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Special political missions and their role in a preventive diplomacy: opportunities and challenges

Abstract: Today's diplomacy is an ambiguous phenomenon which involves many diverse tools and actions undertaken by national and international actors. Diplomacy is undoubtedly one of a key element of international peace and security as it enables disputes and conflicts to be prevented. There is a host of measures and instruments that can be exercised at any stage of a crisis, among which are special political missions. This paper is an attempt to discuss the nature and role of a special political mission in preventive actions. The main attention is paid to the missions established by the United Nations and by the European Union. The considerations resulted in listing strengths of the special political missions and in identifying the challenges that should be faced in order to increase an effectiveness of the missions.

Key words: preventive diplomacy, special political missions, United Nations, European Union.

Introduction

'In a world where war is everybody's tragedy and everybody's nightmare, diplomacy is everybody's business' – these words, spoken by British diplomat William Strang more than 50 years ago, still appear accurate and valid (Hamilton & Langhorne, 2010, p. 1). Today's diplomacy is an ambiguous and multidimensional

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phenomenon. It can be describe both as actions of national and international bodies as well as different tools and instruments used by these bodies (Lee & Hocking, 2011, p. 662). Undoubtedly, diplomacy is one of the key components which has an impact on international dynamic, security and sustainable peace. It is also one of an essential element of preventive actions.

The idea of a preventive diplomacy seems to be clear: use of different diplomatic tools to prevent disputes and a crisis from arising or to prevent the existing ones from escalating into violent conflicts. Over the years the concept has evolved and new mechanisms and instruments have been introduced. The successful preventive diplomacy prompts a shift from an escalatory conflict dynamic to a dynamic of containment and maintenance of international security. Preventive actions, if taken at an early stage, are believed to be the least complicated, the least costly and, at the same time, the most humanitarian method aimed at solving international disputes (Evans, 1994, p. 76). In view of that, international organizations have a host of options at their disposal. The military peacekeeping operations are perhaps the best known and most visible. However, the international organizations can also deploy an array of civilian operations known as special political missions (hereafter SPMs). They have a wide range of tasks and functions. They can be established at various stages of a crisis and appear in various shapes and sizes. Despite this diversity, one principal feature is in common: the political mandate.

This article is an attempt to analyse the nature and tasks of special political missions as a tool of preventive diplomacy. The main attention is paid to bodies established by the United Nations (hereafter UN) and by the European Union (hereafter EU) as these organizations play a key role in ensuring international peace and security (Stankiewicz, 2009, p. 51). In light of that, the effectiveness of the SPMs is evaluated and the strengths and challenges of the special political missions are assessed.

Special political mission as an instrument of the United Nations preventive diplomacy

Special political missions are very difficult to define due to their varied structure, mandates and the way they are established (Gowan, 2011, p. 3). Nevertheless, all of them share the same essential characteristics: the majority of them are of a civil nature with involvement of international officials and experts with a mandate from an international organization. They aim at conflict prevention, conflict solution and at fostering sustainable political settlements (Kugel, 2011, p. 2). The term “special political missions” emerged only in the 1990s, however, the history of this mechanism goes back much further. The origins of the SPMs lie deep in the objectives and spirit of the Charter of the United Nations (UN SG, 2013, p. 3). Their structure

and application have changed over the years and have a close link with the evolution of the United Nations preventive diplomacy concept.

The concept of the preventive diplomacy was introduced for the first time by the Secretary General of the United Nations (hereafter UN SG) Dag Hammarskjöld in the 1950s with reference to the Cold War. It was based on an idea to establish mechanisms which enable the United Nations to have real influence on international peace and welfare (Ramcharan, 2008, p.2). Since the very beginning the adoption of the concept depended on the full cooperation of all Member States (Luthuli & Ntsaluba, 2012, p. 7). It was believed that keeping international disputes and crises localized enables superpowers to avoid larger confrontations (Jentleson, 2000, p. 9). This period constituted the formative years for political missions in their initial structure. In 1948 the UN GA appointed for the first time a mediator – the United Nations Mediator in Palestine (Res. 186(S-2), 1948). The field missions and political offices were also established in that period, e.g. the United Nations presence in Jordan since 1958 which has the task to “watch local development and hold a finger on the pulse” (see Bunche, 1960). The idea of preventive diplomacy was approved and developed by subsequent Secretaries General of the United Nations. They adapted the idea of preventive diplomacy to new challenges and expectations. However, in the late 1960s efforts to set up new political missions were reduced due to the Cold War division and lack of proper cooperation in the United Nations General Assembly and Security Council (UN SG, 2013, p. 4).

The end of the Cold War initiated the new phase of the preventive diplomacy (Sokalski, 2003, p. 4). The international community regained confidence in mechanisms aiming at fulfilment of the principles and purposes of the United Nations Charter. The UN got new opportunities to develop and strengthen its political role in the crisis and conflict prevention (Jenca, 2013, p. 184). Hence, the special political missions started growing in their importance. In 1988 the United Nations General Assembly (hereafter UN GA) adopted the *Declaration on the Prevention and Removal of Disputes and Situations Which May Threaten International Peace and Security and on the Role of the United Nations in this Field* (A/RES/43/51, 1988). It was strongly emphasized that each Member State should act as to prevent any disputes or situations in their international relations (para. 1), and to develop their relations on the basis of sovereign equality of States. In case of any dispute Member States should consider the use of bilateral or multilateral consultations (para. 3). The role of the United Nations Security Council (hereafter: UN SC) in preventive diplomacy was also strongly emphasized. The body is responsible for prevention or removal any crisis and for such purpose it may use of various means at its disposal, e.g. appoint of the Secretary General as rapporteur (para. 8), establish fact-finding or good offices missions (para. 12) and to create regional arrangements or agencies (para. 13). The resolution A/RES/43/51 (1988)

should be assessed as the clear effort of the United Nations to greater engagement in preventive actions (Sokalski, 2003, p. 6).

The perception of the preventive diplomacy and its role for the maintenance of international peace have significantly changed in the 1990s. It was caused mostly by the situation in Rwanda and in states formerly part of Yugoslavia. The new dimension to the preventive diplomacy was given also by the Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali (1992–1996). In 1992 he submitted *An Agenda for Peace: Preventive diplomacy, peacemaking and peace-keeping* (A/47/277, 1992) containing an analysis and recommendations for conflict prevention activities. The four categories of actions have been distinguished: preventive diplomacy, peacemaking, peacekeeping and post-conflict peacebuilding². An adoption of the document has become one of the most important stages to develop the current model of the preventive diplomacy (Ramcharan, 2008, p.4). For the first time the preventive diplomacy was internationally defined as different types of actions to prevent disputes from arising between parties, to prevent existing disputes from escalating into conflicts and to limit the spread of the latter when they occur (A/47/277, 1992, para. 20). With reference to that, the diplomacy aims to resolve disputes before they break out, restore peace and preserve peace and security once it is attained (para. 21). In the *Agenda* different types of mechanisms were introduced, e.g. measures to build confidence, fact finding, early warning and special missions. This approach was confirmed by the UN GA subsequent resolutions (e.g. A/RES/47/120B, 1993; A/RES/48/42, 1993) and by another Secretary General. In 1999 the UN SG Kofi Annan submitted a report (A/54/1, 1999) in which he expressed that conflict and natural disaster prevention seems to be one of the greatest challenge for the international community. Therefore, the efforts of international community should be aimed mostly at actions enabling new conflicts and humanitarian crisis to be avoided (A/54/1, 1999, para. 23)³. The foundation for these attempts should be wide-ranging diplomacy that includes also civilian and political aspects (Salto, 2003, p. 25).

The concept, role and tools of the preventive diplomacy (including special political missions) was discussed on numerous occasions also by Ban Ki Moon. In his report *Preventive diplomacy: delivering results* (S/2011/552, 2011) he made clear that international peace and security is not possible without preventive actions and efforts undertaken by the whole international community (Williams, 2013, p. 29). In 2015 the United Nations General Assembly adopted the resolution *Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* (A/RES/70/1, 2015) in which

2 In 1995 Boutros Boutros-Ghali submitted *The Supplement to an Agenda for Peace: Position Paper of the Secretary-General on the Occasion of the Fiftieth Anniversary of the United Nations* (A/50/60, 1995) in which new types of instruments for peace and international security were introduced: disarmament, sanctions and enforcement actions.

3 Change from *the culture of care to the culture of prevention*.

goals and targets to be achieved by 2030 were introduced. It was emphasized that there is no sustainable development without peace and no peace without sustainable development. Thus, it is crucial to foster peaceful, just and inclusive societies which are free from fear and violence. In accordance with that, the UN GA and the UN SC adopted in 2016 resolutions focused on sustaining peace “at all stages of conflict and in all its dimensions” (A/RES/70/262, 2016; S/RES/2282, 2016). It was underlined that it is essential for the international community to prevent “the outbreak, escalation, continuation and recurrence of conflict”, in response to worrying trends such as the spike in violent conflict worldwide and unparalleled levels of forced displacement. The importance of special political missions was strongly recognized, and its growing significance for international peace and security was underlined.

In light of this, the UN SG Antonio Guterres sought to forge a more coherent vision and to propose new tools to build more just and peaceful societies. He argues that prevention should be understood as averting the outbreak of a crisis which may negatively affect humanity (A/72/707, 2018). Therefore, prevention is the essential element of all actions undertaken by the United Nations and by Member States as they are responsible for countering human suffering and for implementation of sustainable development goals (Guterres, 2017a). Antonio Guterres repeatedly stresses that it is crucial to strengthen mediation, leadership and partnership. Dialogues towards peace should be engaged at different levels: local, national, regional and international. Prevention for sustainable peace has long-term perspective and should rely on the belief that people and communities have capacities for resilience. Restoring stability after violence should no longer be in main focus – the focus should be made on investing in structures, attitudes and institutions associated with peace and security (Mahmoud & Mechoulan, 2018, p. 52). The effectiveness of today’s diplomacy in conflicts or conflict-prone situations depends on a broad scope of tools and approaches and should aim at early diplomatic support for local initiatives (Leader, 2020, p. 327). It requires also more actors involved which are of political and civilian nature and are focused on partnership rather than military actions.

The implementation of the comprehensive approach to the preventive diplomacy resulted in varied structures and broad mandates of the current UN’s special political missions. Although it is not easy to categorize the SPMs, 3 groups can be distinguished: special envoys, sanctions panels and monitoring groups, as well as field-based missions (UN SG, 2013, p. 4). Nowadays, there are 37 special political missions under the auspices of the United Nations, of which fourteen have open-ended mandates and twenty-three have mandates that are anticipated to be extended into 2020 by the General Assembly or the Security Council (A/RES/74/6(Sec. 3)/Add.1, 2019). The SPMs can take action at every point in a conflict or crisis cycle, e.g. prevention, on-going conflict, peace implementation and post-conflict (Johnstone, 2010, p. 16). This, in turn, leads to their wide catalogue of tasks which includes:

1. promoting reconciliation, e.g. the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan, established by the UN SC resolution 1401(2002), and the United Nations Assistance Mission in Somalia, established by the UN SC resolution 2102 (2013),
2. conducting mediation, e.g. United Nations Support Mission in Libya, established by the UN SC resolution 2009 (2011),
3. providing electoral assistance and preventing election-related violence, e.g. the United Nations Peacebuilding Support Office in Guinea-Bissau, established by the UN SC resolution 1233 (1999),
4. strengthening national capacities for peacebuilding process, e.g. the United Nations Office in Burundi, established by the UN SC resolution 1959 (2010).

The above enumeration is only of an exemplary nature and does not exhaust the functions and tasks of the UN special political missions. After all, their mandates depend on a type of a dispute or a conflict, as well as on a potential and an interest of a state (Tlalka, 2014, p. 212). Their diversities and multiplicity only confirm their important and effective preventive role. Moreover, despite many challenges, they still are to be an example for political missions established by other organizations.

Special political mission as an instrument of the European Union preventive diplomacy

The European Union, as a regional organization, promotes peace and guarantees the security of its citizens and territory. Nowadays, internal and external security seems to be ever more intertwined. Therefore, the EU external policy and action continue to gain in prominence and importance. The EU seeks to respond to global challenges and advance its values and interests in an increasingly competitive and volatile international environment. To this end, the EU may implement various mechanisms and instruments, which are adapted to the type of crisis and to the capacity of actors involved. However, it must be remembered that in its earliest stages, the European Union was believed to be itself a conflict-prevention project (Banim & Pejsova, 2017, p. 11). In the preamble of Treaty establishing the European Coal and Steel Community it is emphasized that “world peace may be safeguarded only by creative efforts equal to the dangers that menace it”. It was confirmed also by the Treaty of Rome that created the European Economic Community by stating that States should “pool their resources to preserve and strengthen peace and liberty”. Over the years, this idea has been revised and adapted to changing social and political realities. In either case, international peace, security and cooperation were always among main goals for the European Union.

The EU preventive efforts have been formalized as the Common Foreign and Security Policy (hereafter CFSP). Furthermore, with the 2007 Treaty of Lisbon the

EU retained the goal of pursuing common policies and actions “to preserve peace, prevent conflicts and strengthen international security”. The Article 42(1) of the Treaty on European Union states that the EU should have common security and defence policy. With reference to that, civilian and military means might be used. These may include joint disarmament operations, humanitarian and rescue tasks, military advice and assistance tasks, conflict prevention and peace-keeping tasks, as well as tasks of combat forces in crisis management, including peace-making and post-conflict stabilization (art. 43(1) Treaty on UE). Decisions relating to the tasks are adopted by the Council and coordinated by the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy. The Lisbon Treaty was a cornerstone in the development of the Common Security and Defence Policy (hereafter CSDP) and allowed for the creation of the European External Action Service (EEAS) under the authority of the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy. The preventive approach was recognized also in the EU’s 2009 Concept on Strengthening EU Dialogue and Mediation Capacities and in 2014 Comprehensive Approach Communication. In both documents the need for the EU to prevent conflict was strongly emphasized.

The idea and importance of the EU’s preventive diplomacy was developed in 2016 EU Global Strategy. It was expressed that unity and engagement are among the crucial principles guiding EU external actions. Hence, security and an integrated approach to disputes and conflicts are believed to be priorities for the European Union. The organization should engage in a practical and principled way in peacebuilding and foster human security (EU Global Strategy, 2016, p. 28). The EU should act at all stages of the conflict cycle, acting promptly on prevention, responding responsibly and decisively to crises, investing in stabilisation, and avoiding premature disengagement when a new crisis erupts (Wróblewska-Lysik, 2016, p. 69). The ‘root causes’ should be carefully addressed and monitored as it may help to avoid new conflicts (EU Global Strategy, 2016, p. 17). In light of this, the EU should further develop its civilian missions as they are a vital tool in the UN’s armoury to implement international peace and security.

All the documents, mentioned above, express the responsibility of the EU for preventive actions and provide a basis for launching different types of EU external missions. It must be noted that, although for many years military operations were prioritized (e.g. in 2003 - European Union Military Operation in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, in 2003 - European Union Force (EUFOR) Democratic Republic of the Congo, in 2004 - European Union Force Bosnia and Herzegovina), after 2004 the balance shifted increasingly towards civilian missions. Since then 22 of the total of 34 CSDP missions or operations can be categorised as purely or predominantly civilian in nature (EEAS, 2019). This tendency is partly caused by a greater emphasis on the EU’s integrated approach to external disputes and conflicts (Faleg, 2018, p. 178; Jakobsen, 2009, p. 85). Moreover, civilian

missions are also less costly and less politically divisive for the EU (CSDP, 2020, p. 5). Since 2014, with growing importance of the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, there have been a number of significant initiatives to substantially strengthen CSDP in prevention. Currently, there are 17 ongoing missions and operations of which 11 are civilian in nature (EEAS, 2020, p. 9). They have different mandates and perform various tasks, which include:

1. training and strengthening the capacities of police forces, e.g. European Union Training Mission in Mali
2. providing strategic advice and practical support for reforms, e.g. European Union Advisory Mission Ukraine
3. border assistance, e.g. European Union Border Assistance Mission in Libya
4. rule of law, e.g. the EU Rule of Law Mission in Kosovo
5. civilian protection monitoring, e.g. the EU Monitoring Mission in Georgia

The above enumerations do not contain the exhaustive list (*numerus clausus*), therefore, other types of EU missions may be established. It must be also admitted, that CSDP missions are generally launched because of political choice, often including bargaining among the most and least interested Member States, rather than as a necessary response to protect EU citizens from imminent harm (CSDP, 2020, p. 7). The missions have very often expressed the role of the EU as a regional power interested in problem-solving only in its neighbourhood (Howorth, 2014, p. 147). This, in turn, has led to the questioning of the effectiveness and challenges of EU missions.

Special political missions – strengths and challenges

The significant number and great diversities of the UN and the EU political missions call for an evaluation of their effectiveness as well as consideration of the challenges the bodies face. Different criteria can be used to assess the achievements and shortcomings of the SPMs. One of the obvious criterion is the degree to which the political goals were achieved (Roldt, 2014, p. 101). The UN Secretary General, in his report to the UN Security Council, strongly expressed that the political missions are usually used to perform tasks which cannot be reached with any other mechanisms nor actions, e.g. with military operations (S/2011/552, 2011, para. 27). While military missions are focused mostly on resolving ongoing conflict, the SPMs aim at averting, mitigating and stopping crisis and conflicts. They have the advantage of political engagement with governments, parties and civil society (Mahmoud et al., 2018, p. 21). It is believed that this would send to all actors and stakeholders the clear message: all peace processes are driven by political imperative, therefore, any crisis or conflict may be resolved without violence (S/2001/394, 2001). It must be remembered, however, that it will not be possible without clearly defined goals which

can adapt to changing local conditions (Rodt, 2014, p. 108). It is also important, that the goals set for the SPMs are ambitious enough - if the objectives were relatively unambitious, the goal attainment may not really mean high performance of the SPMs. On the other hand, assuming too high expectation may also result in the inefficiency of the missions. As an example of this can be the EU's civilian missions in Africa which are criticized for a lack of realistic balance between the level of ambition and resources available as well as for a lack of in-depth understanding of the local situation (Højstrup, 2017, p. 13).

The effectiveness of special political missions depends also on their proper justification. The bodies, established by international organizations, are generally recognized as neutral and independent. Any parties to a dispute or a conflict is not represented by the SPMs. Therefore, the missions have greater ability to work closely to relevant actors and to support them in objective way. The objectivity and neutrality are those elements which enable to distinguish the special political missions from a traditional diplomacy in which a State's interests may be a priority (Sellwood, 2008, p. 4). SPMs, established by an international organization, appear to have great authority and to provide leverage that might not exist otherwise (Slim, 2007, p. 13). They can contribute significantly to launch a peaceful conversation between parties in dispute or conflict as well as to initiate democratic changes and social reforms. This is also possible due to the expert knowledge and experience that personnel of the SPMs have and due to the tools the SPMs may apply. The expert support may be implemented in a matter of security, democracy, mediation and civil society (e.g. in 2018 the United Nations Verification Mission in Colombia contributed to the undertaking of one of the most peaceful, inclusive and participatory national elections in decades). It must be remembered, however, that the establishment of any political mission requires proper authorisation, democratic oversight and scrutiny. This usually involves the UN Security Council, the European Parliament and High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, and crucially, national parliaments of states contributing to an operation. This, in turn, may result in the collision of the organization's and the state's interests.

The evaluation of the effectiveness of the special political missions should also include administrative matters. Starting with the staffing, well-qualified personnel is crucial for the proper functioning of the SPMs and for the delivery of a mandate. It is essential to have a clear understanding of what the missions can accomplish and what the current capacities and gaps are on the ground (UN DPPA, 2012, p. 63). The personnel of the SPMs very often serve as the experts during mediations and consultations with different actors and stakeholders. A decision-making process based on unreliable information may not just remain a crisis unresolved but also escalate a situation. In 2011 the United Nations Secretary General published a report in which he warned of a danger that may arise from practice of under-qualified staff (S/2011/527, 2011). It has been noticed that sometimes the SPMs hired members

of previous peace operations rather than personnel with specific expertise on the countries they serve or on the types of problems they face (S/2011/527, 2011). It should be remembered that each political mission is different and involves unique requirements. Thus, it is important to consider the needs of each mission while staffing. The need for a balanced representation of personnel from different ethnic, regional and political groups should also be taken into account. A potential political bias or a local perception of such bias for international staff should be carefully assessed (UN DPPA, 2012, p. 64). A solid, effective and efficient staffing and administration are still recognized as a critical success factor (UN DPKO & UN DFS, 2020), thus, proper and well-qualified personnel should be one of the main priorities when establishing a new special political mission.

While analysing the staffing issue, it is necessary to refer to the gender balance factor, as women should be also involve in the prevention and resolution of conflicts and in peace-building. The SPMs may provide the great opportunity to implement the United Nation Security Council *Resolution on Women and Peace and Security* (S/RES/1325/2000, 2010). Since 2014 the United Nations Secretary General has addressed in the reports issue of women involvement. He has expressed on different occasions that gender perspective is essential when working on prevention (e.g. A/72/525, 2017; A/RES/74/6(Sect.3)/Add.1, 2019). This issue was also raised by the European Parliament, which emphasized that promoting women's participation in CSDP missions is of great importance (CSDP, 2017, p.2). It sustains EU's credibility, improves effectiveness and promotes equality at home and abroad. Moreover, women's involvement increases the abilities and skills of personnel. Therefore, the special political missions must enable women an equal participation and full involvement in all efforts for maintenance and promotion of peace and security. It should be noted that the realization of this assumption by the UN and the EU has recently become more effective. The United Nations Support Mission to Libya has organized workshops and consultations for women and youth in order to increase their involvement in political processes. Furthermore, the mission has provided Libya with advice and technical support to ensure an increased level of the representation of women in politics (A/RES/74/6(Sect.3)/Add.1, 2019). A further example of the women's inclusion is the Yemeni Women's Technical Advisory Group which was formed in 2018 by the Office of the Special Envoy of the Secretary General for Yemen. It is a network of women from diverse backgrounds, including economics, human rights, governance, as well as women with political party affiliation. It enables them to be engaged with political processes in the country. The European Union has also increased women's involvement in civilian missions and operations. The general dynamic towards the appointment of more women in CSDP structures overall, but particularly in leadership positions, has been quite positive. During the autumn of 2016, there were five female heads of missions (European Union Police Mission in Afghanistan, European Union Border Assistance Mission to

Rafah, EU Rule of Law Mission in Kosovo, EU Maritime Capacity Building Mission to Somalia and European Union Capacity Building Mission in Niger). Nevertheless, there is still room for improvement on women's participation (as for December 2017 – the number of women working in CSDP missions was slightly over 20 per cent in civilian missions).

The budgetary matter is the next challenge the special political missions need to face. With reference to the UN SPMs, two main issues should be highlighted: a relatively low budget and the inflexibility of the budget. The need of the broader discussion about the budgetary issues was expressed *inter alia* by the United Nations Secretary-General in 2017. While presenting his vision on prevention, Antonio Guterres highly recommended to extend the expenses on the special political missions as they contribute to the surge in preventive diplomacy (Guterres, 2017b). The issue of proper budgetary was noted also by the United Nations Security Council who asked in 2017 to extend the budget for the existing special political missions for the 2018/2019 biennium. The need to increase the expenses as well as the need for more flexibility of the budget was once again expressed by the UN SG while budgeting for 2020 (A/RES/74/6(Sect.3/Add.1, 2019). It should be also noted that although the SPMs are less costly than military peace operations, their budget is not flexible enough. Each change in the expenses of any mission implies a necessity to revise the whole budget or to set a new budget by the organization (A/66/340, 2011). It should be remembered that the UN financial rules have two separate and misaligned systems. The peacekeeping budget is set annually while the regular budget (which includes the budget of the SPMs) is biannual and agreed at the end of each year. In light of this, the budgeting of the missions very often requires a good deal of guesswork about future needs. Therefore, the greater flexibility in the expenses seems to be crucial for proper exercising of their mandates. The need for increased flexibility, transparency, and accountability of missions, as well as simpler procedures for the financing of CSDP operations, has been repeatedly expressed also by the European Parliament. The common costs of CSDP civilian missions are mostly financed by the Common Foreign and Security Policy budget. In the 2014–2020 Multiannual Financial Framework, CFSP is allocated up to €2.076 billion with commitments annually of around €296 billion. The total CFSP budget for 2014–2020 amounts to €2,338.7 billion (Cîrlig, 2016, p. 1), but the annual commitments for ongoing civilian missions is slightly growing. While in 2015, commitments for the 11 ongoing civilian missions amounted to €258.25 billion of a CFSP budget, in 2016 commitments for the same civilian missions amounted to more than €280 billion of a CFSP budget (Cîrlig, 2016, p. 2). Nevertheless, there is still room for improvements, especially in terms of flexibility and transparency.

Conclusions

As the United Nations and regional organizations work to prevent and resolve disputes, crisis and conflicts around the globe, the special political missions are growing in importance. They are established at different stages of disputes and conflicts and are used for various political issues. This is consistent with the idea of Gareth Evans's concept according to which preventive actions are the least complicated, the least costly and, at the same time, the most humanitarian method aiming at solving international crisis. The special political missions are currently operating in some of the most challenging of the world's hotspots, and they are at the very centre of the international efforts to maintain sustainable peace and security. This is proved by the UN and the EU which constantly increase the number of established political missions. However, as is the case with any tool, the bodies have some strengths and some issues that need to be addressed.

One of the advantages of the special political missions is their diversity. Despite their various structures and the way they were established, the SPMs have common *raison d'être* which is averting and preventing future conflicts, resolving existing ones and supporting the building of a sustainable peace. This, in turn, requires flexibility in mandates and in budgeting, and case-by-case approach. The main budget, framework and tasks should be defined in general, while the flexibility should be given to the SPMs to choose the appropriate measures for achieving the desired results. The tasks, however, should be adapted to local dynamic and needs as there is not and cannot be a one-size-fits-all approach. The sufficient flexibility contributes to the ability to make a rapid response. The special political missions should be able to respond quickly to potential changes on the ground. Even a small delay could cause the opportunity to be missed.

The objectivity, partnership and professionalism are the next factors which can ensure success of the special political missions, but only if resourced and prioritized appropriately. Working under the auspices of the United Nations or the European Union gives potential and capacity of neutrality, impartiality and independence. It needs to be remembered, however, that conflict prevention and peacebuilding require a great deal of partnership. The special political missions should work in support of domestic efforts to resolve crisis and to achieve sustainable peace. The cooperation with local stakeholders should be also supported with the partnership with regional and subregional actors as only they can properly address the needs and goals of the community. The professionalism, experience and expert knowledge of the personnel also contribute to the effectiveness of the special political missions. The SPMs provide channels to address difficult issues and submit policy ideas that would have been politically difficult to initiate otherwise. They can also keep pressure on the governments and party leaders. Therefore, a great attention and care should be paid while staffing.

To conclude, there are some challenges and issues that need to be solved in order to strengthen the effectiveness of the special political missions. Yet, there is no doubt that special political missions are an important instrument of the UN and the EU preventive diplomacy. They are an indispensable tool to maintain international peace as they have ability to defuse tensions, avert conflicts and support local efforts to achieve security and sustainable peace.

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