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State Failure – A Rationale for EU Foreign Policy?

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'Failed states' have come to be a popular catchword for academics and policy-makers alike. In the view of Western governments and international institutions, failed states do not meet the conditions for achieving economic and social development and at the same time provide fertile grounds for violent conflict and non-state actors involved in international crime. The European Union has a long-standing relation with the countries of sub-Saharan Africa, many of which are characterised as failed. This paper seeks to analyze whether the EU's rhetorical commitment to tackle state failure translates into a coherent approach dealing with the root causes of state fragility and asks for the factors explaining the EU's engagement with the problems facing such states. By comparison of European policies towards the Democratic Republic of Congo, Sierra Leone and the Central African Republic, it is argued that the EU's response to state failure evolves in an incoherent manner biased towards conflict situations rather than being guided by a more general concern for fragility. The analysis suggests that EU involvement is mainly driven by coinciding interests at member state and EU level.

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Introduction[1]

In 2009, the sharp increase of piracy off the Somali Coast has put the issue of 'failed states' once more on the agenda of Western governments. The persistence of armed robberies is seen as consequence of the failure to build a Somali state able and willing to deliver core functions such as security, governance and basic services to its population.

Commonly referred to as 'failed states', countries showing similar symptoms to the Somali example attract global attention for at least two interrelated aspects of international concern. First, weak states pose a particular challenge for Western states and development agencies to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (World Bank IEG 2006:83-4). The second field in which weak states have raised global concern is international security. On the one hand, this relates to the onset of civil war and therewith also the threat of regional destabilisation, which is treated as an indicator of fragility in the relevant literature. On the other hand, weak states are linked to the emergence of non-state actors being tied into a net of trans-national organised crime. 9/11 has reinforced the idea of unregulated territories serving as 'safe havens' for terrorists to regroup and to take advantage of illegal trans-border activities.

In both policy areas, the European Union and its member states have at times appeared to be significant actors in sub-Saharan Africa and have acknowledged the problems facing weak states. The European Security Strategy (Council 2003b:4) lists state failure as one of five key threats to international security and in 2007 the Council concluded on a Commission Communication outlining an "EU Response to Situations of Fragility" (Council 2007b, European Commission 2007). However, little is known about the EU's policies towards fragile states and an empirical assessment of whether its rhetorical commitment to assist countries in situations of fragility translates into policy output is lacking so far. This paper seeks to contribute to filling this gap. It asks whether the failed state context informs the EU's approach to the respective countries and more specifically, which factors can explain the launch of European policy responses to state fragility.

The paper proceeds as follows. In the first part, the notion of 'failed states' will be disentangled, showing that the term as well as the concept are highly problematic. The second part provides an overview of why the EU is involved in African fragile states in the first place by reviewing the history of EU-Africa relations. It demonstrates how the contractual cooperation evolved over time with a politicised and securitised rationale. This has informed the "EU's Response to Situations of Fragility", which will be introduced next. The third part empirically examines the EU's policies towards the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Sierra Leone and the Central African Republic (CAR). The analysis finds that state fragility does not serve as a strong rationale for EU policies and that European involvement is mainly motivated by national interests based on political and historical reasons which coincide with interests at European level to establish the EU as a foreign policy actor. The paper concludes with a brief discussion.

Disentangling Africa's 'Failed State'

The African state has prompted a wide range of labels. Amongst others, scholars have described it as 'weak', 'failed', 'poorly performing', 'quasi', or even 'collapsed' (Jackson 1987, Rotberg 2004, Helman and Ratner 1993). Though an agreed upon definition is lacking, what is

commonly assumed under these labels is the breakdown of state institutions and the inability of society to refill the emerging gap due to low levels of socio-political cohesion (Gros 1996). As withering governance structures leave power up for grabs, the loss of the state's monopoly over the means of force becomes apparent with local groups engaging in armed struggle and taking control over parts of the state territory (Zartman 1995:8). These processes are related to the rise of illicit trans-border activity such as trade in weapons or drugs and human trafficking, the spreading of informal markets and deepening societal fragmentation.

A closer look at the term 'failed state' reveals that it is misleading and normatively biased. The notion takes the classic western sociological model developed by Max Weber as its levelling rule, according to which a state is "that human community that (successfully) claims the monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force within a given territory" (quoted in DiJohn 2008:3). The three preconditions identified by Weber, namely territorial integrity, the state's monopoly on the use of coercion and citizenship, however, do not fit well with African realities where the state is thus less present and solid in assuming basic functions such as security, welfare, and representation.[2] Clapham (1999:6) thus concludes that instead of taking the state as the focal point, one needs to look beyond it to understand where society turns to instead. Most attempts to define the 'failed state', however, maintain a state-centric approach and refer to a set of functions the modern state is supposed to fulfil. The failure of many African states to live up to these expectations equates in much of the discourse to the failure of the state. Doornbos (2006:2) thus correctly concludes that it are the models that fail rather than the state.

Though the flaws of the term 'failed state' do not necessarily render the concept futile, its theorisation remains weak and underdeveloped. The policy-oriented failed state literature commonly presupposes that countries can be located at a continuum ranging from 'consolidated' Weberian states to 'failed' states (Andersen 2005:10), whereas the respective locations are identified according to a set of empirical criteria rather than processes. Therefore, the approach fails to understand the conditions leading to failure and frequently confuses its causes and consequences.

Another problem with the concept is its inflationary use. The distinct fields sharing an interest in the failed state – human rights, development and security – refer to different dimensions of state failure applying the same or similar terms. In a review of different definitions Moreno Torres and Anderson (2004:28) conclude that the states termed 'failed' may in fact be "unresponsive to the poor, […] may be simply poor performers, some may be autocratic, some may be conflict-ridden". This renders the application of the term dubious when applied to countries such as Rwanda, which was frequently termed 'collapsed' during the 1994 genocide. In fact, the Rwandan state was not disintegrating but a persistent and potent force pursuing "the task of murdering many of its people with hideous efficiency" (Clapham 2002:776). As the concept remains fluid, the membership of the category changes according to its use while at the same time the term itself keeps changing. In the EU's official language, 'failed states' (Council 2003b) became 'fragile states' and eventually turned into 'situations of fragility' (Faria and Ferreira 2007:4-5).

Confined to pointing to a number of specific problems posed by failed states, the concept in practise tends to trigger similar responses on side of foreign actors engaged in development or conflict management. Though Western governments and international institutions routinely stress the need to adapt to local circumstances, the documents issued on fragile states indicate

that the international community generally pursues similar policies towards all states it deems failing (e.g. Council of the European Union 2007b:sec.13). This demonstrates that the discourse on failed states is not simply words and ideas, but also enables action and guides policies. Regardless of the uncertainty of the concept, it is therefore possible to analyse these actions based on the definition of the actor itself.

The EU as an Actor in African Fragile States

The following section provides a brief account of the development and security cooperation between the EU and Africa. From these activities follows the EU's concern for fragile states and consequently its policy response, which are presented after.

EU-Africa Relations

The EU's relations with Africa date back to its very beginnings and were largely based upon colonial ties. With the accession of new member states, preferential trade agreements and financial aid under the Yaoundé and later Lomé Conventions were extended to 68 countries in 1990. By the mid 1990s, the introduction of economic and political conditionality into the cooperation indicated a new direction in the EU's development policy. This came along with a general trend to link development with principles of democracy and good governance (Bagoyoko and Gibert 2007), but also reflected the EU's new optimism about Europe's international role with the aspiration to "assert its identity on the international scene" (Treaty of the European Union, Art.B2). Within a short time after political conditionality was introduced into economic development programmes, however, emerging crises and the outburst of violent conflict in West Africa and the Great Lakes Region challenged the link between democracy and stability in African countries (Söderberg and Ohlson 2003:26-30). As a consequence, a security dimension was added to development policy and became an essential part of the Cotonou framework which replaced Lomé in 2000 and within which current EU-Africa relations mainly take place.

Alongside the politisation and securitisation of development policy, issues of conflict, human rights and democracy have themselves become more prominent. These changes appeared at a time when the EU expressed the desire to strengthen its profile as a global actor and was developing an integrated foreign and security policy. The Union has increasingly manifested a priority commitment to conflict prevention and resolution, predicated upon targeting the root causes of instability with an emphasis on political causes of conflict (Youngs 2006). Thereby, it has advocated a long-term and integrated approach, comprising the mainstreaming of conflict prevention objectives into all fields of external relations, whereas direct initiatives range from humanitarian activities to institution building (Bagoyoko and Gibert 2007:12-5). Though crisis management, conflict prevention and peace-building measures are still largely based on Community instruments under the first pillar, the EU has expanded the means at its disposal. Within the framework of the European Foreign and Security Policy (ESDP), independent civilian and military capabilities have been developed and permanent institutional and operational structures as part of a wider process of reforming and strengthening the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) have been established.[3] In 2003, the EU declared itself able to undertake the 'Petersberg Tasks' adopted in the Treaty of Amsterdam (1997), which comprise humanitarian and rescue tasks, peace-keeping and operations of combat forces in crisis

management, including peace-making. Instruments for short-term actions in situations of crisis include, amongst others, political dialogue and diplomacy initiatives, sanctions, police forces and security sector reform instruments. On the military side, the EU places emphasis on low-scaled, rapidly deployable forces and in 2007 15 battelgroups were declared operative. Therewith, the EU sees itself well equipped to respond to multi-faceted security situations such as failed states (Council 2003b:7).

Despite the longstanding relation between the EU and African countries, the ambition to formulate a coherent policy towards Africa was for the first time expressed at the Africa-Europe Summit in 2000. In 2005, the Council endorsed a new Africa Strategy which served as a framework for the Strategic Partnership concluded at the EU-AU Summit in Lisbon in 2007 (Council 2007b). The Lisbon documents define only few new areas of cooperation and refer to the problem of fragile statehood only briefly as a matter where "reaching a common understanding and agreeing on steps that could be taken" is aimed at (ibid: sec.28). However, the partnership covers a wider range of issues under the headings peace and security, governance and human rights, trade and regional integration and development. It shows a stronger degree of commitment than previous documents did and for the first time lays down principles with a prescriptive character for EU member states (S.Schmidt 2008:13, 16). Therefore, it constitutes a significant step in EU-Africa relations.

The EU's Approach towards Fragile States

The previous sections have shown how security and development issues have informed the EU's approach towards fragile states. Western governments, international organisations and development agencies widely agree in their strategies on state failure, which are geared to prevent and reverse collapse. Following the principle "remain engaged" (OECD/DAC 2002:6) rather than "let them fail", the approach rests on the assumption that it is possible to reconstruct collapsed states within the old borders (Herbst 1996). The strategies include institution (re)building, the enhancement of governance capacity and accountability, the delivery of basic services to the population, Security Sector Reforms (SSR) and the strengthening of civil society and 'change agents' (Debiel et al. 2007:11-40).

Various EU documents have referred to the issue of state fragility without offering a clear definition, though demanding that the specific context ought to inform policies related to development and conflict (European Commission 1999, Council 2003b, 2005). A paper specifically on the topic was put forward by the Commission in 2007, which was followed by Council Conclusions and a resolution by the European Parliament. In terms of conceptual clarity, however, the definition of fragility remains vague as it refers to "weak or failing structures and to situations where the social contract is broken due to the state's incapacity or unwillingness to deal with its basic functions, meet its obligations and responsibilities regarding the rule of law, protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms, security and safety of its population, poverty reduction, service delivery, the transparent and equitable management of resources and access to power" (Council 2007b:sec.2).

The Council has called upon the Commission to present an implementation plan for the concept which is expected for the end of 2009 and the approach is currently being put to a practice test in six pilot countries.[4] The Commission identifies three priority areas for the action plan, namely the EU speaking with one voice, coherence between the various instruments and aid

effectiveness.[5] As opposed to the US' approach focusing on security and short-term responses (USAID 2005), the EU is primarily concerned with development thus favouring long-term assistance (Council 2007b:sec.9). It mainly addresses aid-related issues; however, assistance is closely tied to political elements which are part of the Union's instability and conflict prevention policy. The EU shows a strong commitment to remain engaged and hold up principles of good governance and democratisation even in the most difficult situations. The Council explicitly states that democratic governance is a "key element to prevent and overcome fragility" (ibid: sec.12). In cases when the central government is not committed to such principles, the EU stresses the need to engage with non-state actors. Otherwise, the support of the government to enable it to perform basic state functions in order to build up legitimacy is seen as crucial to tackle instability. In this context, the Commission calls for greater resources to be allocated to "orphan fragile states" which receive little attention from donors (European Commission 2007:sec.4.2).

As related to security, the EU's conflict prevention and crisis management capacities are stressed whereas both Community and CFSP/ESDP instruments play an important role (ibid.:sec.4.6). The preferred framework for addressing fragility are the Country Strategy Papers (CSPs) agreed between third country governments and the Commission, through which aid is programmed under Cotonou. The EU also formally endorses the OECD's Principles for Good International Engagement in Fragile States (OECD/DAC 2007).

Therewith, the EU Response is not a distinct approach but a set of strategies and instruments already in place in development cooperation and under the policies relating to conflict, combined with the call to strengthen these principles and improve the instruments. The approach is strongly informed by the security-development nexus and seeks to strike a balance between long-term measures aimed at building effective and legitimate political systems on the one hand and quick and flexible responses to "specific features of fragility related to humanitarian aid and security" on the other hand (Council 2007b:sec.8). This balance thus serves as the levelling rule in assessing the EU's activities in failed states.

EU's Policies towards the DRC, Sierra Leone and CAR

The previous chapter has shown how historical relations with Africa as well as developments within the EU have conditioned the Union's concern for and its policies towards African states labelled fragile. In order to judge whether EU policies follow the rhetorical commitment to engage with the problems of state failure and to detect the factors accounting for the EU's engagement in preventing or reversing state failure, the Union's policies in three selected countries are analysed. These comprise the former Belgian colony DRC, the CAR as a former French colony and the formerly British Sierra Leone. They are part of different regional complexes and were further selected on the basis of a brief look at EU's involvement. In the DRC, the EU is highly visible whereas this is less so in Sierra Leone and the CAR, despite the fact that the latter recently witnessed the launch of an EU military operation. Importantly, all three countries feature a number of similarities which render the cases comparable. The selection is drawn from a list of fragile states that the EU has adopted in the context of its development policy and which is based on the World Bank's definition.[6] All three are members of the African, Caribbean and Pacific States group (ACP) and are referred to as fragile in other Commission documents as well as in the international discourse (Rotberg 2004). They can

adequately be described as states *unable* to provide basic services rather than primarily *unwilling*. All of them have experienced war and/or minor conflict since the end of the Cold War and are ranked at the bottom of the UN Human Development Index (UNDP 2007/2008).

The State Failure Context

As it is earmarked in the EU's Response to Situations of Fragility, the Commission remained present in all three countries under study also in precarious situations. In periods of suspension of cooperation, as in the DRC between 1992 and 2002 and in the CAR during two years following the coup of François Bozizé's in 2003, reduced funding was reoriented towards infrastructure and humanitarian programs (Kobia 2002:435-6, RCA-CE 2007:19, 21). In all three countries, the Union has resorted to NGOs on the one hand and on the other hand provided budget support in order to provide basic services to the populations, which is in line with the EU's stated approach.

For all three countries, the Commission is an important donor and points out that its development strategy has been informed by the prevalent 'fragile post-conflict' situation.[7] However, the CSPs, which are the preferred framework to deal with fragility, fail to comprehensively assess institutional weaknesses and priority needs for capacity building. The main areas to which EU funds have been allocated vary considerably between the three countries. The EC has engaged less in 'state building' and security in Sierra Leone and again less in the CAR, where this role was taken up by the former colonial powers.

Looking beyond development cooperation, the three countries under study again display rather different levels of EU involvement in tackling fragility. In the CAR and Sierra Leone, it is a European member state and more specifically the former colonial power that is most committed, whereas the DRC is showplace of the EU's most comprehensive approach on the continent.

In the DRC, a sizeable attempt to ensure some stability has been triggered by the EU's military intervention 'Artemis' in 2003, the EU's very first military operation outside Europe and the first mission to be conducted without NATO assets or planning. Artemis was deployed in the town of Bunia for the duration of ten weeks with the aim to restore security, allow UN troops to deploy and to facilitate the delivery of humanitarian aid (Council 2003a) after renewed fighting in parts of the DRC threatened peace-agreements that had ended prolonged violent conflicts in 2002.

Further on, the EU concentrated on supporting the electoral process and SSR efforts. The EU accounted for around 80% of the total costs of the election process and sent an observer mission which was deployed for the constitutional, legislative and Presidential elections between December 2005 and November 2006 (Hoebeke et al. 2007:6). During the initial post-conflict phase, the EU was instrumental in establishing the Congolese 'Unité de Police Intégrée' (UPI) which was to protect the personnel and infrastructure of the transitional government and to secure the elections in Kinshasa (Misser 2007:45-6). UPI was supported and monitored by the first civilian mission for crisis management in Africa (EUPOL Kinshasa), which comprised about 30 officers and was extended twice due to the detention of the elections. In 2007, EUPOL Kinshasa was replaced by EUPOL RD Congo providing technical assistance to Congolese officials within the police and the justice system (Gya and Jacquemet 2008:22). Relating specifically to the army, the EU has established another mission (EUSEC RDC) which comprises a small number of advisers working at several levels to rebuild the army and reform

its system of payment (Martinelli 2006:392-3). Support is further channelled through a DDR World Bank programme and through several member states' programmes mainly focusing on SSR (Hoebeke et al. 2007:5, 12-3). At the diplomatic front, EU representatives have been closely involved since the appointment of the first EU Special Representative for the Great Lakes Region in 1996 (see Grevi 2007).

Following a request of the UN, the EU launched a second military intervention in the DRC in support of the UN troops on the ground (MONUC) during the electoral period in 2006. EUFOR RD Congo was criticised for inaccurate limitations in its mandate and delays in its adoption (Howorth 2007:239), which was essentially due to German unease with sending its troops abroad and more specifically, to suspicions that behind-the-scene dealing placed it in a position in which it was unable to refuse the lead of the operation (Ehrhart 2007:11, Schmidt 2006). Thus the German Bundestag restricted the operation area to the relatively calm Kinshasa whereas troubles were more likely to arise in the east of the country (Haine and Giegerich 2006). Only a limited number of troops could be deployed on Congolese territory at a given time, with the rest being based in Gabon. As related to timing, it was feared that riots would break out after the announcement of the results, which was the time EUFOR RDC ended. Taking this lack of political will into consideration, the mission appears more like an attempt to reinforce the EU's credibility than a serious commitment to secure the nationwide elections. Nevertheless, taking the missions and the support provided by different budget lines together, the Union's involvement in the DRC adds up to a sizeable measure of assistance to bring about stability.

Sierra Leone is a rather different case of European involvement as the EU has played a limited role while the country has witnessed one of the most significant conflict-resolution and state-building engagements on part of the UK[8]. Following British military engagement from 2000 on, the Commission has somewhat stepped up its activity in state building and security issues though this engagement is restricted to technical aspects despite the concern that in doing so the underlying causes of the conflict are being disregarded (Sierra Leone-EC 2007:6). In the Council, political will to greater engagement has been rather weak, not least because the international community seemed to have concluded that Sierra Leone lies within the responsibility of its former colonial power. Thus West European governments negated the request of Blair and his Foreign Secretary, Robin Cook, to provide military assistance to the UN force monitoring the 1999 peace-agreement between the government and the rebel Revolutionary United Front (McSmith 2000). Subsequent EU Presidencies since 2001 have appointed a Representative to the Mano River Union countries (Sierra Leone, Liberia, Guinea, newly also Côte d'Ivoire); however, the Council did not appoint a Special Envoy.

European involvement in Sierra Leone has encompassed support for local and presidential elections in form of finances and two observer missions. As a more general response to the role of diamonds in the Mano River conflicts, the EU has backed the Kimberley Process Certification Scheme and in the same line launched its own Action Plan to facilitate the production of and trade in legal timber (Gibert 2007:38).[9] However, as related more generally to the trans-border links of Sierra Leone's conflict, the EU's commitment to the region has been limited, though an approach dealing with regional dynamics has been considered to be crucial (HRW 2005).

While it is clear that the fragile state context has not triggered a comprehensive approach on the part of the EU, it remains questionable to what extent Britain has envisaged an important role

for Europe. It did not, for instance, include the EU in the elaboration of Sierra Leone's running governance plan (Youngs 2006:343).

In the CAR, the EU's involvement in reversing state fragility is even slightly more limited than in Sierra Leone. The CSP of 2007 acknowledged that the EU's involvement in the country is effectively limited to development cooperation (RCA-CE 2007:27). In the country suffering from ongoing rebel activity and unlawful retaliatory attacks by the government forces, much has been left to France which remains present at many levels and continues to influence domestic events despite signs of decreasing willingness to bear responsibility (ICG 2007:20, 27). EU involvement in security matters includes financial support to the AU's Special Envoy to the CAR and the establishment of an AU liaison office in the capital in 2003 (Assanvo and Pout 2007:25). Furthermore, funds from the African Peace Facility have been allocated to the African peace-operation FOMUC (Bach 2008:8).

In March 2009, EU soldiers were sent to Birao in the north-eastern CAR as part of the EU's contribution to a multidimensional UN intervention in Chad and the CAR (MINUCRAT). EUFOR Tchad/RCA was mandated for one year to protect civilians, UN personnel and infrastructure and to facilitate the delivery of humanitarian aid (Council/ESDP 2008). The operation, however, was officially motivated by a concern for the western region of neighbouring Sudan (Council 2007a:1), where the EU has recently stepped up its commitment (see Howorth 2007:214-7). As a direct intervention in Darfur was objected by the Sudanese government, the alternative was to act on the margin of the conflict (Helly 2008:1). Thousands of Darfurians have crossed into Chad and the CAR to seek refuge and observers have noted that the precarious situation in both countries has increasingly been framed as a result of 'spill-over' from Sudan (Prunier 2007). This is problematic insofar as the problems facing Chad and the CAR are essentially domestic and only secondarily linked with Darfur/Sudan (HRW 2007:100). A number of events related to Chad have supported the observation that the realities within the area EUFOR was deployed at have been neglected (see Tull 2008). It is therefore plausible to assume that the EU's engagement did not necessarily fit the needs of the CAR. For example, EUFOR was only present in the area bordering Darfur and limited to a single detachment in the CAR, while there has been ongoing violence also in the northwest of the country (Debos 2008:240). As all EUFOR troops in the CAR were French, it is even questionable whether EUFOR was publicly distinguished from French military presence even though the EU and France have stressed the 'European character' of the mission (e.g. Council 2008:3). Thus at least from a CAR point of view, EUFOR did not represent a commitment to engage in the country.

It is hoped, however, that the catastrophe in Darfur will lead to greater attention to the CAR (ICG 2007:30). In fact, the country has at least initially benefited from overall increasing aid levels. Though it is difficult to establish a causal link, the CAR has also witnessed greater engagement on part of the EU, including several important SSR efforts (DPRT 2007:E6, HDPT CAR 2008, RCA-CE 2008). It has to be seen whether this trend continues. So far, the CAR is an example of very limited EU involvement despite the fact that it remains highly fragile.

To summarise, the EU's policies towards the three countries under study do not display a strong rationale informed by the problems posed by state fragility. As relates to already existing policies, the EU complies with some of the principles outlined in its official Response but fails to conduct thorough assessments of fragility in the individual cases thus turning a blind eye on its root causes. I.e., in all three countries a clear top-down approach supporting the state and its

institutions has been adopted, which risks to (re)build a state resting on perpetuated power structures without addressing the sources of fragility. Such problems have been observed in all countries under study (see ICG 2007:17-9, Ginifer and Oliver 2004:13-9, Porteous 2005:294-5, Vaillant 2006).

The analyses of EU responses going beyond already existing relations has shown considerable differences in levels of EU involvement, whereby a focus on conflict and post-conflict situations appears to be dominant. In the DRC and presumably also in the CAR, military engagement as a response to the implications of conflict has triggered a number of other policies. Similarly, in Sierra Leone the EU has taken a more comprehensive approach following the lead of the UK after British military engagement. The prominent role of conflict prevention and resolution within the EU's foreign policy objectives is also apparent in the official agenda of the Council, where the countries under study featured most often related to outbreaks of fighting. Though conflict situations appear to have served to focus the attention of both the Council and the Commission on certain situations of fragility, this also supports the claim that the EU is reactive rather than proactive, which objects the stated aim to act preventively.

Even in the case of the DRC, where the context of state fragility has triggered a number of different policy responses, it is questionable whether European involvement can adequately be described as a joint holistic approach or whether the EU is simply present in many sectors. Interestingly, related to aid levels the EU does not seem to have prioritised the DRC, as ODA per capita has been significantly low.[10] Also state building had not been planned extensively by external actors but evolved over time in a reactive manner, rendering the DRC a test-case for rather newly developed EU policies and instruments.

Determinants of Involvement

The fact that state fragility does not appear to be a strong rationale for EU foreign policy action raises the question which factors can explain the EU's engagement with problems facing unstable and fragile states. This is of particular interest as the EU does not specify priority areas for the deployment of its means under ESDP which are still limited. The following discussion first outlines possible explanations for the drivers behind EU policies towards fragile states. It deals with factors at nation-level and then turns to possible EU-level determinants.

In order to identify the underpinning motivations of state failure policies, two approaches are employed focusing on interests and values respectively. Whereas interests are understood as an amoral concept based on realist and liberal theories (Hoffmann 2000), value approaches go beyond the assumptions of rational choice theory. Grounded on social constructivism, value approaches reject the notion that policy decisions are purely made on grounds of a cost-benefit analysis and suggest to focus on ideational dynamics giving rise to a more value-driven foreign policy. Values, identities and beliefs are theorised as underpinning policy decisions which are accordingly seen to be guided by a 'logic of appropriateness' rather than by a logic of expected consequences (Sjursen and Smith 2004). The two strands are used as analytically different, recognising that the assumptions held by each school are not necessarily competing and that the promotion of values can be based on interest and vice versa (Wendt 1999). The aim here is rather to detect which logic prevails.

In all cases, national interests appear to have played an important role with regard to EU engagement. In the DRC and the CAR, it was France that successfully pushed for a military intervention, the significance of which lies in their catalysing effects for other policies.

In the case of the DRC, in 2003 the UN Secretary-General approached both France and the EU with a request to provide an interim force to end the humanitarian disaster in the Ituri district (Faria 2004:40-1). France signalled its willingness to intervene provided that a) it was granted a Security Council mandate and b) other countries join in (UN 2003) and started preparations for an operation immediately. At the same time, the High Representative of the EU, Javier Solana, hinted that the EU could send a small force for a short period of time (Lobjakas 2003) and shortly after the Council agreed to set up a European operation. The decision followed France's insistence to bring operation Mamba under the EU banner (Bagoyoko and Gibert 2007:23) and after Britain had backed the proposal, Germany saw itself unable to frustrate the initiative by its most important EU partners[11].

The fact that France sought European endorsement even though the Security Council had already approved of its mission reveals that the decision to Europeanise the intervention was not taken on military grounds but on political. For France, it was widely seen as an opportunity to repair its image after the heavily criticised operation 'Turquoise' in Rwanda while avoiding accusations of neo-colonialism (Gegout 2005:436, 438). As France was also the 'framework nation' and carried most of the costs of the operation, Artemis was criticised being "a French operation with an EU cover" (Grignon 2003:4).

French and Belgium influence has also been observed in the decision-making process eventually leading to the launch of EUSEC RDC, a mission in support of the Congolese security sector reform, where efforts at that time were headed by the two countries (Hoebeke et al. 2007:10). Later, the delayed adoption of the second EU military mission EUFOR RDC demonstrated unease on parts of several member states, especially Germany, and commentators have raised speculations about national behind-the-scene dealing mainly on the parts of Britain and France (Ehrhart 2007:11, Schmidt 2006).

Relating to the CAR, the French government was again successful in pushing for a European operation. The lengthy force generation process for EUFOR Tchad/RCA and the fact that neither Britain nor Germany have provided troops is seen as a proof for concerns about the European nature of the mission and for an alleged French hidden agenda aimed at securing the rule of Chad's President Idriss Déby (Helly 2008:2). The importance of French national interest is evident as the country supplied the bulk of troops and funds for the mission.

These observations are illustrative of the political stakes of a number of European member states, in particular those with a history of colonialism in the continent. France has maintained very particular relations with its former colonies as Africa has been considered "a major instrument in maintaining the rank of France in the international scene" (Claeys 2004:113, Médard 2005). On the other hand, Sierra Leone is exemplary for the greater attention sub-Saharan Africa has received since Tony Blair's New Labour government. British involvement came at a time when Africa was becoming an explicit foreign policy priority for New Labour and Blair expressed its readiness to resort to the use of force for humanitarian and political purposes (Porteous 2005). Later on, Sierra Leone had essentially become a test-case for Britain's position within global power politics. With a level of investment in Sierra Leone that significantly

limited the UK's ability to finance programmes in other parts of Africa (Porter 2003:72), a failure of the UN and the UK to secure stability in the comparatively small country would have had a disastrous impact on the latter's credibility.

The Europeanization of the two military missions as well as the level of European support the UK ensured for a number of initiatives in Sierra Leone need to be seen in the light of a rather recent tendency of the UK and France to coordinate and multilateralise their Africa policies (Krause 2002, Tull 2005). At the same time, approval on part of the EU indicates that objectives at EU level were equally involved. Against the backdrop of the EU's expressed desire to strengthen its global political profile, the deployment of the rather newly developed instruments under ESDP on the continent have been interpreted by realists as serving a wider purpose of establishing the EU as an international actor (Olsen 2002). Rather than responding to African needs, European member states are suspected to "use Africa policy as a way of creating a united Europe on the cheap" (Bayart 2004:454). This criticism arguably holds true in the case of Artemis, which being the first EU operation was hailed as a fundamental breakthrough, representing "tangible evidence of the development of the European security and defence policy" (Council 2001:15). The decision to launch the operation was taken only shortly after the European divide over the Iraq war and can therefore be interpreted as a symbol demonstrating that the EU was still alive and able to act (Menon 2005). Artemis, most notably driven by the desire to show European strength and unity, can thus be regarded as a "practical experiment in politico-military collaboration in the EU" (Cornish cited in Howorth 2007:235). Later on, also the second EU mission in the DRC was criticised for its lack of commitment to the country's needs. With the German Bundestag having restricted the mandate both in geographical range as well as in terms of time (Haine and Giegerich 2006), the mission did not reflect a serious commitment to secure the nation-wide elections but rather an attempt to reinforce the EU's credibility at low costs.

Related to the CAR, this claim is more difficult to make. Though it has been argued above that the mission was not driven by a concern for the needs of the country, the participation of in total 14 member states and the strong commitment of the neutral and non-aligned countries Austria, Finland, Ireland and Sweden support the argument that EUFOR was a (late) response to the humanitarian crisis in Darfur (Ehrhart 2008:157). The high costs associated with the operation as well as the difficulties to meet its objectives (see Seibert 2007) reinforce the claim against a decision purely based on EU interest and in favour of a decision based on a feeling of obligation on humanitarian grounds. Nevertheless, it can be argued that at the same time the CAR opened a 'window of opportunity' for the validation of CFSP/ESDP instruments, both for its military part and its civilian components within the security sector, since also the latter is a rather new area for external actors to engage in. This explanation may then account for the refusal of European states to comply with Britain's request for troops to Sierra Leone, as in 2001 ESDP was not operational yet.

In respect of other European policies, some influence of what is called the EU's "external identity" has also been visible. This refers to a general agreement that the EU as an international actor is distinct from other external powers, pursuing objectives such as the strengthening of democratic principles and respect for human rights as opposed to purely interest-based goals (Hill and Wallace 1996). The policies pursued to reach these aims are fairly constantly guided by a set of shared values such as the preference for diplomacy over coercion and for long-term, non-military solutions to political problems. The Cotonou framework

which provides the base for the relations between the EU and the countries under study is reflective of these values and the fact that the Union has made use of a wider range of instruments after the military interventions in the DRC and also in the CAR supports the claim that the underpinning logic here is one of appropriateness according to the EU's external identity as a multi-dimensional actor. Nevertheless, its self-perception as an actor well-placed to respond to the multi-faceted problems facing African fragile states did itself not result in a greater commitment to address fragility in the three cases under study. The EU's response to fragility in the CAR and also to some extent in Sierra Leone did not go far beyond its development policies already in place. Furthermore, the European approach to state failure in all three cases did not differ from those of other donors so that its added value for the CAR, Sierra Leone and the DRC merely lies in the importance of its financial means.

To summarise, it was the interests of former colonial powers in the first place that led the EU to deploy CFSP-pillar instruments in situations of fragility. Whereas these interests are based on political, cultural and historical sentiments, at EU level the decisions were driven by the interest to strengthen the EU's standing within global politics. In addition, in the case of EUFOR Tchad/RCA there was arguably a concern for the humanitarian situation in Darfur on parts of the EU. The decisions to launch these operations appear to be crucial in that they seem to have increased the EU's commitment to the respective countries also within the Community pillar. Though values and sentiments of responsibility have informed the context of European policies towards fragile states, they can not be considered as drivers of specific policy responses and neither as the prevailing logic underpinning European policies.

Conclusions

The goal of this research has been to detect whether the concern for state fragility appears to be a strong rationale for EU policies towards sub-Saharan countries that have been labelled "failed" or "fragile". A review of EU-Africa relations has outlined how the once exclusive focus on economic and social development has expanded to include political and security issues. This nexus has informed the EU's guiding principles to deal with state failure. The analysis of EU policies towards the DRC, Sierra Leone and the CAR, however, has shown that the Union's actual response does not constitute a coherent approach informed by a concern for fragility but evolves as a learning-by-doing process.

The EU's commitment to engage with problems of fragile statehood varies considerably and its understanding of fragility appears to be biased in favour of conflict situations. Comprehensive responses exceeding the mere continuation of development policies were triggered by the interests and values of individual member states which succeeded to a greater extent in the DRC and to a lesser extent in Sierra Leone to secure increased European engagement. The launch of the military operations in the CAR and the DRC, which were highly significant as they were followed by several other policy responses, came at a time when they were conceived as useful to strengthen the role of the EU and where not triggered by a feeling of obligation to act on humanitarian grounds.

In the absence both of a strong commitment to engage in fragile states and a dominant EU interest in the respective countries, the political will of the member states in the Council and their estimation whether these countries provide for a strengthening of the EU's external role will

determine the EU's future responses to fragility. Taking the findings of this research into consideration, this will most probably happen in cases of severe instability in the face of armed conflict. In this context, the role of the Commission, which is entrusted with development policy and has thus a different focus, needs to be further examined. There is evidence that the Commission is influential within second-pillar EU Africa policy (Krause 2003), though it was beyond the scope of this study to examine the interplay between the two institutions related to Council decisions. Based on the findings of this analysis, it is however striking that the Commission's policies did not reflect a strong commitment to resolve the structural problems of fragility and in the cases they did so, the responses only followed the deployment of CFSP/ESDP instruments or the lead of individual states respectively. It is not clear though whether this is merely a result of neglect. Related to Sierra Leone and the CAR it might be the case that the heavy presence of the former colonial powers prevented the Commission to engage more deeply with problems of fragility.

Though it has been argued that the decisions to launch EUFOR RDC and EUFOR Tchad/RCA were not informed by the problems of fragility in the first place and thus neglected the needs of the countries, ESDP measures might serve to direct the EU's attention to specific problems of fragility. The fact that this focus seems to be missing within the EU's policies towards African fragile states raises two important questions. First, it might be argued that it is the lack of conceptual clarity that prevents the EU from engaging more strongly with problems related to weak state structures. In order to achieve a deeper understanding of state 'failure', the implementation plan that will be put forward by the Commission should therefore abstain from formulating a tailor-made approach. As Hill (2001:332) has argued with respect to conflict prevention, it is not inherently constructive to load a specific task onto every aspect of the EU's external relations. It is to be preferred to identify priority reforms responding to specific trajectories and forms of state failure.

This leads to the second question whether 'fragility' is a useful paradigm for action at all. The problems of the concept have been discussed in the first part of the paper, and it is worth recalling that the EU's list of fragile states comprises a number of countries with very different problems. Importantly, these include state power as a persistent force that in many cases bears responsibility for instability and violence.

Future research on the determinants of EU involvement in fragile states could benefit from the insights of politicians involved in decision processes. With the help of interviews, a better understanding of decision-making and the role of fragility as a guiding principle could be reached.

Notes

[1] This paper is based on the Master thesis "Value-Driven or Interest-Based? The Determinants of EU Involvement in African Failed States", which was completed at the University of Edinburgh in August 2008.

[2] For a detailed discussion, see Andersen (2005) and Dunn (2001).

[3] For an overview on the development of CFSP see Keukeleire and MacNaughtan (2008), on ESDP see Howorth (2007).

[4] According to information drawn from e-mail correspondence with DG Development, these were proposed by different member states which also take a co-leading role in the exercise. For the three African pilot cases, these are the Netherlands for Burundi, Germany for Sierra Leone and Portugal for Guinea Bissau, the latter being proposed by the UK.

[5] European Commission: Development and Relations with ACP States: Fragile States. http://ec.europa.eu/development/policies/9interventionareas/governance/fragile_states_en.cfm [1.9.2009].

[6] The EU lists 22 African countries south of the Sahara. European Commission: First Benchmarking of EU Aid: Response to Situations of Fragility. Note to the Reader. http://fs1.bbj.it/# [15.9.2009]. The Bank classifies a country as fragile if it is a low-income country (measured as GNI per capita) scoring 3.2 and below on the Bank's 'Country Political and Institutional Assessment' ratings (World Bank IEG 2006:78). The ratings are produced by comparison of a country's performance against 20 criteria. See World Bank CPIA (2005).

[7] European Commission: Geographical Partnerships:

http://ec.europa.eu/development/geographical/regionscountries_en.cfm?CFID=1213162&CFTOKEN=40306386&jsessionid=24301e8ef33c3a2e421c [15.8.2009].

[8] For a detailed account see Schümer, T. (2008): New Humanitarianism: Britain and Sierra Leone, 1997-2003. Basingstoke, New York, Palgrave Macmillan.

[9] For a discussion on the role of natural resources in Sierra Leone's conflict see Reno, W. (2003): Political Networks in a Failing State: The Roots and Future of Violent Conflicts in Sierra Leone. In: Internationale Politik und Gesellschaft 2/2003, pp. 44-66.

[10] European Commission: First Benchmarking of EU Aid. EU Aid: Key Trends. Congo, DRC. http://fs1.bbj.it/# [3.8.2009].

[11] This was admitted by German Foreign Minister Joschka Fischer in a speech given to the German Bundestag on June 18, 2003.

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