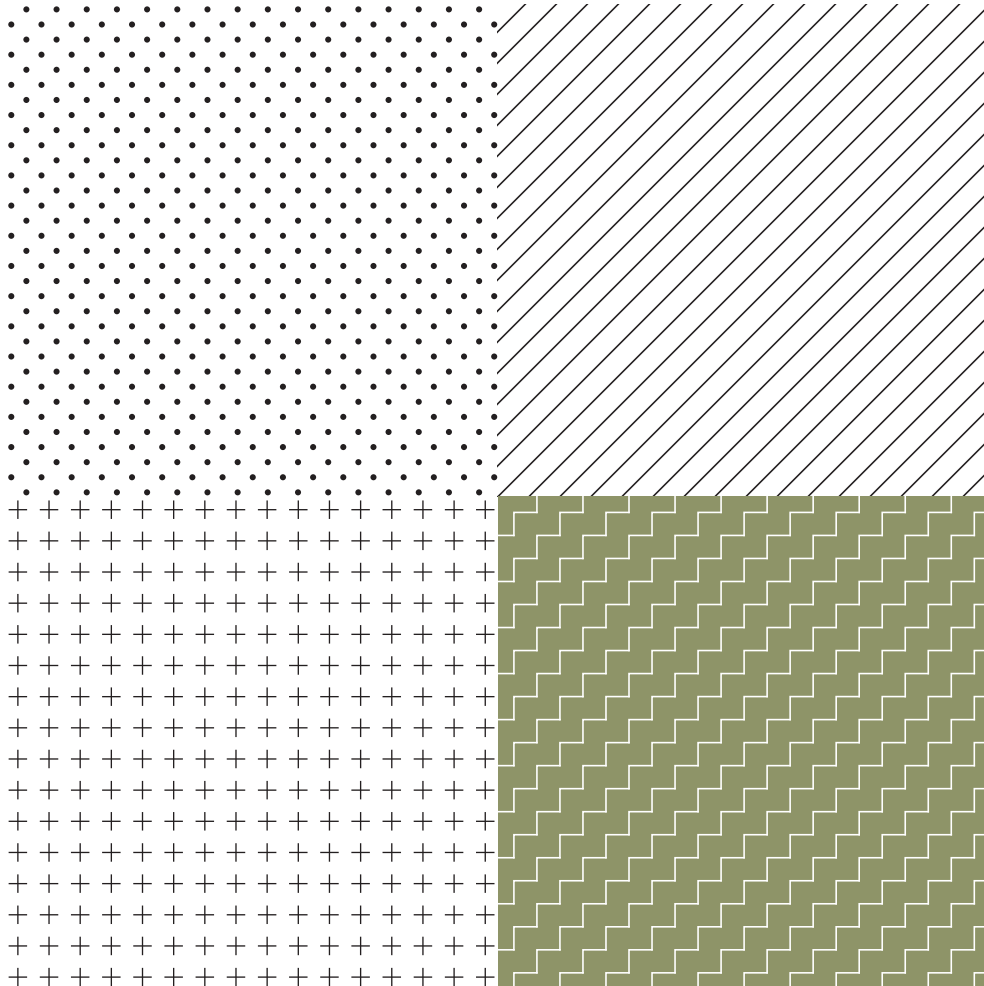


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ENHANCING EU PEACEBUILDING CAPABILITIES



## EU and Security Sector Reform: Tilting at Windmills?

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## Colophon

# EU AND SECURITY SECTOR REFORM: TILTING AT WINDMILLS?

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Deliverable 2.6: Scoping Study on SSR and Civil-military Synergies

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## Whole of Society Conflict Prevention and Peacebuilding

This scoping study was produced as part of the project “Whole of Society Conflict Prevention and Peacebuilding”, which aims to enhance the EU’s peacebuilding and conflict prevention capabilities.

It is one of the seven scoping studies that aim to define the state of the art knowledge about civilian means for conflict prevention and peacebuilding, and identify research gaps in relation to several cross-cutting themes and clusters that the project focuses on. More information at [www.woscap.eu](http://www.woscap.eu)

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## 1.1 Executive Summary

The EU's overall thinking and approach to civilian peacebuilding and crisis management explicitly – and, as a result, the security sector reforms (SSR) which are instrumental in this wider project – hinges on the dominant notions of **Liberal state-building, Liberal peace-building and Liberal Peace Thesis**. One of the key assumptions made with regard to SSR is that 'democratic civil-military relations foster stable societies'. In the Anglo-American context, after decades of social engineering, this assumption became a fact of life. However, outside of these regions, the liberal state and liberal peace project – and the SSRs which play an important role in these processes – continue to be received with suspicion and hostility.

The normative underpinnings of the Liberal Peace building project – and thus, the role of SSRs – are shared by the major international security actors, namely, the EU, United States of America, United Nations, OSCE and the World Bank. However, the EU often faces enormous challenges and resistance in its attempts to translate the key liberal 'norms' to other security actors outside of the EU, creating a 'shared consensus' with the actors therein at national, regional, sub-regional, state and non-state levels. This **absence of a shared consensus around the main normative tenet** underpinning EU-SSR missions means that they often end up being less inclusive, top down and unsustainable in the long run, leaving room for the emergence of potential ceremonial, hybrid and disappointing security institutions and practices that are wholly or partially contradictory with the goals of EU-SSR policy.

The EU's main approach to **SSR heavily relies on the OECD approach**, that is defined as "seeking to increase partner countries' ability to meet the range of security needs within their societies in a manner consistent with democratic norms and sound principles of governance, transparency and the rule of law". This definition extends well beyond the narrower focus of more traditional security assistance on defence, intelligence and policing, thus leaving a lot of room for devising new policies, instruments and institutions. Although the EU has thus far been able to impress with the **breadth** of its SSR related policies, instruments and institutions, it has failed to match this with the **depth** of the OECD-principles in SSR operational missions.

Although civilian means lie at the heart of EU's SSR policy, in actual operations, EU-SSR still shows a tendency towards applying **the traditional "train and equip" approach**, which focuses on improving the technical capacity of the security forces (who are identified as legitimate security actors). This is in contrast to the OECD's **"governance-development" approach**. The train and equip model is often presented as a technical approach, and is often more successful in engaging local elite political support for SSR operations. However, because this approach alters the underlying power relations and structures of accessing resources among the competing local security actors, it cannot escape becoming embroiled in governance/political outcomes. Therefore, acknowledging and engaging with the 'political' aspects of this "train and equip" approach to SSR in EU operations is essential, if EU-SSR is to be sustainable.

Contrary to the commitment the EU shows on **building legitimacy from the bottom-up** to its SSR, EU attempts to **'buy-in' legitimacy from the top-down**, to its operational missions by offering various incentives (i.e. aid, EU membership) to potential security counter parts, who often happen to be the political and military elites in the state system. To a certain extent, this

buy-in approach seems to work in the EU's immediate neighbourhood, where the opportunity and the incentive of gaining EU membership functions as a tangible and desirable incentive for national politico-military elites. However, in contexts where there are no such concrete dividends on offer, especially in fragile political contexts located outside the European neighbourhood, EU's SSR interventions have a less of an appeal. This raises the question, how can the EU build bottom-up legitimacy for its SSR interventions in fragile contexts, where threats to security loom large?

Compared to no-conflict situations or stable political environments, there is a marked lack of acceptance and legitimacy for EU's SSR interventions in post-conflict, on-going conflict and complex fragile political situations. **Distinguishing these contexts** from each other, and being aware of the specific dynamics underlying each of these contexts, is crucial for undertaking successful, relevant and sustainable SSR missions. Further, SSR is often an official process that takes place in a post-conflict setting where there is a formal peace process and peace agreement. When SSR takes place in a context without a peace agreement, it is more difficult. In Afghanistan, for example, General Petraeus described the SSR process as "repairing an aircraft while in flight-and while being shot at." Undertaking of in-depth conflict assessments, engaging with different stages of conflicts and making context specific SSR interventions is crucial if EU SSR interventions are to produce sustainable security environments.

In the terrain of EU-SSR, which encompasses a wide range of actors, we can identify a swathe of activities that cut across a number of different policy arenas, sectors and communities of practice. On the one hand, this diversity of actors, policy arenas and activities has resulted in producing a range of **different sub-approaches to SSR**. SSR is approached differently by the various European Union member states; these include 'top-down' or 'bottom up' approaches, as well as the GSSR favoured by the Netherlands, UK and Sweden. Further, based on past colonial divisions between English and French speaking EU members, there are both Francophone and Anglophone variations of SSR. What is important to note is that these sub-approaches result in different outcomes in different contexts and importantly making it **difficult to assess and measure the success** of EU's SSR interventions. The EU can measure the success of SSR in many different ways. For example, when dealing with a 'top down' approach, we might ask, how well does the security sector maintain the monopoly of force by overcoming non-state armed groups, and how efficient is the security sector? By contrast, with a 'bottom up' approach, we might ask, do civilians feel safe?

The EU has a notorious reputation of being **incoherent and for lacking in coordination**, mostly blamed on its institutional structure, and the split between the commissions and the council. Various EU-SSR operational missions continue to demonstrate the coherence issues and co-ordination issues playing an important role in undermining the EU's overall capability, seriousness, and 'actorness' in global security governance. Regardless of the EU's expressed commitment to a comprehensive approach, the horizontal incoherence between the Commission and the Council- the groups responsible for development policy and security policy respectively- suggests the EU still has much work to do. Since the establishment of the EEAS in 2010, and the current process of developing a European SSR strategy, it is hoped that the EU will be able to more effectively enable clear identification of priorities and make better use of its resources and policy instruments, overcoming the horizontal as well as the vertical incoherencies in the Union as well as between the EU and its individual member states.

Overcoming these 'vertical' and 'horizontal' inconsistencies is important so that EU-SSR can avoid being a deliberate target of the local elites with narrow power interests, who use such incoherencies in SSR missions for instrumental gains.

In the last two decades of scholarly knowledge generation on EU-SSR, a significant **gap is left in terms of theory building and development of robust conceptual and analytical frameworks**. Although there is a large amount of empirical evidence gathered on EU-SSR operational missions that points to the importance of engaging with the political factors and politics of SSR, two decades of EU-SSR research has not offered much promise in turning this evidence into a systematic SSR theory that illuminates its inherently political dimension. We believe that one possible way to overcome the current theoretical and analytical deficits in SSR scholarly research, and to provide a promising ground for future EU-SSR academic inquiries, is to include two dimensions in the analysis: 1) A nuanced **political analysis** that focuses predominantly on power; and 2) a robust **political theory of change** as informed by Hudson and Leftwich (2014), drawing on debates in the field of politics of development.