A Civil-Military Headquarters for the EU

The Weimar Triangle Initiative Fuels the Current Debate
Claudia Major

In April 2010, the foreign ministers of the "Weimar Triangle" countries—Poland, France, and Germany—launched an initiative to strengthen the European Union's Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP). The core objective of this initiative is to establish permanent civil-military planning and command structures for EU operations, in short: an EU Headquarters. This would be a significant improvement over the current state of affairs, in which the relevant structures are split between the EU and the member states' levels. This impedes the effective use of resources; it wastes time and reduces the operational efficiency of EU crisis management. Similar initiatives have failed in the past due to political concerns. If the EU wants to remain engaged in crisis management and carry out the complex civil-military tasks, it cannot do without appropriate internal EU structures.

In recent years, a number of problems have become evident in the planning and command of EU crisis management operations. The Weimar Triangle initiative to create permanent civil-military planning and command structures aims to overcome these problems and increase the EU's effectiveness in crisis management. Its integrated civil-military focus also reflects the growing importance of the EU's civilian dimension and its desire to implement a *comprehensive approach* to crisis management.

Planning, command and control: the cornerstones of an operation
Effective command and control in military operations requires comprehensive advance planning. Planning is the process by which political goals are translated into a military operation. Military expertise is needed throughout the political process, even in the early stages of decision-making on a potential military operation. During the phase of *military advance planning*, military experts produce generic plans for different types of operations on a routine basis. In a crisis situation, these generic plans constitute the basis for developing specific options for action—the *crisis management concept*—for the situation at hand. This forms the basis for political decisions on the specific operation and provides the framework for subsequent *operational planning on the strategic level.*

Dr. Claudia Major is researcher at SWP's International Security Division

Infrastructure, personnel, and expertise for planning, command and control exist in all countries and military organizations in the form of military headquarters (HQ). The HQ is the interface between political decision-makers and military organizations. The EU possesses similar structures, but, unlike NATO, it has no permanent military HQ. Instead, specific structures and responsibilities are split between the EU and its member states. When a military operation is to take place, the EU has to activate the different entities ad hoc and bring them together.

State of play

The advance planning of an operation, the subsequent development of a crisis management concept, and the preparations for a European Council decision to launch an operation are all carried out at the EU level under the aegis of the Crisis Management and Planning Directorate (CMPD), which is part of the European External Action Service (EEAS). Only after the EU member states have decided to launch an operation and have defined its parameters through a Council Decision is an Operation Headquarters (OHQ) activated, which then takes over the operation's planning and its subsequent command and control.

At present, there are three options for activating an OHQ: First, the EU can use the OHQs of five of its member states—Germany, France, the UK, Greece, and Italy. However, these countries are not obliged to provide their facilities for EU missions and operations; they decide on a case-by-case basis. Second, the EU can make use of NATO structures under the Berlin Plus arrangements (2003), as it did for example in Operation ALTHEA in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Third, if none of the five countries offers its OHQ, the EU can activate its Operations Centre (OpsCentre) in Brussels, which has been operational since 2007. The OpsCentre is a nucleus that can be transformed into a fully fledged OHQ. Up to now, it has only been used in a military exercise.

The EU has almost always chosen the first option. The others have been avoided for political reasons.

Inefficient arrangements

The EU's operational experiences have shown that the existing arrangements cause significant losses of time, high costs, and reduced efficiency.

These problems result mainly from the delayed activation of the national OHQs. To develop the *crisis management concept*, which is the necessary step prior to the activation of the OHQ, the EU member states need already military planning expertise. Yet the EU structures, that is CMPD and the EU Military Staff, provide only limited planning capabilities: first, these institutions are not adequately staffed; second, their expertise is split between the EU level and member state structures, and third, they lack operational experience. Yet, during the early planning stages that precede a strategic political decision to launch an operation, comprehensive planning capabilities are needed to answer political questions—for example, how long the operation will take and what it will cost.

Furthermore, the planning process lacks continuity: when the selected national OHQ takes over operation planning, it can draw on national planning expertise but to a very minimal extent on practical experience at the EU level, due to the small number of EU operations carried out to date. As a result, there is no institutional memory, and national personnel often lack an understanding of EU competencies and processes. And since the OHQ now takes on part of the military responsibility for the operation, it will go back to earlier planning stages and rewrite those aspects of the EU planning on which it possesses more expertise—for example, on questions about the skills and capabilities of the available troops.

In practice, the late involvement of the OHQ can delay the start of an operation. After all, when no operations are underway, the national OHQs are merely kept

on standby; they are not standing, fully-manned headquarters with infrastructure ready for immediate use. If the EU activates an OHQ, its planning and command capacities first have to be built up. However, even keeping the infrastructure and personnel of the five OHQs on standby entails substantial costs. The personnel of all five OHQs, with around 90 staff members each, have to be trained for possible deployment since the states decide on an ad hoc basis which OHQ will be used.

Political deadlocks, unsuccessful attempts

Although these shortcomings have been known for some time, several countries have consistently refused to remedy them by creating an EU HQ. Their primary fears are of weakening NATO and straining trans-atlantic relations. An EU HQ would, in their eyes, unnecessarily duplicate existing NATO structures, which are available for EU use in the framework of the Berlin Plus agreement. This would not only tie up resources but also increase the EU's military autonomy—which some countries like the UK oppose. In view of the small number of EU operations that have taken place to date, and the relative success of the existing arrangements, critics doubt whether the costs and effort required for an EU HQ are justified.

Furthermore, the HQ discussion raises political questions about how much autonomy should be granted to the EU in such a core area of national sovereignty as security and defense policy. The EU member states differ widely in their positions on this matter.

While France has wanted to expand EU structures for the planning and command of military operations, the UK has consistently rejected this as unnecessary duplication. Germany is attempting to mediate between these two positions: it favors stronger EU structures but stresses the need to promote complementarity with NATO structures and to ensure civil-military coordination. For a long time, Poland positioned itself as a supporter of NATO, but now advocates strengthening the CSDP as a means of reinforcing the transatlantic security partnership.

Up to now, these differences have prevented the establishment of an EU HQ. They stood in the way of any other reforms in the Council Secretariat apart from process optimization. The most recent example is the creation of the Crisis Management and Planning Directorate in 2009, which resulted from the merger of two former directorates (Defence Aspects and Civilian Crisis Management). This new body was intended to improve the coordination of civilian and military planning, command and capability development. But these reforms have achieved little, since the member states left the structural problem—the fragmentation of planning and the lack of permanent structures—untouched. They also failed to seize the opportunity that arose with the creation of the European External Action Service (EEAS) as a context in which to undertake fundamental reforms.

The potential of the Weimar initiative

The Weimar initiative seeks to tackle the current structural shortcomings by calling for the establishment of permanent civil-military planning and command structures for the EU. These would

▸ overcome the fragmentation in the planning process between the EU and the national levels, accelerate the process, and avoid double planning;

▸ reduce the dependence of the EU on the five states providing OHQ;

▸ save resources by eliminating the necessity to keep national OHQs on standby;

▸ increase the likelihood that rapid response operations could be carried out successfully;

▸ strengthen the institutional memory of the EU in the area of planning and command, which would facilitate smooth

and efficient processes and foster the emergence of an EU strategic culture;

▸ create synergies between civilian and military planning processes and thereby save costs, for example, in logistics.

The integrated civil-military character of the proposed structures would also counter the concerns expressed about the duplication of NATO structures. An integrated civil-military OHQ would be the first of its kind. It would also be forward-looking: events like the 2010 earthquake in Haiti have shown that future crises will demand an approach that integrates civilian and military instruments from the early planning stages on.

Open questions, crucial steps

The chances of success for the Weimar initiative depend on the resolution of a number of issues, but also on the member states' push for its implementation.

Structural questions like the establishment of an HQ always relate to the balance of power between the states and the EU. It will therefore be important to determine who will have the decision-making authority and who will provide the personnel. Since the EU HQ must have authority over the troops of the member states, it seems sensible to establish a multilateral HQ under the control of the states, as has been the case up to now. If the states are firmly committed to developing a comprehensive approach, they will need to involve the EU Commission to a substantial degree, given its extensive civilian capabilities—for example, its humanitarian aid instruments.

The linchpin of the initiative will be the commitment and support of the states—particularly the UK, where a Eurosceptic coalition has been in office since May 2010. Recent experiences, however, appear to be increasing the willingness of the UK to undertake reforms. The country has been directly confronted with the problems of EU structures through its command of Operation Atalanta (since 2008), and also with the high costs incurred by providing

the OHQ. The increased budgetary pressure since the onset of the financial crisis has also intensified efforts in the UK to identify cost-saving opportunities.

France, Poland, and Germany now have to advance their initiative and give it a strong footing at the EU level. The heads of state and government of these countries should embrace this initiative launched by their foreign ministers. The foreign ministers still have not formally introduced the initiative at the EU level. As a result, the other states have still only expressed reactions on an informal level. And while the majority of these reactions have been positive, implementation can only begin after the initiative has been officially launched at the EU level. A necessary step in this direction would be its presentation to European High Representative Catherine Ashton and to the other EU states.

The creation of a joint EU civil-military planning and operations management structure can only be realized with the agreement of all member states. Failing this, interested states could still implement some ideas within the current EU framework as group initiatives, namely as "Permanent Structured Cooperation" (see *SWP-Aktuell* 13/2010). The Permanent Structured Cooperation provided for under the Lisbon Treaty allows for closer cooperation among EU member states that are willing and able to improve their defense capabilities. The establishment of Permanent Structured Cooperation has to be ratified by all of the states participating in the CSDP. At this stage, however, the states have not agreed on the concrete modalities.

The Polish EU Presidency in the latter half of 2011 promises to provide the right framework for this, and could mobilize the support needed to push the Weimar initiative through. It also marks a kind of benchmark date: if the Weimar Triangle has not garnered sufficient support for the initiative by then, it will be unlikely to succeed at a later date.