Failing forward in the EU’s common security and defense policy: the integration of EU crisis management

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ABSTRACT
Recent years have witnessed renewed efforts to advance integration in the EU’s Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP), including in the domain of military and civilian capability development. The adoption of a Civilian CSDP Compact (CCC) and the creation of a European Peace Facility (EPF) are prominent examples of recent steps taken towards further integration. Still, despite recent progress, CSDP reforms have often been slow to materialise, lag behind the reform ambitions of key EU foreign policy actors, and fail to address important shortcomings experienced by CSDP. This article addresses why this might be by exploring the evolution of CSDP crisis management through a failing forward approach, which charts the course of integration dynamics, identified by neofunctionalism and liberal intergovernmentalism, through time, revealing its cyclical nature. Our case studies of the EPF and the CCC demonstrate how the long-term integrative dynamics in EU military and civilian crisis management are marked by a cycle of crisis followed by incomplete institutional reforms, policy feedback, experiential learning and subsequent, yet again incomplete, efforts to remedy institutional shortcomings and policy failure.

KEYWORDS CSDP; crisis management; failing forward; neofunctionalism; intergovernmentalism; learning

Introduction
In recent years, the proliferation of crises and violent conflict close to the borders of the European Union (EU) have increased the demand for effective EU crisis management capabilities (European Union, 2016). Efforts to advance integration in the EU’s Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP), including in the domain of military and civilian capability development, have culminated in the creation of a European Peace Facility (EPF) and the adoption of a Civilian CSDP Compact (CCC), described as major
milestones for CSDP (Dijkstra, 2018; Fiott, 2020, p. 13). Yet, whilst the EPF and the CCC are both important steps towards further integration, CSDP reforms have also often been slow to materialise, lag behind the reform ambitions of key EU foreign policy actors, and fail to address important CSDP shortcomings, such as the development of military capabilities and the need for stronger coordination between EU-internal security policies and CSDP (Pohl, 2015, p. 32; Shepherd, 2016, p. 90).

Why has the EU frequently responded to major challenges through incomplete, incremental reforms rather than something more bold and timely? We address this question by adopting the ‘failing forward’ approach (Jones et al., 2016), which shifts attention to ‘a cycle of piecemeal reform, followed by policy failure, followed by further reform’ (Jones et al., 2016, p. 1010; Jones et al., 2021). In this view, intergovernmental bargaining in crisis situations tends to result in incomplete solutions, which subsequently give rise to neofunctionalist dynamics that lead to further crisis. Building on the temporal perspective of the failing forward approach, we consider the dynamics triggered by previous reforms to account for the development of the EPF and the CCC, rather than treating them as the result of discrete decisions.

The article employs a novel theoretical argument to study recent developments in advancing the EU’s civilian and military crisis-management capabilities. Moreover, we propose an important conceptual refinement through the extension of neofunctionalist failing forward dynamics to political spillover mechanisms, while we extend the empirical application of the failing forward approach initially applied to the Economic and Monetary Union (Jones et al., 2016) to the CSDP domain. CSDP constitutes an interesting case for exploring the relevance of the failing forward approach in other EU policy areas. The strong intergovernmental character of CSDP – in conjunction with diverging member states’ foreign, security and defence policies – increases the propensity for incomplete reforms and suboptimal policy outcomes (Alecu de Flers et al., 2011). Simultaneously, over the past years the CSDP has faced a combination of substantive crises – most notably mounting instability and conflict in the EU neighbourhood and the so-called ‘migration crisis’ – which have amplified calls for upgrading its institutional capacity. As such, CSDP is subject to the very tensions between crisis-induced pressures and institutional constraints highlighted by ‘failing forward’.

This article builds on secondary literature, policy reports, media coverage and official EU documents as well as 23 semi-structured interviews with EU officials, member state and civil society representatives (see Annex I). Methodologically, we draw on what has been described as ‘minimalist process tracing’ (Beach & Pedersen, 2019, pp. 33–35) to explore evidence linking the failing forward dynamics to integrative steps in the EU’s crisis management domain. We proceed as follows. First, we develop the failing forward framework and highlight its added value with respect to established theoretical
approaches in the domain of CSDP. We then turn to the empirical analysis and apply the failing forward approach to the cases of the EPF and the CCC, examining to what extent the mechanisms specified in the framework contributed to these developments.

**Failing forward in CSDP integration: the need for an integrated theoretical approach**

The institutional evolution of the CSDP presents scholars with an empirical puzzle that has been addressed selectively by intergovernmentalist and neofunctionalist scholarship. Despite the often limited and incomplete nature of CSDP reforms produced by intergovernmental negotiations, we have witnessed a progressive deepening of CSDP cooperation and a widening of its tasks and instruments beyond that which EU member states have initially been willing to concede (Smith, 2004). Why have EU leaders responded to major external challenges and crises with incomplete institutional reforms? Intergovernmentalist accounts of CSDP have emphasised the central role of member states and the institutional constraints of intergovernmental CFSP negotiations, which require unanimity for all major decisions (Hoffmann, 2000; Wagner, 2003). In this view, sovereignty concerns and diverse national preferences are central hurdles to advancing integration. Conversely, neofunctionalists have highlighted mechanisms for achieving greater integration in CSDP and the adoption of substantive foreign policy outputs over time (Bergmann, 2019; Haroche, 2020; Riddervold, 2016). Unlike the dynamics emphasised by intergovernmental accounts, neofunctionalist mechanisms focus on the role of supranational agency, functional interdependencies among different EU policies, and socialisation and learning dynamics in transgovernmental policy networks (Smith, 2017).

Both intergovernmental and neofunctionalist approaches account for important aspects of the integration process in the CSDP domain. Yet, by themselves they provide only partial answers to the wider pattern of integration that is marked both by moments of stalemate and periods of progress and escape from intergovernmental constraints. The fact that intergovernmentalist and neofunctionalist explanations are frequently juxtaposed in the existing scholarship on CSDP results in a partial and disjointed account of the evolution of CSDP. The failing forward approach connects different integration dynamics through time in a ‘cyclical manner’ (see Jones et al., 2021). Striving for bridge-building and synthesis, it shifts our attention to the importance of institutional incompleteness, crisis and policy failure in the process of European integration. As Freudlsperger (2020) notes, the failing forward approach ‘shows how hard intergovernmental bargain produces incomplete and hence crisis-prone governance structures that eventually propel integration forward’.
The theoretical argument connects the failing forward approach to CSDP in six main steps. The argument suggests that (i) critical decisions in EU integration are driven by far-reaching crises that challenge the institutional status quo and enhance the pressure to find a solution and the scope for political compromise among member states. If a crisis situation is widely considered as a challenge to the EU institutional status quo, we speak of ‘institutional EU-crisis’ (see Falkner, 2016; Zimmermann, 1979, p. 69) – in contrast to the management of external crises that are at the core of the day-to-day business of CSDP. In such an institutional crisis, pivotal member states that hold the strongest preference intensity concerning CSDP institutional change act as coalition organisers (see Henke, 2019, p. 902).

Yet, given the important institutional constraints of EU policymaking it is assumed that (ii) the EU’s responses to such institutional crises and challenges through short-term bargains result in ‘lowest common denominator’ solutions that produce incomplete institutions, constraining the EU’s capacity for effective action (Wagner, 2003, p. 577). These lowest common denominator solutions reflect the divergence of EU member states’ preferences, forcing them to settle on the minimum compromise solution (Jones et al., 2016, p. 1027) that, in intergovernmental domains such as CFSP/CSDP, are shaped by powerful countries like France, Germany and, until recently, the UK (Hofmann, 2013; Pohl, 2015). By incomplete institutions, we refer to a situation where the EU is unable to realise its stated ambitions and objectives because of institutional shortcomings and limitations, even though a failure to do so usually does not amount to an immediate ‘institutional crisis’. However, more profound challenges to the institutional status quo may arise when salient international developments and external crises expose significant gaps and shortcomings in CSDP’s existing institutional framework.

Once steps towards upgraded, yet still incomplete institutions have been made, they are expected to (iii) open up new opportunities for neofunctional dynamics, which can advance integration both in terms of ‘deepening’, which relates to institution-building and a shift of authority to the EU level, and ‘widening’ in the sense of increasing the scope of the EU’s competencies (Majone, 2014, p. 91). We distinguish three neofunctionalist dynamics relevant for the failing forward argument: First, ‘cultivated spillover’ relates to situations where supranational EU actors benefiting from integration promote policy initiatives that expand their own tasks. Second, ‘functional spillover’ concerns functional pressures emanating from situations in which progress in an integrated policy sector cannot be successfully achieved without extending integration to new, related sectors. It may also occur when the policy goals pursued in a little or non-integrated sector can be more effectively pursued with the support of legal and policy instruments located in more integrated, related sectors (Haroche, 2020, p. 857).
Third, previous integration steps might create sites for elite ‘socialisation’ and ‘experiential learning’ that have been described as ‘political spillover’ (Lindberg & Scheingold, 1970, p. 119). Research on CSDP has shown that deepening institutional cooperation has led to the emergence of trans-governmental networks in CSDP institutions, marked by a culture of cooperation and a sense of common purpose (Alecu de Flers et al., 2011; Mérand et al., 2011). This is important, as a Europeanised elite in institutions can be expected to seek to learn from the experience of policy feedbacks and suboptimal outcomes. Experiential learning may lead to a situation in which incomplete institutions create policy feedback effects that are then incorporated into subsequent reform efforts at later stages in the failing forward cycle.

Although the failing forward logic assumes that these neofunctionalist dynamics have a potential to advance integration in the CSDP domain, they continue to meet intergovernmental constraints. The failing forward logic thus expects that (iv) subsequent reforms evolve in an incremental manner and remain partial and limited. Hence, (v & vi) the failing forward cycle is likely to repeat in the face of continuous institutional incompleteness. Table 1 summarises the main steps of the failing forward argument and its observable implications.

As a fusion of theoretical arguments, the failing forward approach has, by definition, some overlaps with the ‘pure’ versions of liberal intergovernmentalism (LI) and neofunctionalism. However, there are also differences. From an LI perspective, we would expect integration dynamics to stem from the impetus of pivotal member states. Modified accounts of LI (Schimmelfennig, 2016) also highlight how crises facilitate convergence of member states’ interests. Yet, LI tends to focus on intergovernmental bargains, and does not account for the endogeneity of the integration process. Hence, a major difference with the failing forward approach is that we would neither expect significant dynamics ‘in-between’ major negotiations from a LI perspective (Schimmelfennig, 2016, p. 191f.), nor assume that such dynamics structure later intergovernmental decisions.

Neofunctionalists expect that the interdependence of policy sectors creates functional pressures for further integrative steps to be taken up by decision-makers. Supranational institutions exploit these pressures and contribute to lifting agreements beyond the lowest common denominator by brokerage or through positions of authority within the EU’s decision-making system (Niemann, 2006, pp. 46–51). The failing forward argument is different insofar as it expects spillover pressures to operate within intergovernmental constraints and not to overcome the preference divergence that leads to lowest common denominator solutions among member states. Moreover, the failing forward approach assumes that the EU’s initial
response is dominated by intergovernmental bargains, with neofunctional dynamics emerging only subsequently.

The remainder of this article probes the explanatory power of the failing forward argument in relation to EU military and civilian crisis management, whilst also contrasting it with core expectations of ‘pure’ liberal intergovernmentalist and neofunctionalist explanations.

**Table 1.** Main elements and observable implications of failing forward in CSDP.

| Phases of integration process in CSDP | Causal sequence of failing forward dynamics in CSDP | Observable implications |
|--------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------|-------------------------|
| intergovernmental negotiations      | (i) Major international events and crisis produce fundamental pressure to upgrade institutions and enhance the scope for EU-level compromise, but (ii) intergovernmental conflict over scope of institutional innovations | (i) A crisis being widely considered by EU actors and member states as challenging the institutional status quo and as enhancing pressure for institutional innovations; Pivotal EU member states act as coalition organizers (ii) diverse set of preferences among member states; intense negotiations result in minimum compromise solutions |
| in-between major intergovernmental negotiations | (iii) functional pressures, supranational entrepreneurship, and experiential learning, meeting intergovernmental constraints; (iv) spillover pressures and policy feedback incorporated into institutional designs (incremental steps) | (iii) existing functional interdependencies leading to dysfunctions, and policy-makers regard these functional logics as plausible/compelling (functional spillover); Supranational actors preferring further integration and acting as policy entrepreneurs through promotional brokerage or positions of centrality in the EU’s political system (cultivated spillover); Changes in procedures and capabilities in CSDP as a result of new information and experiences (experiential learning); Continuous preference divergence and lack of joint willingness for major reforms among member states (intergovernmental constraints) (iv) ‘piecemeal’ policy reforms that only resolve partially institutional incompleteness |
| intergovernmental negotiations | (v) Renewed institutional EU-crisis because of continuous institutional incompleteness; (vi) Experiences and incremental reforms of previous phase inform and structure the response to the renewed institutional crisis ‘failing forward’ cycle continues | (v) EU actors and member states consider a crisis as challenging the institutional status quo and as enhancing pressure for institutional innovations; Pivotal EU member states act as coalition organizers (vi) Institutional reforms reflect previous experiences and institutional innovation. |

Source: Own compilation.
CSDP integration in times of multiple crises

European integration was extended to military and security issues only when it became apparent in the early 1990s that the EU’s foreign policy lacked the institutions, instruments and autonomy to confront the post-Cold War situation. In particular, US demands for a greater European involvement in regional security and the EU’s inability to address the instability caused by the violent breakup of former Yugoslavia resulted in a broadly shared view that EU foreign policy faced an ‘institutional crisis’. Still, despite the widely shared realisation that the EU needed to overcome substantive institutional shortcomings to address security threats and challenges collectively, fundamental differences remained among member states with regard to national interests, strategic outlooks and security identities (Pohl, 2015, pp. 29–36).

The CSDP constituted a challenging undertaking from the outset. The European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP), the predecessor of the CSDP, was limited and incomplete. Decision-making was strictly intergovernmental, with the unanimity rule applying to all major decisions, and the policy was weakly institutionalised and lacked basic capabilities. The 2009 Treaty of Lisbon established the CSDP and introduced important innovations, including a mutual assistance and solidarity clause, the creation of a framework for Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) and the expansion of the so-called Petersberg tasks (Smith, 2017). Still, a lack of member state agreement and support limited the ambitions of key Lisbon Treaty reforms.

The emergence of multiple challenges has amplified the pressure to upgrade CSDP. To the south, the EU faces instability in the Middle East and North Africa, including violent conflicts in Syria and Libya that have contributed to the ‘migration crisis’. To the east, the EU confronts an increasingly assertive Russia, which violated the European security order through its illegal annexation of Crimea in 2014 and its destabilisation of Eastern Ukraine. These challenges coincided with a less coherent and predictable US foreign policy. Against this backdrop, the EU’s 2016 Global Strategy considered these multiple threats faced by the EU as an ‘institutional-crisis’ that threatens the European project, demanding a more rapid, effective and capable CSDP (European Union, 2016, pp. 47–48).

Case study: EU military training missions and the European Peace Facility

The EU has established itself as an actor in military crisis management, taking important steps to upgrade its institutions and capabilities. These include the formation of EU Battlegroups and institutional innovations, such as the creation of a Military Planning and Conduct Capability (Peen Rodt, 2014; Reykers, 2019) and the deployment of EU military training missions (EUTM). In 2010, the EU launched its first CSDP military training mission, EUTM
Somalia. Whereas previously deployed CSDP military operations primarily focused on traditional *peacekeeping* tasks, the primary objective of EUTM Somalia has been *military capacity building*. The EU deployed military training missions to Mali in 2013 (EUTM Mali) and Central African Republic in 2016 (EUTM RCA), making military capacity-building a main component of its foreign and security policy toolbox. The introduction of CSDP military training missions in Somalia and Mali was embedded in the EU’s regional strategies for the Sahel and the Horn of Africa, both emphasising terrorism and organised crime as threats to the EU’s own security (Council of the EU, 2011a, p. 6, 2011b, p. 1).

**An incomplete governance framework for EU military training missions**

The introduction of EU military training missions testified of the EU’s ambition to complement its civilian efforts to support security sector reform (SSR) in partner countries. However, EU policy-makers soon realised that the CSDP governance framework established in the 1990s was fragmented and incomplete. A central challenge was the lack of effective financial instruments for training missions; the Athena mechanism to fund common costs incurred by EU military personnel, the Instrument contributing to Stability and Peace (IcSP), and the African Peace Facility (APF) did not allow for the provision of military equipment to partner countries (interviews 2, 3, 6, 13).

**Policy feedback, functional pressures and supranational policy initiative**

The gap between the CSDP framework and existing financial instruments resulted in ineffective policy outcomes, as the EU did not have the full set of instruments necessary to implement its military training missions. The EU’s partners in Somalia and Mali confronted equipment shortages (interviews 10, 20). The EU’s own assessment concluded that the Somalian army’s lack of equipment and infrastructure had ‘a negative impact on the effectiveness of the training and carried a reputational cost for the EU’ (European Union, 2015, p. 6). These shortcomings were more severe in the case of EUTM Mali, where EU officials reported an ‘impoverished and disorganised’ Malian army that lacked uniforms, communication tools, water tanks or protective gear (European Union, 2015, p. 5; Fletcher, 2013). According to EU officials, these shortages, not to speak of the lack of adequate weapons and ammunition, threatened the strategic goals of the mission (interview 10).

Policy feedback from actors on the ground created functional pressures to bridge the gaps between CSDP and development policy and to reform the governance framework for EUTMs to allow the funding of equipment and infrastructure for partner countries. In this way, policy feedbacks and learning played a role in identifying functional interdependencies and important reform requirements (interviews 1, 10, 20).
EU member states quickly responded to these functional pressures. At the European Council of December 2013, Germany presented its ‘enhance and enable’ initiative for military capacity-building as a role model for a similar EU initiative (Tardy, 2015, p. 2). In its conclusions, the European Council confirmed the need to support partner countries, ‘so that they can increasingly prevent or manage crises by themselves’ (European Council, 2013, pp. 3–4). Responding to the request by the member states, the Joint Communication on Capacity Building in Support of Security and Development (CBSD) of April 2015 by the Commission and the HR/VP proposed to enhance the EU’s military capacity building capabilities through either creating a dedicated instrument or adapting existing instruments.

**Intergovernmental bargaining and incomplete reform: failing forward towards a European Peace Facility?**

The eighteen-month negotiations on the implementation of the CBSD resulted in the December 2017 agreement to reform the IcSP, to allow for the provision of non-lethal equipment and infrastructure to military actors. The agreement represented a narrowing of the scope of the initial proposal (interviews 19, 20). It reflected the maximum degree of compromise that could be achieved among the member states. France and Germany led the group of member states within the Council that supported a broad scope for CBSD measures, including the provision of lethal equipment if needed, as well as funding CBSD through an arrangement within CFSP (interviews 2, 3, 6, 19). The French government pushed for CBSD out of its interest to share the financial burden of SSR activities in conflict theatres such as Mali among EU member states (Tardy, 2015; interviews 6, 19). The more CBSD-sceptic group of member states included Ireland, Luxembourg and Sweden, countries traditionally sceptical of strong interlinkages between development and security policy initiatives (Council of the EU, 2017, p. 12; Loevin, 2016; interviews 2, 6, 13). These countries aligned with the Commission’s legal argument that CBSD military capacity-building activities could only be funded out of the EU’s budget if they could be linked to development policy objectives and if the provision of lethal equipment was excluded. Negotiations within the Council resulted in the lowest common denominator outcome, an agreement to implement CBSD measures of limited scope through the IcSP – a budgetary instrument legally rooted in development policy – but to exclude the provision of lethal equipment. This legislative process culminated in the adoption of the amended IcSP Regulation of December 2017 (European Union, 2017).

On 14 December 2017, two days after the IcSP reform was adopted, the European Council requested ‘that the Council adopt, in spring 2018, a recommendation on a new dedicated instrument covering requirements for Capacity Building in support of Security and Development after 2020’ (European Council, 2017, p. 1). Jointly with the European Commission, then HR
Federica Mogherini presented a proposal for a Council decision establishing an EPF on 13 June 2018, which was welcomed by the Foreign Affairs Council 12 days later (Council of the EU, 2018a, p. 4). The EPF, placed outside the EU’s budgetary framework, would allow the EU to fund ‘capacity building activities in support of third countries’ armed forces in pursuit of CFSP objectives’, including the provision of weapons and ammunition (European Union, 2018, p. 2).

The EPF proposal responds to functional pressures to change the EU’s funding structures even after the reform of the lCSP. Those pressures have persisted due to the inability of EU military training missions to stabilise the security situation in the Sahel and thus to mitigate migration. The security situation in Mali, for example, has steadily deteriorated since 2016, putting into doubt the effectiveness of the EU’s security assistance efforts (Tull, 2020). Functional pressures to change the governance framework for military capacity building can also be seen in a statement HR Borrell gave with regard to EU involvement in the Sahel in February 2020: ‘We need guns, we need arms, we need military capacities and that is what we are going to help provide to our African friends because their security is our security’ (Borrell, cited by Nielsen, 2020).

In the EPF negotiations, EU member states’ preferences diverged visibly (Deneckere, 2019, p. 6). Whereas France and Germany led the group of progressive member states, Denmark, Malta and the Netherlands reportedly opposed providing lethal equipment, while Ireland and Sweden expressed reservations and pushed for strong safeguards. Some states also saw the EPF as an opportunity for their arms-export industry (Nielsen, 2019; interview 20). On 22 March 2021, the Council adopted a decision establishing the EPF, allowing for the provision of lethal equipment to third countries. However, member states also agreed on ‘thorough risk assessment and strong safeguards’ to be installed as a means to accommodate those states that are sceptical about the provision of lethal equipment to third countries (Council of the EU, 2021).

In sum, the developments resulting in the 2017 lCSP reform and leading up to the creation of the EPF in 2021 closely match the stages of the failing forward cycle, with intergovernmental constraints resulting in incomplete and crisis-prone governance structures that propelled integration forward. Whether the creation of the EPF will enable member states to ‘escape’ the failing forward cycle by completing integration of EU military crisis management, or rather lead to another institutional crisis in the near future remains to be seen.

**The Civilian CSDP Compact: failing forward towards strengthening EU crisis management**

The civilian CSDP has long received limited political attention from member states, the exception being its Nordic champions Sweden and Finland.
It was set up with an ‘incomplete’ institutional framework whose structures developed step-by-step (Tammikko & Ruhomäki, 2019). Soon after the CSDP became operational in 2003, it became apparent that civilian CSDP suffered from institutional deficits and shortages of capabilities and resources, including difficulties in recruitment and deployment of qualified personnel (Juncos, 2020, p. 83). To address these shortcomings, efforts were made to strengthen civilian crisis management, leading to the establishment of new EU-level structures, enhanced coordination mechanisms between CSDP and Community policies, and a widening of tasks (Dijkstra, 2018, p. 3; Tamminnen, 2017, pp. 25–28).

Against the backdrop, reform efforts produced the Civilian CSDP Compact (CCC) of 2018. Marking an ambitious and far-reaching reform agenda (Böttcher & Wolf, 2019, p. 3), the CCC widened the scope of civilian missions to issues such as irregular migration, cyber-security, hybrid threats, terrorism and radicalisation, organised crime, and border management and security (Pirozzi & Musi, 2019, p. 2). Moreover, the Compact laid out strategic guidelines, commitments and proposals for action that should lead to a more capable, effective and joined-up CSDP, covering areas such as capability development, financing, recruitment and training of personnel and inter-institutional coordination (Council of the EU, 2018b). As with the case of military crisis management, the developments leading up to the CCC took place against the backdrop of acute problem-solving pressures that exposed severe gaps and shortcomings in the institutional framework of CSDP crisis management.

**Policy feedback, functional pressures and supranational entrepreneurship**

When the CCC was established, the EU could draw on substantive experiences and lessons learned from 15 years of civilian crisis management. From the outset, the EU had invested in a sophisticated system of lessons-learned processes (Smith, 2017). Following the Lisbon Treaty, the EEAS, together with the Council Secretariat, pushed for a new institutional mechanisms, including the ‘Crisis Management Goalkeeper’ facility and mechanisms located in the CSDP Lessons Management Group, the EEAS Crisis Management and Planning Directorate, and the Civilian Planning and Conduct Capability (CPCC) (Rieker et al., 2016, pp. 6–12; Tamminnen, 2017, pp. 31–33).

These efforts sparked a number of policy reforms in civilian CSDP, contributing to the broadening of mission mandates that initially proved ill-suited to the wider political context of the missions, which was further institutionalised by the extended task catalogue for civilian missions enshrined in the CCC. Experiential learning also strengthened coordination within the EU and with external actors and facilitated the establishment of new material
resources such as the CSDP Warehouse, the CPCC, and the CMPD (Smith, 2017, pp. 158–172).

The process leading to the CCC involved even broader efforts to learn about institutional challenges of civilian CSDP (interviews 21, 22). The EEAS organised stakeholder workshops to assess previous experiences and to identify reform needs. Moreover, the EEAS engaged relevant national ministries to learn about the domestic administrative and legal governance context for member states’ capacity to effectively contribute to civilian CSDP crisis management (interviews 22, 23). Improving national assets and mechanisms became a central ambition of the CCC, committing the member states to develop ‘National Implementation Plans’ and exchange best practices. The Berlin-based European Centre of Excellence for Civilian Crisis Management (CoE), established in February 2020, supports the implementation of key commitments under the CCC.

The CCC not only draws on past experience, but also responds to the functional pressures of a changing security environment. Highlighting the growing nexus between external and internal EU security, the CCC incorporates an extension of civilian CSDP tasks, including issues ‘linked to irregular migration, hybrid threats, cyber security, terrorism and radicalisation, organised crime, border management and maritime security’ (Council of the EU, 2017, p. 8; 2018b, p. 3). This emphasis was already visible in the Global Strategy (2016). Among these new security issues, migration-related tasks gained particular relevance in the context of the 2015 refugee crisis (Bendiek & Bossong, 2019).

Facing strong pressures to provide a swift response – and aware of the fact that the ‘root causes’ of migration could only be alleviated in the longer term – EU institutions and member states looked for existing foreign policy instruments (interview 21, 23). Responding to those pressures, civilian CSDP missions – such as EUCAP Sahel Niger, and EUBAM Libya – widened their mandates, adding the fight against irregular migration and the disruption of organised crime, including human trafficking, to their task descriptions (European Commission, 2015, p. 5).

At the institutional level, the CCC’s broadening of CSDP required new mechanisms for cooperation across a range of other actors. In the area of migration, new links developed between CSDP and actors from the field of Justice and Home Affairs (JHA) (Pirozzi, 2018) who sought to utilise this ‘window of opportunity’ to draw on civilian CSDP capabilities complementary to JHA instruments and to benefit from the access to third countries and on-the-ground experience that civilian CSDP missions had established (interview 23). Recent examples of these linkages include the ‘visiting expert concept’, which allows experts from the European Border and Coastguard agency FRONTEX to be deployed on CSDP missions. Another example is CSDP training, where the CCC Joint Action Plan advances cooperation and coordination
between CSDP and other actors. In particular, the EU Civilian Training Group is charged with promoting an effective use of courses provided by different actors, including the European Security and Defence College (ESDC), national training institutes, and several JHA agencies, including FRONTEX (European Commission and High Representative, 2019).

EU member states have been a key driver behind the strengthening of the linkages between migration policy objectives and civilian CSDP (Parkes, 2016, p. 2). Simultaneously, supranational actors were instrumental in advancing civilian CSDP during discussions prior to the adoption of the CCC (interview 21). The High Representative played an important role in proposing the strategic direction of the Compact that was finally adopted in November 2018. Upon the invitation of the Foreign Affairs Council in November 2017, the High Representative presented a Concept Paper on Strengthening Civilian CSDP as well as a Civilian Capabilities Development Plan (CCDP) (European Union, 2018, pp. 4–5; see also European Parliament, 2019, p. 7).

**The CCC as an incomplete policy outcome – moving towards another failing forward cycle?**

The evidence suggests that functional pressures emanating from the EU’s external migration policy in response to the 2015 refugee crisis, coupled with supranational entrepreneurship exerted by the HR/VP and the EEAS, were crucial to member states’ understanding that a major step forward in civilian CSDP was needed. Moreover, institutionalised policy feedback loops and experiential learning produced important insights that informed subsequent reforms, culminating in the CCC. However, the reform commitments envisaged in the CCC will not resolve fundamental institutional shortcomings: CSDP remains under firm control of EU member states, with civilian missions depending on voluntary staff contributions and decision-making for launching a mission requiring unanimity (see Juncos, 2020). Ambitious plans such as the proposal by Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker for the improved use of qualified majority voting in CSDP-related decisions faced strong opposition from several member states, including Cyprus, Greece, Hungary and Italy (Haakansson, 2019). Similarly, the fact that member states were unwilling to agree on binding targets for individual contributions to civilian CSDP missions makes it difficult to reverse the trend of declining staff contributions to civilian missions (Smit, 2019, p. 3).

**Conclusions**

As our analysis demonstrates, the long-term integrative dynamics in EU military and civilian crisis management are a good match with the logic of the failing forward approach, marked by a cycle of crisis, followed by incomplete
institutional reforms and subsequent, yet again incomplete, efforts to remedy institutional shortcomings and policy failure.

In the evolution of European instruments to support military capacity building, the evidence suggests that functional pressures and supranational entrepreneurship, coupled with learning from CSDP operations, best explains the 2017 IcSP reform to implement CBSD. The proposal for the EPF and subsequent negotiations among member states demonstrate the cyclical character of policy dynamics in the military branch of CSDP crisis management. Concerning civilian CSDP, functional pressures emanating from new security challenges, most notably in the context of the 2015 migration crisis, coupled with supranational entrepreneurship exerted by the HR and the EEAS, were crucial for member states’ realisation that a major step forward was needed. Moreover, policy feedback loops and experiential learning informed incremental reforms, culminating in the Civilian CSDP Compact. However, the Compact also demonstrates the limits of those dynamics, as member states were unwilling to agree on more substantive reforms, such as binding targets for their individual contributions to civilian CSDP missions. Intergovernmental bargaining led to another incomplete policy outcome, which will constrain CSDP.

Our application of the failing forward approach to the ‘high politics’ domain (Hoffmann, 1966, p. 882) of CSDP points to the potential for combining neofunctionalist and intergovernmentalist theories. Whereas LI accounts of CSDP have focused on discrete events in the evolution of the policy, the failing forward approach reveals the broader, long-term patterns behind those individual decision-making events and connects them to dynamics in related policy domains through the integration of functional spillover pressures and experiential learning. Taking into account this longer time horizon allows for a deeper understanding of the role of intergovernmental decision-making processes in CSDP. Furthermore, while our findings resonate well with recent claims about the creeping supranationalisation of EU foreign and security policies (Bergmann, 2019; Haroche, 2020; Riddervold, 2016), a failing forward lens puts those dynamics into context and exposes the limits that intergovernmental bargains may set for supranational entrepreneurship.

The case studies also point to the importance of policy feedbacks and experiential learning in the day-to-day business of crisis management. These areas have not been sufficiently considered by the failing forward framework. Incomplete institutions and reforms have resulted in significant limitations, capability gaps and policy failures in the management of CSDP military operations and civilian missions. Building on mechanisms for experiential learning has been central to identifying institutional shortcomings and functional interdependencies and to feeding lessons learned back into the institutional reform process.
Note
1. More ambitious reform efforts also faced legal hurdles, as the Commission argued against the legality of providing weapons and ammunition through EU budgetary funds (interviews 2, 6, 13, 17).

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Annex I. Institutional affiliation of interviewees

1. European Commission, June 2017
2. European Commission, June 2017
3. European Commission, June 2017
4. European External Action Service, June 2017
5. European Commission, June 2017
6. EU member state, June 2017
7. S&D Group, European Parliament, June 2017
8. GUE/NGL Group, European Parliament, June 2017
9. European External Action Service, June 2017
10. European External Action Service, June 2017
11. European Peacebuilding Liaison Office (EPLO), June 2017
12. The European People’s Party (EPP), European Parliament, July 2017
13. EU member state official, July 2017
14. European External Action Service, July 2017
15. EU member state official, July 2017
16. EU member state official, August 2017
17. The Greens, European Parliament, August 2017
18. European Commission, August 2017
19. EU member state official, December 2017
20. European External Action Service, May 2019
21. EU member state official and formerly European External Action Service, August 2020
22. European External Action Service, August 2020
23. European External Action Service, August 2020