprehensive answer to the question of how to make the mission more gender sensitive. Offering such expertise and promoting these types of action can help institutionalise a practice which is today largely dependent on the personal commitments of managers or expert staff (Hörst et al. forthcoming).

Finally, while the European Parliament plays no formal role in CSDP missions and operations, it can raise much-needed political awareness of the issue by

- commissioning research on the topic of gender and the CSDP,
- instructing the European Institute for Gender Equality to collect sex-disaggregated data from missions and operations, and
- ensuring that EU staff in the CSDP receive questions on their efforts to increase gender-friendly policies within their structures.

⁶ This designation is without prejudice to position on status, and is in line with UN Security Council Resolution 1244/99 and the International Court of Justice Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence.

⁷ The role of the EEAS Principal Gender Advisor is to ensure cooperation and coordination between the EU and international, regional and national actors on policy and action related to gender and UNSCR 1325. He or she is also to contribute to internal coordination on gender and UNSCR 1325 matters, and to increase the visibility of these issues within the EEAS as well as in its foreign policies. For more information, please see European Peacebuilding Liaison Office (no date).

Conclusion

The EU Global Strategy states that the Union aims to play a decisive role in global security. The EU has many well-developed soft-power policy instruments at its disposal, but they must be backed up by hard power. Indeed, the Global Strategy recognises that ‘to engage responsibly in the world, credibility is essential. In this fragile world, soft power is not enough’ (European External Action Service 2016a, 44). EU security and defence cooperation is being upgraded; thus, the importance of CSDP missions in the Union’s wider neighbourhood is likely to increase in the coming years. This makes addressing gender balance a key priority for achieving the operational success of CSDP missions. It also underscores the aim of taking a more integrated approach to conflicts and crises, one that looks at the multiple dimensions of conflict, including gender (European External Action Service 2016a, 28, 51).

While the evidence is clear that teams with greater gender balance increase the effectiveness of missions and operations, there is much to be done at the national and European levels to involve more women in crisis management in all positions and at all levels. EU member states are mainly responsible for recruiting and retaining women for CSDP missions and for deploying them to these missions. Efforts to increase diversity and equality must be strengthened. The EU has a vested interest not only in encouraging its member states to improve gender balance but also in adapting its own practices, rules and regulations to become more gender-friendly.

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