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“Challenges to the European security strategy from a gender perspective”

Contribution to an international conference on gender-inclusive decision making for peace with justice

Who’s making policy? What difference does it make?

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I. The European Union – development from a “peace power” to a global armed force - Background and development of the European Security Policy

Since 2003, the European Union has moved to a main actor in the field of international peace operations.

In 2006, already 12 so called peace operations are in European responsibility: They are operations “out of area”, i.e. in conflict regions in non-EU-countries like Afghanistan, Kosovo, Sudan, Irak

The reason: The EU is interested in presenting itself as an armed force capable to intervene worldwide because the EU is going to develop to a big military force -

In the result the strategy of conflict solution of the EU becomes more and more militarized.

The Background of this development:

The changes in the international structure since the end of the Cold War and the collapse of the Eastern bloc countries have led to changes in the security policy debate.

This brought also about a shift in the division of labour among the USA, NATO, and the EU, and in the follow-up a change in the European Union’s concept of security policy.

Although advocated by a lot of civil society organizations, the NATO was not demilitarized and disbanded. With the advent of new intra- and interstate armed conflicts worldwide, adherents of an “expanded notion of security” gained the upper hand.

In addition to this, the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, those of March 2004 in Madrid/Spain, and of July 2005 in London/GB advanced the acceptance of this concept of “expanded security” and the corresponding policy and strategy within the western countries.

Because these attacks ended the presumption of inviolability most people had felt within their own countries and triggered a sense of insecurity and threat. Therefore, large segments of the population are accepting new forms of intervention politics and are willing to put up with restrictions in human and civil rights.

In consequence, Europe has developed from a “peace power,” as the EU has viewed itself since its inception, to a new determinant for global force and order in the last years – with an increasing programme of militarization.

I am going to clarify this with regard to the European Security strategy:

The European Security Strategy

The EU formulated its first common foreign and security policy in December 2003 in a strategy paper entitled “A Secure Europe in a Better World,” and spelled it out in the “Headline Goal 2010” adopted in 2004.

In contrast to previous security policies of most of the individual European countries, the notion of “expanded security” has a global orientation. Unlike the idea of human security – developed and discussed within the UN -, it remains oriented to narrowly defined national or EU interests. Threats to security are viewed as that with the potential to endanger the stability of Western-oriented states. That also means: The threat does not have to be real.

Five key threats are listed:

International terrorism, proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, regional conflicts, state failure in specific regions of the world, and organized crime that develops in its wake.¹

Environmental catastrophes, diseases, and epidemics are relegated to secondary importance. It is a weighting of threats which is close to the definition of threats by the US, but contrasts with the threat scenarios in the UN context, which are more strongly oriented toward the concept of “human security” and include poverty and disease firstly.

So: What is the answer of the EU to these potential threats? And in which way do they refer to gender issues and women`s and girls` security and rights?

In the first place: the EU will expand their capacity for military intervention. That means: The EU Security Strategy is oriented toward military intervention, not only to protect the EU zone, but also to intervene in other regions of the world.

On the other side, the representatives of the EU always confirm - what you can also read in the Security Strategy: “none of [the new threats] can be tackled by purely military means,”² and “preventive engagement” is to play an important role.

For this, part of the European policy are as well a lot of documents, treaties and contracts as elaborated concepts and instruments refering to conflict prevention and civil conflict intervention.

But a comparison of the funding for civil and military conflict management shows that the emphasis lies strongly on the military investment.

II. The problems from a peace activist and gender perspective

In general, there is no concrete definition of “security” and there is a complete absence of cause analyses for the formulated threats.

¹ Council of the European Union (2003): A Secure Europe in a Better World – The European Security Strategy, I., pp. 3-5, at:

[http://ue.eu.int/cms3_fo/showPage.ASP?id=266&lang=DE&mode=q]

² *ibid*, II. p. 7

2. And in consequence: There is neither a clear concept of “security policy” in general nor are there clear criteria for civil or for military interventions.

Sure, it does not lie within the scope of such documents to perform these analyses themselves, but there should be articulated clear criteria for civil and military interventions.

3. It is already clear that: The EU forces will be called upon to perform a greater combination of military and civil tasks. If EU forces do in fact take over tasks that were handled by civil actors in the past, and connected with an understanding of peace policy - we may expect a progressive militarization of crisis and conflict management and the terminological mixture of peace and security – with the result: Peace and security policy is used more and more as a connected pair. And in the population military and armed forces become more common and - maybe - more accepted.

(Military forces are asked to feature “interoperability” as a major new quality “to enhance the effective use of military capabilities,” allowing them “to work together and to interact with other civilian tools.”³)

4. In the dominating Security policy and strategy, women figure only as objects in need of protection, for example in connection with trafficking. They are not conceived of as active subjects.

(That also leads to the problem that very often the consideration of women in security policy and peace processes is misunderstood as consideration of the gender dimension.)

5. The notion of “expanded security” as well as the ESDP and the EU Security Strategy is completely gender-blind.

Thus, this policy stands in opposition to the EU’s Treaty of Amsterdam of May 1, 1999, an amendment to the European Treaties, which is a binding directive for European institutions and policies to regard gender mainstreaming and actively promote gender equality not only within all parts of European policy, but also in all member states of the EU.

Overall, this policy and strategy ignore the UN Resolution 1325.

III. Gender references

But, I will not say, all strategies and conceptions of the EU, even of the Security policy, are gender-blind. Quite the reverse. There exist a lot of EU documents, treaties and contracts which refer to the outcome of the Feminist movements, to the principles of gender mainstreaming and also to UN resolution 1325. E.g., last year the EU council passed a document to implement UNSCR 1325 in the context of the ESDP.⁴ (not yet it is published). Moreover, some resolutions of the EU Parliament (the last this summer) postulate the implementation of UN resolution 1325 within all EU missions and security politics, and especially they are aware of the specific problems of women.

The statements (like that of Sir Emyr Jones Parry, the British Representative of the EU Council during the period of presidency last year), are nearly always the same. The EU will promote:

- In ESDP Missions, the part of women shall be increased,
- women shall be supported in peacebuilding processes by participation in official negotiations and post-war governments

³ Council of the European Union (2004): Headline Goal 2010. Document 6309/6/04, p. 3.

⁴ Council Secretariat, Implementing UNSCR 1325 in the context of ESPD, Doc. 11932/2/05; and: Council Secretariat, Compilation of Replies: Gender mainstreaming and Implementation of UNSCR 1325. Exchange of National Best Practices, GPM Doc. Sèance no: 09/06, 25.April 2006)

- the dialog with women's organisations shall be improved
- the protection of women and girls in armed conflicts shall be improved
- the gender trainings of the EU staff esp. participating in conflict management operations shall be guaranteed.

And – that is new - women and women's organisations shall take part in the planned UN peace building commission and the gender balance should be guaranteed there.

The main problem of all of these gender relations and proposals:

Since years, they are not realized. The reasons:

They are not really referred to the official security strategy and ESDP.

Until now, Defence Policy and military strategy are male domains. And most of the representatives within this sphere of policy are men without any interest in regarding gender perspectives and women's interests.

And as I mentioned: for them, very often the consideration of women – mostly only of some women - is misunderstood as consideration of the gender dimension.

There exist some other problems: even if women are participants within parts of concrete EU politics or missions, this is no guarantee for a refer to the gender issue;

and very often not only among the participating experts, male and female is a lot of expertise concerning gender problems. They are not trained in gender issues in combination with conflict management and peacebuilding.

Moreover: there is an urgent need of systematical consideration of gender perspectives.

So, what is to do?

IV. Conclusions: Demands to the European security strategy and policy from a gender perspective

1. The understanding of Security has to be changed and developed towards "Human Security" that also appropriately takes into consideration the elementary (security) problems of women in war and post-war periods,
2. In general: EU peace and security policy has to favourite prevention instead of intervention; and civil measures instead of military measures
Every intervention should be preceded by a cause analysis that also takes a look at gender relations
3. If intervention: there must be clear criteria for every kind of intervention (and only mandated by the UN); and clear separation between military and civil interventions
4. The budget for civil conflict prevention and management must be increased and the budget for military forces has to be reduced
5. An action plan for the whole European Union should be developed immediately to implement UN-Resolution 1325; and the EU should decide strong impacts for all member countries to do the same
Such an action plan should e.g. have precise guidelines like quotas for women participation in EU missions and EU policy positions and time tables concerning the realization
6. A Gender index for foreign and security policy should be developed, and gender-specific data are regularly collected and used, e.-g. for conflict and actor analyses (The EU has to promote systematically gender sensitive studies on questions of foreign and security policies and of the conditions in the conflict regions.)
7. All peace building activities which the EU is involved in must be evaluated.
8. Gender awareness and qualification must be part of education and further training for civil and military personnel in conflict management
9. The EU should establish a national position for monitoring the implementation of Resolution 1325 with the enlistment of civilian (female expert) groups.

