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# EU Foreign Policy and the Challenges of Structural Diplomacy: Comprehensiveness, Coordination, Alignment and Learning

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This Policy Paper is the twelfth in a series that will be produced by the Jean Monnet Multilateral Research Network on 'The Diplomatic System of the European Union' (DSEU). The network is centred on three partner institutions: Loughborough University (UK), University of Leuven (BE) and Maastricht University (NL). It also brings together colleagues from a wide range of academic institutions within the EU, and includes participants from EU institutions and non-governmental organisations. The aim of the Policy Papers series is to contribute to current debates about the emerging EU system of diplomacy and to identify the key challenges to which the EU's diplomatic system will need to respond in the short and medium term.

# EU Foreign Policy and the Challenges of Structural Diplomacy

## Comprehensiveness, Coordination, Alignment and Learning

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### Introduction

Developing long term relations with other countries in the world and promoting a set of important objectives and norms (such as democracy, human rights, rule of law, and good governance, free market economy) are at the heart of EU diplomacy. This policy brief examines these dimensions of EU diplomacy from a wider perspective and highlights what this brand of diplomacy is really about: influencing the 'rules of the game' or 'structures' in third countries and other regions.

We label this diplomacy as '*structural diplomacy*,' a process of dialogue and negotiation with third countries aimed at sustainably influencing or shaping political, legal, economic, financial, social, security and/or other structures in target countries.<sup>i</sup> There are two key aspects of 'structural diplomacy'.

Firstly, the objective is to influence or shape *structures*. These structures consist of organizing principles that shape and order the political, legal, socio-economic and security fields (e.g., 'free market economy' or 'democracy'). The operationalization and institutional setup of these organizing principles can take different forms, though, allowing for differentiation and variation adapted to the specific context of each region, country or society.

Secondly, the objective is to produce *sustainable* effects. The purpose of the process of dialogue and negotiation is to influence or shape structures in such a way that these affected structures obtain an enduring character and become relatively permanent, including when the external support or involvement has disappeared. In other words, the purpose is not just to pursue changes, but also to pursue *structural changes*.

Successful examples of structural diplomacy are the EU's diplomacy towards the Central and Eastern European countries and, in general, the Balkan region. However, the EU's structural diplomacy proves less effective or less easy with regions and countries to which the EU cannot offer potential EU membership as the ultimate reward for the pursuit of structural changes (such as the countries that are part of the European Neighbourhood policy or the Arab world in general). This is problematic for the EU as it is increasingly confronted with other actors in these regions<sup>ii</sup> (such as Russia, China, or Islamic movements supported by Saudi Arabia) that conduct their own strong structural diplomacy in function of promoting their rules of the game.

The purpose of this policy paper is to illuminate some challenges of structural diplomacy and to formulate concrete recommendations for the EU's diplomatic system, including not only the European External Action Service, but also other European and national actors involved in EU diplomacy. The policy paper draws on the research conducted in the framework of the Jean Monnet Multilateral Research Project on 'The EU as a Diplomatic

Actor<sup>iii</sup> with regard to two specific case studies: the EU's rule of law mission in Kosovo<sup>iv</sup> and security sector reform (SSR) policies in DR Congo<sup>v</sup>. It will also include evaluations and recommendations that have a wider relevance, notably for the EU's current structural diplomacy efforts in the Arab world.

## **Comprehensiveness**

A first major lesson is the crucial importance of a comprehensive approach, an essential requirement for achieving lasting and sustainable effects. Comprehensiveness implies that the EU's structural diplomacy has to take into account the overlapping nature of the structures in various relevant, interrelated sectors (political, legal, social, economic, financial, security, etc.) and levels (the state, individual, societal, regional and global levels). Structures in various sectors and on various levels are not isolated from each other, but are closely interconnected, and this demands a cross-sectional analysis.

Two examples of the EU's rule of law and security sector reform missions can illustrate this. Both examples illuminate the close connection between the security sector and the economic and financial structures; both also highlight that focusing on state structures is not sufficient in view of the interconnectedness between these structures and the individual and international levels.

The first example is the EU's support for security sector reform in DR Congo and for the reform of the police structures through the CSDP mission "EUPOL DR Congo." An analysis of the broader context of this mission points to the valuable (and often underestimated) role of this CSDP mission, for instance through its advisory role in the drafting process of new police legislation by the Congolese authorities. However, research demonstrates that important dimensions of the police reform (such as the creation of civilian oversight mechanisms and the financial aspects of the police reform) were, in general, subordinate to the traditional police reform projects. While the latter consist mainly of technical interventions in the short term, a structural reform requires a wider set of instruments. What is not tackled, and what is at this moment beyond the scope of the EU's involvement, are state level administrative, financial and budgetary structures (cf. the lack of effective financial and administrative 'chain of payment' systems necessary to guarantee the payment of the salaries, and the limited revenues in the budget of the DR Congo). The limited revenues are also related to the problematic international trade and security structures that stem from the excavation of raw materials in East Congo.

The second example, the EU's CSDP rule of law mission "EULEX Kosovo", is an example of a quite comprehensive approach, as it focuses on the interrelated police, judicial, and border management structures. Improved functioning of the police structures and a better handling of criminality by police forces can have only limited effects without structural reform of the judicial system to assure courts deal effectively with criminal cases. The EU, however, neglected some important dimensions at particularly the start of the rule of law mission, including the problem posed by police officer and judge's low salaries. Such neglect undermined the potentially positive effects of the EU's efforts. This issue is related to the economic and financial structures of Kosovo, due to the strict budgetary limitations imposed by the IMF and World Bank on the government in Pristina. Whereas many EU actors initially regarded the salary problem as irrelevant, the European Commission together with other international actors launched a vetting process that included a (still limited) increase of salaries of judges.

The previous examples indicate that, in most cases, pursuing structural changes in one sector and on one level requires that the structures in other sectors/levels are taken into account and that structural changes must also be pursued in other relevant sectors/levels. It is evident that the EU is not able to tackle all relevant structures. Because of the overlaps between sectors and levels, European diplomats and civil servants should though at least evaluate to what extent the EU's diplomacy takes into account the interconnectedness of the various dimensions of a policy problem to create an effective structural diplomacy. This points to the importance of the following two challenges: coordination and alignment

### **Coordination.**

Comprehensiveness as a requirement of effective structural diplomacy implies that a division of labour between many international actors is normal. This underlines the importance of coordination between the actors involved within and among the EU institutions, with the EU member states, and with other international organizations.

Effective coordination between EU actors (the various actors within the EEAS, the EU Delegations, DG DEVCO, other DG's in the Commission, etc.) is a first requirement to achieving a comprehensive approach, as is coordination of the wide array of policy instruments available to the EU.<sup>vi</sup> The need for greater coordination in the Brussels arena and in the field has also been painfully clear in the EU's policy with regard to both DR Congo and Kosovo. The two case studies indicate that each EU actor often concentrates on the realization of individual projects without taking into consideration the general scope of the required structural reforms. In the case of police reforms in Congo, the problematic relationship between the CSDP missions and the Union Delegation (previously Commission Delegation) resulted in a context where the required coordination was either very limited or totally absent. Moreover, while it is expected that the EU Delegation assumes the general coordination, the EUPOL mission did not accept this oversight. At the same time, the mission was not provided with sufficient financial and technical resources to realize its programme. It is in this context that a full integration of the CSDP missions within the EU Delegation is required – which though also implies that the functioning of the EU Delegations takes into account the specific nature of ESDP missions.

At least as important but receiving much less attention is the recognition that member states play a major role in many foreign policy issues. Financial and other resources and the political leverage and credibility of the member states (and of NGOs or development agencies from these member states) can be equal to or substantially higher than that of the EU. This explains why it is not always logical to expect the EEAS in Brussels or the EU Delegation in third countries to be at the heart of EU coordination. Explicitly recognizing the major role of some member states and providing them with a lead function in terms of coordination (and if useful in rotation with other member states and with the EU Delegation in the context of regular EU Heads of Mission meetings) can prove to be more functional than trying to always centralize coordination within the EU Delegation.

The comprehensive nature of structural diplomacy also explains why the involvement of and coordination with other relevant third countries and international organisations is required. Important in this context is that the EU not only coordinates with its traditional partners (i.e. other Western countries or global organisations), but also with other relevant

regional powers or neighbouring countries, even if the EU is not used to work together with them. Managing the division of labour among different international actors certainly presents a major task for the EEAS and EU Delegations.

## **Alignment**

The most important component of coordination is also the most often forgotten: alignment. More broadly, this refers to coordination with the relevant domestic actors in the third country that is subject or recipient of the EU's structural diplomacy. 'Alignment' is a major principle in the field of development cooperation but it is also highly relevant in the field of diplomacy and foreign policy. It implies that a foreign policy actor first aligns its policy as much as possible with the policies, priorities and contexts of the target country and second, that it fits its activities as much as possible within the existing institutional frameworks and procedures of the third country. What is needed is thus an "outside-in approach," which does not take the European or Brussels context as the main point of departure, but centers on the endogenous context of the third country.

The challenge for EU structural diplomacy is to try to avoid the development or use of a parallel system (with measures and policies being implemented and realized by international organisations, NGO's, or consultancies), and to make use of and strengthen existing institutions and procedures of a country. To take into account the specific endogenous context of the third country is a principal challenge, as they are often characterized by weak governmental, administrative and financial structures. Thus, adapting policies to these contexts by at least initially downgrading the level of ambition and sophistication (and the related administrative burden) is imperative when implementing policies. This can lead to better results than when applying the EU's own high standards, sophisticated approaches and 'best practices' to a context where the EU's goals are inconsistent with existing structures. Here, achieving a 'minimum-level of practices' may already be a achievement.

The EULEX activities in Kosovo provide an example of minimal alignment. EU goals in regard to the police component too often neglected measures that had been set out in Kosovan sector-specific national strategic policy documents. In terms of capacity building, if the EU had acknowledged and built upon what already existed by supporting the implementation of policies adopted by the government, it would have promoted 'learning by doing' and increased the chance of sustainable changes, even if this would imply some uncertainty and possibly even failures in the short term.

The lack of alignment between external programmes and endogenous processes and structures is also clear in the EU's policies in the DR Congo. EU actors often implement projects according to European frameworks and concepts that do not correspond to the Congolese socio-economic realities and needs. As a result the Congolese authorities and population do not always support these policies. One example illustrates this. The EU wants to restructure the police system in DR Congo on the basis of the European principles of "proximity police." However, it is questionable whether this can be achieved within the specific context of the DR Congo as its police forces include former combatants (and thus engender fear among parts of the population), have very limited budgetary resources, have inadequate or simply absent equipment for policemen, and are subject to very bad road infrastructure.

## Learning - Dialogue

The need to adopt a comprehensive and cross-sectorial approach and to take into account the specific endogenous context of the third country points to another major challenge for EU structural diplomacy: upgrading the position of 'learning' and 'dialogue' within the EU's diplomatic system and activities. An effective structural foreign policy requires a broad, in-depth understanding of the endogenous context in the third country (relevant endogenous actors, enabling and prohibiting factors and processes, values, traditions, sensitivities, etc).

This implies that the EU's diplomats and civil servants need to be able to rely not only on excellent generalist or specialists in specific policy fields (such as police reforms), but also on area specialist with a sound knowledge of the third country, long-term experience in these countries, and a solid network of contacts within these countries. What the EEAS and the EU delegations need are not just diplomats or civil servants specialized in the EU's policy towards the Balkans and Central Africa, but specialists in the Balkans and the DR Congo.

Though the recruitment policy of the EEAS has until now focused on finding a balanced mix of excellent diplomats and civil servants from the various EU institutions and member states, priority should now be given to experts specialized in non-European countries and societies, which is essential for overcoming an EU's diplomatic approach that is too Western ethnocentric and too EU-centric. Or to take two other major fields of interest in the EU's diplomacy, the EEAS and the EU delegations need not only experts in EU-China relations or in the EU's Mediterranean policies, but China-specific specialists and specialists in the Arab societies when dealing with China or the Arab world.

A sound knowledge of the third country also allows the EU diplomats and civil servants to enter into a more profound dialogue with the partners in the third country, which in its turn will contribute to complementing the 'EU perspective' with a 'third country perspective'. This will help to avoid the EU taking for granted the paradigms which constitute the basis of the EU's diplomatic approaches and neglecting paradigms or policy priorities of the partner countries.

## Policy recommendations

This policy paper **analyses the EU's diplomacy from the point of view of its potential structural impact on third countries and regions**. For that purpose, we introduce the concept '*structural diplomacy*': the process of dialogue and negotiation with third countries aimed at influencing or shaping in a sustainable way political, legal, economic, financial, social, security and/or other structures in these countries. The analysis leads to the following policy recommendation for the diplomatic system of the EU:

- High-ranking officials within the EEAS as well as the Heads of Mission of the EU Delegations should receive the explicit task to **look at the EU's long-term relations and partnerships with third countries from a structural diplomacy perspective**. They systematically try to take into account the requirements regarding comprehensiveness, coordination, alignment, learning and dialogue in order to increase the legitimacy and chances of success of the EU's diplomatic efforts.

- The EU must **adopt a comprehensive approach that recognizes the interconnectedness between the structures in various relevant sectors (political, legal, social, economic, financial, security, etc.)**. A cross-sectorial approach is needed to avoid the neglect of some policy sectors undermining potential successes in other related sectors. Equally important is to focus not only on the state level but also on the related individual, societal or international level.
- Comprehensiveness underlines **the importance of cooperation between the various relevant actors**, within and among the EU institutions as well as with the EU member states, other third actors, and other international organizations. The EU's diplomatic system should recognize the often-crucial role of individual EU member states as well as of other third countries in this context, including countries with which the EU has no strong tradition of cooperation.
- The EU should take seriously the most forgotten component of coordination: coordination with the relevant actors in the third country that is subject of the EU's structural diplomacy. **Following the principle of alignment, the EU must align its policy as closely as possible to the policies, priorities and contexts of that third country** in attempt to fit its activities within existing institutional frameworks and processes of the third country (even if this requires from the EU to lower its level of ambition and sophistication).
- Because the difference between the political, legal, economic and societal contexts in Europe and other regions in the world is quite large, the EU must make greater efforts to **adapt the EU's policies and methods to the specific endogenous contexts within third countries, in order to avoid a complete misfit**. An effective and relevant structural diplomacy cannot consider the exportation of European structures and norms as a standard operating procedure. These structures do not constitute 'passe-partouts' and cannot be applied everywhere or in all circumstances without adaptation.
- The EU should **enter more systematically into two-directional dialogue with third countries**. Such dialogues will ferment in-depth understanding of the contexts and the real priorities of the partner countries while demonstrating more convincingly that the structures promoted by the EU are indeed in the interest of the partner countries.
- A major **objective of the recruitment policy of the EEAS should be to attract top experts on China, Asia, the Arab world, Islam, etc.** This is pertinent in order to further strengthen the expertise available to the EEAS and the EU Delegations as well as to overcome the often too EU-centric or Western ethnocentric perspective on non-European countries.
- Strengthening the effectiveness and external legitimacy of the EU's structural diplomacy and taking into account more the specific interests and endogenous contexts of third countries must become a EU priority. This is important in view of **the competing structural diplomacies conducted by actors such as Russia, China, or Islamic movements supported by Saudi Arabia**. This is particularly urgent as these actors promote structures that are quite different to those promoted by the EU, but that are nevertheless perceived by parts of the population and elites in third countries as more effective and more adapted to their situation.

The Diplomatic System of the EU Network, funded by the European Commission's Jean Monnet Programme, brings together three partner universities with a strong tradition in the study of European integration in its international context. The lead partner is Loughborough University, and specifically its Department of Politics, History and International Relations and Centre for the Study of International Governance. The other partners are the University of Leuven, from Belgium, and Maastricht University, from the Netherlands. Each partner is responsible for key events and a research strand. In addition selected experts drawn from EU and Member State institutions and from relevant sections of civil society will be invited to participate in selected network activities.

Nothing in this paper should be construed as representing the views of any EU or national institution, including those represented in the network itself. For further information about the network and its activities, please visit <http://dseu.lboro.ac.uk>

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<sup>i</sup>Keukeleire, S., R. Thiers and A. Justaert (2009) 'Reappraising Diplomacy: Structural Diplomacy and the Case of the EU', in Brian Hocking and Jozef Batora (eds.), 'Special Issue: The European Union and Diplomacy', *The Hague Journal of Diplomacy*, 4(2), pp. 143-165.

<sup>ii</sup>See also the Policy Paper No. 11 of M. Smith and D. Allen (2012), on 'The European Union, Strategic Diplomacy, and the BRICS Countries.

<sup>iii</sup>This paper has been written in the framework of the Jean Monnet Multilateral Research Project on 'The EU as a Diplomatic Actor' (DSEU) as well as in the framework of the TOTAL Chair of EU Foreign Policy of Stephan Keukeleire at the College of Europe (Bruges).

<sup>iv</sup>Keukeleire, S., A. Kalaja and A. Çollaku (2011), 'The EU's policy on Kosovo', in Koutrakos, P. (ed.) *European Foreign Policy: Legal and Political Perspectives*, Edward Elgar, pp. 172-202; Keukeleire, S., A. Kalaja and A. Çollaku (2011) 'The EU and Kosovo: Structural Diplomacy in Action - but on the basis of one-sided paradigms?', *DSEU Policy Paper*, 4/2011; Keukeleire, S. and R. Thiers (2010) 'EULEX Kosovo: Walking a thin line, aiming for the rule of law', in Blockmans, S., J. Wouters and T. Ruys (eds.), *The European Union and Peacebuilding: Policy and Legal Aspects*. TMC Asser Press, pp. 353-374; Papadimitriou D. and P. Petrov (2012 forthcoming) 'Whose Rule, Whose Law? Contested Statehood, External Leverage and the EU's Rule of Law Mission in Kosovo', *Journal of Common Market Studies*; Papadimitriou, D. and P. Petrov (2012 forthcoming), 'Europeanisation, Conditionality and State Building in Kosovo: the elusive pursuit of EU actorness (1999-2008)', in Elbasani, A. (ed.), *Europeanisation and Institutional Change in the Western Balkans*, Routledge.

<sup>v</sup>Justaert, A. (2012 forthcoming) 'The Implementation of EU's Security Sector Reform Policies in the DR Congo', *European Security*; Justaert, A. (2011) 'From SSR to SSD: A European Structural Diplomacy towards the DR Congo?', *DSEU Policy Paper*, 5/2011; Justaert, A. (2010) 'Coordination et Alignement européens dans la Réforme de la Police Congolaise', *Mouvements et Enjeux Sociaux*, Avril, pp. 29-45; Justaert, A. and Musao Kalombo, C. M. (2011) 'External Police Reform in the DR Congo: Conflict or Convergence?'; Report prepared for the *Trilateral Research Project on Chinese and Western Development Cooperation Activities with DR Congo*, Leuven: HIVA, 1-28; Justaert A. and S. Keukeleire (2010) 'The EU's Security Sector Reform Policies in the DR Congo', in Vanhoonacker, S., H. Dijkstra and H. Maurer (eds.), 'Understanding the Role of Bureaucracy in the European Security and Defence Policy', *European Integration online Papers (EIoP)*, 14(1); Justaert, A. and S. Keukeleire (2012) 'Informal governance and networks in EU foreign policy', in Christiansen, T. and C. Neuhold (eds.), *International Handbook on Informal Governance*, Edward Elgar, pp. 558-590.

<sup>vi</sup>See also the Policy Paper No. 10 of S. Duke, K. Pomorska, and S. Vanhoonacker (2012), 'The European Union's Diplomatic Architecture: The Mid-Term Challenges'.