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European Peace Facility:

Anatomy of an Instrument
With a Hidden Potential to
Contribute to European Union's
Crisis Management Capabilities

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This Food for Thought paper is a document that gives an initial reflection on the theme. The content is not reflecting the positions of the member states but consists of elements that can initiate and feed the discussions and analyses in the domain of the theme. All our studies are available on www.finabel.org

In times where inter- and intra-state armed conflict reverberates around the world, the debate around 'peace' and the courses of action to restore or maintain it emerges within political and military fora. While decision-makers tend to concur on the importance of preserving peace in international, regional or local relations, they often diverge in their understanding of the term, let alone the modalities to attain it. Such absence of consensus, coupled with power politics games, is reflected at international level, most notably within the United Nations, whose bodies have been struggling (if not failed) either to speak with one voice vis-à-vis bloody conflicts such as the Crimean and Donbas crisis, the ongoing Russo-Ukrainian war of attrition and the never-ending Israeli-Palestinian powder keg, or to prevent/respond to massacres like the Rwandan and Srebrenica genocides.

Such stalemates and operational failures go to the detriment not only of the international organisation's reputation, but first and foremost of the civilian populations suffering from atrocities, as well as the local competent authorities which lack the necessary capabilities and resources to cease them. To compensate inaction at international level, the European Union (EU) is slowly asserting itself as a pivotal actor from a crisis management and peacekeeping viewpoint. Within its Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) framework, it has launched a wide range of peacekeeping and military training missions in contentious areas of the world to help local actors deal with hostilities and establish a roadmap to restore the status quo. At the same time, EU member states have agreed on mechanisms to collectively fund peace and security efforts, as demonstrated by the now defunct Africa Peace Facility and the ATHENA Mechanism.

This paper illustrates the latest instrument adopted by EU Defence Ministers, i.e. the European Peace Facility (EPF). In itself, its adoption can be regarded as a CSDP milestone, since it embodies an unprecedented effort by a regional organisation to autonomously safeguard international peace and security. Given the sensitive nature of the issue and national governments' reluctance to surrender competences in security and defence matters, reaching unanimity among 27 states often requires painful compromises resulting in understaffed and underfunded initiatives. In this regard, the paper critically analyses the EPF's legal framework and how it has been applied to the war-torn Ukrainian, Western Balkan and sub-Saharan African contexts. Such an approach helps the reader gain a first-hand touch of the EPF's operational successes and drawbacks and, ultimately, potential solutions to unlock its full potential.

Only time (and the Council of the EU) will tell which is the way forward. What remains sure is that the launch of the EPF marked a point of no return in the European approach to manage international peace and security. On this note, recourse to it to support Kyiv Armed Forces within the context of the full-scale invasion of Ukraine is a promising sign for more robust and ambitious CSDP action in the near future.



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ABSTRACT

On 22 March 2021, the Council of the EU adopted a decision establishing the European Peace Facility (EPF) to enhance the Union's ability in conflict prevention, peace preservation and maintenance of international stability and security. Taking over the Africa Peace Facility (APF) and the ATHENA Mechanism, the EPF was conceived of as an off-budget instrument to fund capacity building activities in support of the armed forces of 3rd countries. During the first two years of its existence, recourse to the EPF has been made in regions such as the Western Balkans and sub-Saharan Africa, where the financing of military training and/or monitoring missions allowed the EU to extend the array of operations within the realm of crisis management under art. 41(2) TEU. Nonetheless, the most innovative aspect compared to ATHENA and the APF has been the provision of weapons and ammunition since the full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022.

After briefly introducing the EU's common security and defence policy (CSDP) framework and its latest developments, the paper

illustrates the EPF's current state of the art, from the context in which it was adopted to the legal framework provided by the Council Decision 2021/509, in order to point out elements of change and continuity with ATHENA and the APF (Chapter 1). Based on the analysis of its use in Ukraine, the Western Balkans and sub-Saharan Africa (Chapter 2), the paper then elaborates on the EPF's strengths as opposed to some non-indifferent drawbacks which might impair its functioning in the near future (Chapter 3), such as the consensus-based decision-making in the Council, the voluntary nature of financial contributions, reservation mechanisms for MSs reluctant to fund initiatives (e.g. constructive abstention), and the off-budget nature creating accountability issues. Prior to the concluding remarks, Chapter 4 discusses solutions to unveil the EPF's full potential, such as improving coordination with other CSDP instruments to avoid cacophony and promoting a more integrated approach to crisis management among MSs beyond mere cohesion.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

APF	Africa Peace Facility
APSA	African Peace Security Architecture
AU	African Union
BMTF	Balkan Medical Task Force
CARD	Coordinated Annual Review on Defence
CFSP	Common Foreign and Security Policy
CSDP	Common Security and Defence Policy
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
EDA	European Defence Agency
EDF	European Defence Fund
EEAS	European External Action Service
EPF	European Peace Facility
EU	European Union
EUFOR	European Union Force Bosnia and Herzegovina
EUMAM	European Union Military Assistance Mission
EUTM	European Union Training Mission
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
MPCC	Military Planning and conduct Capability
NDICI	Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument
NDPP	NATO Defence Planning Process
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
PESCO	Permanent Structured Cooperation
PSO	Peace Support Operation
TEU	Treaty on the European Union

INTRODUCTORY STATEMENTS: THE DIFFICULTIES OF TURNING SECURITY AND DEFENCE POLICY INTO AN EU FLAGSHIP

Defence policy, together with foreign and security policy, is one of the areas where states have historically been reluctant to surrender their competences to an inter/supranational entity. As a result, no significant progress was made during the first years of the European Union's existence, with the fields being categorised as intergovernmental in nature by the 1992 Maastricht Treaty so as to leave countries free to consult themselves without the obligation to coordinate efforts at the EU institutional level and harmonise legislation on the matter. It was not until the Treaty of Lisbon in 2007 (entered into force in 2009) that the EU's founding documents set up a fully-fledged Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP). They did so through the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) pillar in charge of crisis management, inter-state coordination and cooperation in defence matters (Council of the EU, n.d.-a). This mostly applies to the deployment of civilian and military missions and operations outside the EU territory, with activities ranging from conflict prevention to peacekeeping, from humanitarian assistance to military training, from disarmament to post-war stabilisation (Council of the EU, n.d.-a).

These overarching objectives were consolidated in the 2016 EU Global Strategy on Foreign and Security Policy, which envisaged making the Union's security and defence policy more effective on the basis of enhanced cooperation between member states' armies, an integrated approach to conflict and crisis management,

the promotion of resilience and strategic autonomy (EEAS, 2016; Council of the EU, n.d.-a). With the endorsement of the European Council, the strategy was coupled with the implementation plan on security and defence in December of the same year, which prioritised the response to external conflicts/crises, partners' capacity building and the safeguarding of the EU and its citizens (Council of the EU, n.d.-a; Council of the EU, 2016).

Since the strategy's entry into force, the most relevant courses of action to implement such an ambitious agenda comprise the coordinated annual review on defence (CARD), the permanent structured cooperation (PESCO), a military planning and conduct capability (MPCC) and the rapid response toolbox (Council of the EU, n.d.-a). Launched in 2017 to address the lack of inter-state cooperation when it comes to defence planning and procurement, the CARD is undertaken by the European Defence Agency to analyse CSDP drawbacks and collaborative opportunities on capability development and, on such grounds, inform national and EU decision making (European Defence Agency, n.d.). PESCO was established in the same year as a platform to, on the one hand, promote defence cooperation among capable and willing member states and, on the other hand, foster the Union's efforts as a security provider while maximising its defence spending (EEAS, 2023b, p. 1). Since June 2017, the MPCC acts as a command-and-control military structure tasked with overseeing non-execu-

tive missions (EEAS, 2023a, p. 1).

Notwithstanding these remarkable steps, the CSDP toolbox still lacked an instrument which would comprehensively deal with peacekeeping, military training and post-conflict stabilisation in 3rd countries suffering civil wars or aggression by other states. Furthermore, harmonisation was very much needed between the then-ongoing EU's training and assistance missions around the world; notwithstanding the existence of the ATHENA mechanism and the Africa Peace Facility (APF), those relied (and are still relying) on ad-hoc initiatives by those member states who were able and willing to contribute, to the point that the EU contingents being deployed were largely understaffed and underfunded. In such a patchwork framework, the European Peace Facility (EPF) came to life in April 2021.

Background and Current State of the Art

This chapter purports itself to lay the foundations of the paper's analytical part. Building on the introductory statements on the evolution of the EU's common security and defence policy (CSDP) and its instruments, it sets off by outlining the political and historical context in which the European Peace Facility was, first, conceptualized by then-High Representative/Vice-President of the European Commission Federica Mogherini and, secondly, adopted by the Council of the EU in March 2021.

The chapter goes on by delving into the legal framework within which the EPF operates, with a detailed analysis of the Council

Decision 2021/509, as well as the key CSDP provisions in the EU treaties upon which the latter is based. Such analysis proves crucial to draw comparisons between the EPF and its two predecessors (the ATHENA Mechanism and the Africa Peace Facility) from a regulatory and operational viewpoint, in order to point out the most prominent features of change and continuity. The latter section also acts as *trait d'union* with the second chapter of the paper, which unpacks the activation of the EPF in some of the world's most insecure states or regions.

Context in Which the EPF was Conceived and Adopted

This new facility shall be contextualised within the Union's comprehensive approach to the financing of its external action aimed at, first, devising a coherent and comprehensive security policy and, secondly, establishing synergies with other initiatives like the Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI-Global Europe) (Council of the EU, 2021a). The aforementioned EU Global Strategy laid the foundations to pursue priorities in the CSDP area by setting out a commitment to mobilise the Union's unparalleled networks and economic weight in accordance with the principles of coherence, credibility, responsiveness and unity (EEAS, 2016, p. 10).

Credibility-wise, the strategy insisted on the EU's power of attraction, the consistency of its policies and adherence to common values; it also made full-spectrum defence capabilities essential to respond to external crises and safeguard the European continent (EEAS, 2016, pp. 10-11). At the same time, though, by ac-

knowledging member states' sovereignty on defence matters, it could only push itself to call for enhanced cooperation to build a solid European defence industry (EEAS, 2016, p. 11). It did the same for responsiveness to encourage more structured cooperation and higher flexibility of the development policy, while it underlined unity to address challenges like migration, counterterrorism and cross-sectoral human rights violations (EEAS, 2016, p. 11).

The latter dimension also applied to extra-EU scenarios, with the Global Strategy promoting a multifaceted approach to build 'inclusive, prosperous and secure societies' and push for 'accountable governance' through long-term commitment (EEAS, 2016, pp. 25-26). It also emphasised the Union's role as security provider and peacebuilder in accordance with international law, thus enabling legitimate institutions to deliver basic services and security to their populations: to stand up to these objectives, member states should develop defence capabilities through maximum interoperability- based on a supranational strategy outlining, *inter alia*, the tasks, requirements and capability priorities to be achieved (EEAS, 2016, pp. 44-45).

In December 2017, after the European Council's request to the Foreign Affairs Council to adopt an ad-hoc instrument for Capacity Building in Support of Security and Development for the post-2020 EU budget, these statements acted as fundamental guidelines for then-High Representative Federica Mogherini to propose the establishment of the EPF as an off-budget fund for peace support operations and 3rd countries' capacity building (Furness & Bergmann, 2018). Al-

ready at that time, she was aware of the need to provide the African Union's peacekeeping/-building missions with stable, predictable and values-based support by circumventing the legal obstacle to financing military activities through the EU budget (Furness & Bergmann, 2018). This solution would prove the catalyst for EU member states to build political consensus and launch the EPF which, after coming to life, remained untested in a relatively lukewarm regional security context, but would go on to make headlines as soon as the major disruptive conflict since World War II irreversibly deteriorated on Ukrainian soil in February 2022.

From the outset, the EPF was proposed as a tool to strengthen the EU's external action in an increasingly complex security landscape (Syrjänen, 2023, p. 41). More precisely, it responded to the need to complement existing soft-power instruments like diplomacy, humanitarian support and development aid with a hard-power one to protect the Union and its citizens (EEAS, 2018). In parallel, the Council emphasised the importance of supporting partner countries in preventing further conflicts, building peace and maintaining international security (Council of the EU, 2018b). Still, at that time it did not make any reference to the supply of lethal military equipment (Syrjänen, 2023, p. 43); such opportunity would be mentioned in December 2020, when EU ministers reached a political agreement on the EPF's establishment and stressed their commitment to reinforce partner countries' and international organisations' ability to prevent and respond to crises and safeguard their populations (Council of the EU, 2020b).

Legal Framework and Funding Mechanism

The EPF's pivotal goal is to provide financial assistance to strengthen military and defence capabilities of 3rd states (Bartoloni, 2022, p. 381). In other words, it was established to fund equipment and training for EU partner countries' armed forces while bearing the costs of CSDP operations outside the Union's territory, financing the military component of civilian missions or exercises abroad and supporting missions led by other international organisations (Bilquin, 2023). As stipulated by art. 56 of Council Decision 2021/509, recourse to it aims at contributing 'rapidly and effectively to the military response of third States and regional and international organisations in a crisis situation' (Council of the EU, 2021b, pp. 45-46). Another foundational aim is to support peacekeeping operations under the aegis of regional or international organisations when it comes to military and defence matters, from supplying armed forces with (non-)lethal equipment to securing the relevant infrastructure (Danilov, 2023).

All these objectives constitute the backbone of the EPF's mission, which is grounded on art. 21(2)(c) TEU, as the instrument has ultimately been established to preserve peace, prevent conflicts and strengthen international security insofar as military and defence assistance measures bolster third states' efforts to respond to a crisis situation (Bartoloni, 2022, p. 381; EU, 2012, p. 28). In a nutshell, for the first time in its history, the EU is taking advantage of an instrument to complement such measures with the activities of its CSDP missions/operations: in parallel, they are meant to be enshrined within a coherent po-

litical strategy and coupled with risk assessments and solid safeguards (Council of the EU, 2021a).

From an institutional perspective, funding through the EPF is under member states' control: these coordinate their efforts in the Council, whose unanimous decisions are implemented by the European External Action Service (EEAS). Santopinto & Maréchal, 2021, p. 13). The latter falls under the authority of the EU's High Representative, whose actions in the realm of CFSP are supervised by the Council (Besch, 2020). By contrast, the Commission plays a marginal role, as political initiative belongs to the member states or the High Representative (Santopinto & Maréchal, 2021, p. 13). Nevertheless, since the CSDP is a diplomacy-oriented area with a short-/medium-term focus to respond to member states' immediate security imperatives, the Commission's involvement ensures a beneficial counter-balance, as it reflects the general European interest and envisions longer-term structural responses to the challenges faced by the policies in this domain (Santopinto & Maréchal, 2021, p. 13).

The EPF officially became operational as an off-budget instrument in July 2021 (Bilquin, 2023). At that time, it had an overall financial ceiling of €5.692 billion (in current prices) for the 2021-2027 financial framework, during which the annual ceiling would increase from €420 million to €1.132 billion (Bilquin, 2022a; Immenkamp, 2021, p. 3). These digits, however, have been revisited largely because of the ongoing Russo-Ukrainian conflict, increasing up to €12 billion in current prices as of the latest Council decision on the matter taken on 26 June 2023 (Council of the

EU, 2023d). In the next chapter, whilst discussing the use of the EPF in relation to the war-torn Ukrainian context, the paper will elaborate on this steady increase to accommodate EU Member States' financial and military assistance to Kyiv and its armed forces.

The instrument consists of two financial pillars, each coordinated by a secretariat (Council of the EU, n.d.-b). On the one hand, the Council controls the operations pillar, which supports the costs borne by CSDP missions and operations with military or defence implications; on the other hand, the assistance measures pillar, under the aegis of the European Commission's Foreign Policy Instruments Service, deals with EU actions for 3rd countries and regional/international organisations to bolster their military and defence capabilities, as well as to provide assistance to peace support operations (PSOs) (Bilquin, 2022a). Furthermore, the EPF represents a fundamental step towards a defence union, as it requires member states not directly participating in an operation falling under this mechanism to still contribute to its funding (Britz, 2023; Engberg, 2021). As far as the specific case of Ukraine is concerned, contributing states also have the opportunity to ask for reimbursement of (non-)lethal support, from tanks and ammunition to first-aid kits and fuel, through an ad-hoc clearing house within the EU Military Staff and the EPF committee (Bilquin, 2022b; EEAS, 2022a). The latter convenes representatives from each member state and falls under the oversight of the Council's presidency (Wallentine, n.d., p. 3).

Whilst not incorporating EPF funding, it is worth noting that the current multi-annual financial framework is innovative as it includes

the costs related to the financing of defence cooperation initiatives among EU member states (Ilinca, 2023, p. 53). The European Defence Fund (EDF) covers capability development and defence research (€8 billion), while the initiative to strengthen inter-state military mobility based on the homonym Action Plan benefits from €1.6 billion (European Union, 2021, p. 162; European Commission, 2021, p. 2).

Both the enforcement of the EPF's tasks and the allocation of funds are envisaged to be coupled with monitoring procedures to ensure an appropriate assessment of the risks and the measures to mitigate a conflict or a crisis in line with international humanitarian and human rights standards, as well as EU arms export legislation; at the other end of the spectrum, the beneficiary should comply with international law and obligations at headquarters and state levels (Danilov, 2023). Should violations of such standards arise, civil society actors can submit related information to the Union's competent authorities (Danilov, 2023).

Change and Continuity With the ATHENA Mechanism and the Africa Peace Facility

From 2004 to 2021, the EU's participation in CSDP military missions and operations was funded through the ATHENA mechanism, to which member states contributed according to their Gross Domestic Product (GDP) (Britz, 2023). ATHENA's scope of common costs, which were never related to military activities and did not exceed 15% of missions' total budgets, has now been enhanced by the EPF, which implies smoother, more predict-

able and more flexible deployment of EU Military Staff following the directions given by the Council (Council of the EU, 2021a; Santopinto & Maréchal, 2021, p. 12). Another innovative feature of the EPF is that it can issue assistance measures in favour of 3rd countries (Leonardo, 2023). By contrast, the EPF has left ATHENA's funding mechanism intact: in line with the ban on bearing expenditures having military/defence implications from the EU budget (art. 41(2) TEU), it foresaw a 5-10% threshold of CSDP operations' costs to be borne by states themselves (Bilquin, 2022a).

From a geographical scope viewpoint, during the pre-2021 period, the EU could only fund operations led by the African Union or other regional organisations within the framework of the African Peace Facility (APF) (Council of the EU, 2021a). For almost 20 years, Member States funded military activities led by the African Union (or by Peace Support Operations supported by it) in countries like South Sudan, the Central African Republic, Somalia, Gambia and the Lake Chad Basin (Bilquin, 2022a). The adoption of the EPF overcomes this geographical limitation, thus giving Member States the opportunity, through coordination at the Council level, to finance peacebuilding operations and militarily assist their partners on a worldwide scale (Council of the EU, 2021a). Additionally, on 9 June 2021, the Council launched the Neighbourhood Development and International Instrument – Global Europe (NDICI-GE) to finance the civilian components of the AU-led PSOs (Council of the EU and European Parliament, 2021a; Bilquin, 2022a).

A further feature of distinction concerns the

institutional path to fund peace- and security-related operations in Africa. From 2003 to 2019, under the APF framework, the EU had to go through the African Union Commission to activate the African Peace Security Architecture (APSA) and allocate €2.68 billion and military equipment to sub-regional/national military operations (EU, 2017; Hauck, 2020, p. 6). The new framework resulting from EPF's entry into force does away with this institutional passage and ensures the direct provision of financial and military aid to the missions/operations concerned (Fabricius, 2021; Fagbayibo, 2021, p. 7). In other terms, the EU can supply training and equipment to African states' armed forces without the mandate of the African Union (AU) Peace and Security Council (International Crisis Group, 2021). Additionally, following the European Court of Auditors' ruling in 2018, EU support for APSA's development required recalibration: because of plummeting state contributions to the AU budget, the APSA had ended up relying too much on external funding and most of the EU contributions had been dissipated through staff-related expenditure rather than capacity building (ECA, 2018, p. 33; Lumina, 2022).

In short, the EPF integrates ATHENA's intergovernmental dynamics and APF's development dimension (Siebel, n.d., p. 39). With respect to the latter, both the Early Response Mechanism (urgent prevention, mediation and de-escalation measures) and activities aimed at strengthening African organisations' institutional capacities through civil actions have been taken over by development cooperation programmes managed by the European Commission which, on the other hand, has

not retained its management role in the governance of the funds (Santopinto & Maréchal, p. 15). Unlike the APF, not only does the EPF aim at supporting peace operations by the Union's partners, but it also puts EU member states in a position to fund 3rd countries or international organisations' capability building (Santopinto & Maréchal, 2021, p. 12).

Instances Where the EPF has Been Activated

This chapter aims to illustrate how EU member states have made recourse to the EPF's off-budget funding mechanism in three different war-torn scenarios: Ukraine, the Western Balkans and sub-Saharan Africa. The focus on the Ukrainian context is pivotal for the overall discussion: in fact, given the need to allow Kyiv to contain Russia's military full-scale invasion since February 2022, adjustments to the EPF's financial ceiling were made. In this sense, the Russo-Ukrainian war marks a fine example of the EU's regulatory activism in the CSDP domain, as well as a display of its crisis management capabilities.

The other two instances of study have instead aroused more controversy, as financial support has been characterised by a more disjointed and piecemeal approach. Taken together, the preference for military assistance in kind (equipment, vehicles etc.), the relative unsuccess of the ongoing training/assistance missions, the prioritisation of efforts towards the Russo-Ukrainian war, the attachment of democratic strings to the funds and the absence of strong political consensus have all played a role in EU member states' decision to play to the lowest common denominator.

In this sense, the chapter underlines how the EPF is grappling with overcoming the regulatory and operational obstacles faced by the now-extinct ATHENA Mechanism and APF. Ukraine

Financial assistance to Kyiv under the EPF mechanism started prior to the unfolding of the full-scale invasion. This serves as a useful reminder of the hostilities in the Eastern oblasts of Donetsk and Luhansk since the spring of 2014. On 2 December 2021, parallel to funding allocations for Georgia, Moldova and Mali (the latter to be discussed below), the Council devoted €31 million to support medical, engineering (e.g. demining), mobility and logistics units, as well as cyber-defence (Council of the EU, 2021f; Bilquin, 2022a). Needless to say, since Kremlin forces unleashed the invasion on 24 February 2022, we witnessed unprecedented activism by EU ministers within the CSDP framework. Only four days later, they started to allocate military equipment and platforms to help the Ukrainian armed forces defend the country's sovereignty and territorial integrity and safeguard the civilian population from armed aggression (Council of the EU, 2022a). From a content viewpoint, the act fully complies with the objectives outlined by art. 1 of the EPF decision (strengthening military and defence capabilities of a 3rd state) and art. 21(2)(c) TEU (maintenance of international peace and security) (Bartoloni, 2022, p. 382).

On the other hand, doubts arise about compliance with procedural requirements set out by art. 9(5) of the EPF decision, as recourse to the instrument should be supported by the preliminary assessment of the risks involved in the adopted measure and the safe-

guards thereof, including potential flanking elements, monitoring and evaluation arrangements (Council of the EU, 2021b). The fact that they were not mentioned was arguably dictated by the state of emergency in which the Council acted (Bartoloni, 2022, p. 382), even though art. 58(2) EPF explicitly outlaws the use of emergency procedures for assistance measures (Council of the EU, 2021b). After three months, the financial assistance's tally reached €1.84 billion with Decision 2022/809 (Council of the EU, 2022d).

By the end of 2022, EU ministers had succeeded in agreeing on six €500-million aid tranches (each comprising two assistance measures) consisting of lethal equipment and platforms (€2.82 billion) and non-lethal support (€0.18 billion); additional €100 million were earmarked by member states having exercised constructive abstention on lethal support, bringing the overall amount to €3.1 billion (Bilquin, 2022b; Council of the EU, 2022g). On 15 November 2022, the Council launched the EU Military Assistance Mission (EUMAM) to train up to 15,000 Ukrainian troops in Poland and Germany to enhance their capability to continue defending its internationally recognised borders and population (Council of the EU, 2022i; Bilquin, 2022b). In parallel, EU ministers allocated €16 million under the EPF to finance the provision of, *inter alia*, ammunition, transportation services and military equipment maintenance for 24 months (Council of the EU, n.d.-c).

Early 2023 saw the approval of the 7th assistance tranche and the increase of the financial ceiling by €2 billion, as the first 12 months of the Russo-Ukrainian war had already ab-

sorbed 60% of the initial €5-billion threshold for the 2021-2027 period (Bilquin, 2023, p. 3; Council of the EU, 2023b). With Decision 2023/577, the Council unprecedentedly expanded early financing through a minimum deposit system from rapid response operations to individual assistance measures, while setting a €5-million reimbursement threshold for the costs related to the EU Crisis Management Military Exercise (MILEX 2023) (Bilquin, 2023, p. 3). The latter will take place between late October and early November 2023 as the first live exercise under the soon-to-be-operational EU Rapid Deployment Capacity (EEAS, 2023c).

On 20 March, the Council allocated €1 billion to partially reimburse, for the first time, member states for ammunition and missile delivery, plus another billion for the same kind of procurement but by the EU and Norwegian defence industries based on a collaborative project launched by the European Defence Agency (EDA) (Bilquin, 2023, pp. 3-4; EDA, 2023). In parallel, EUMAM Ukraine benefited from an additional €45 million split between supply of non-lethal equipment and reimbursement of Ukrainian troops' personal training kits (Bilquin, 2023, p. 2). Such a steadfast financial commitment, which was wreathed with the second (and, for now, definitive) top-up of the EPF's financial ceiling last June, demonstrates the EU's willingness to leverage its economic power when it comes to supporting like-minded states like Ukraine which are seeking accession to the Union (Blandin et al., 2022, p. 4; Bosica, 2023; Council of the EU, 2023d). At the same time, though, as recalled by High Representative Borrell, military assistance should

not prevent diplomatic efforts from continuing, in order to feed the hope of bringing an end to the conflict (Blandin et al., 2022, p. 4; Shandilya, 2022).

Western Balkans

The unprecedented amount of resources mobilised in support of Ukraine implied the scale-down of financial support in other regions affected by decades-long territorial feuds like the Western Balkans. This was reflected in the meagre sums earmarked by the Council, starting from the €6 million for the Balkan Medical Task Force (BMTF) on 9 June 2022, in order to supply the medical units of Slovenia's

and five non-EU countries' armed forces: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia (Council of the EU, 2022e; Bilquin, 2022b). As for Sarajevo, financial assistance was substantiated on 4 November 2021, when the Council allocated €10 million for Bosnian armed forces' capacity building, the delivery of 68 medical and transport vehicles and 150 metal detectors to the local demining battalion, and support for European Union Force Bosnia and Herzegovina (EUFOR) troops to maintain a stable and secure domestic environment (Council of the EU, 2021d; Bilquin, 2022a).

So far, 2023 has seen North Macedonia taking the 'lion's share' of EPF funding in the region, as no other measures have followed: on 16 March, the Council earmarked €9 million to upgrade the infantry battalion group's non-lethal equipment to boost the army's standards to participate in EU CSDP missions (Council of the EU, 2023c). Such financial assistance will be spread over the next three years and

will be enforced by the Slovenian NGO ITF – Enhancing Human Security (Bilquin, 2023).

Sub-Saharan Africa

Similar drawbacks apply to the African continent, even though the EPF could build on a more solid baseline in terms of budget and logistical assistance in virtue of the APF funding legacy. On 22 July 2021, i.e. less than one month after the new CSDP instrument became operational, the Council promulgat-



ed a general support programme worth €130 million for AU-led PSOs (Council of the EU, 2021c). In December, upon the Malian Foreign Minister's request for the EU Training Mission to evolve into more efficient training and combative components, the Council gave the green light to a €24-million, 30-month-long assistance package, which would contribute to the strengthening of local armed forces' capability to cope with terrorism and restore territorial integrity (Council of the EU, 2021g; Bilquin, 2022a). However, due to the risk of increasing interferences and abuses from Wagner mercenaries, operational training activities were suspended in April 2022, this decision being confirmed six months later (Agence Europe, 2022; Council of the EU,

2022h).

On 22 April 2022, notwithstanding the major mobilisation in support of Ukrainian armed forces since February 2022, EU ministers managed to come up with a second round of assistance measures to be taken advantage of until 2024 (Bilquin, 2022b). Among the earmarked €600 million, €10 million were devoted to enhancing the Multi-National Joint Task Force of the Lake Chad Basin against Boko Haram, €120 million for AU's transition mission in Somalia and €15 million for the Southern African Development Community mission to Mozambique (Council of the EU, 2022b). The latter joined the previously mobilised assistance to equip the EU Training Mission (EUTM) (€4 million) and the rapid reaction forces trained by it (€85 million between November 2021 and April 2022) (Bilquin, 2022b; Council of the EU, 2021e; Council of the EU, 2022c). Lastly, on 18 July 2022, the Nigerien army also benefited from EPF funding (€25 million) (Council of the EU, 2022f). The year finished with a third round of EPF funding which, besides the aforementioned assistance to Bosnia and Herzegovina, involved Mauritania (€12 million to bolster armed forces' capabilities to counter domestic and regional threats) and Rwandan troops' deployment to Mozambique (€20 million to deal with terrorism in the Cabo Delgado province) (Bilquin, 2023, p. 5; Council of the EU, 2022j; Council of the EU, 2022k).

Throughout 2023, Niger has been the sub-Saharan state benefiting the most from EPF funding, with €40 million being earmarked on 7 March 2023 for armed forces to safeguard territorial integrity, sovereignty and the

civilian population vis-à-vis terrorism, while stepping up support for the EU military partnership mission launched on 12 December 2022 (Council of the EU, 2023a). In April, the Council was also considering a two-year, €5-million assistance consisting of lethal weapons (especially helicopter ammunition), potentially making Niger the second country after Ukraine benefiting from such a measure (Bilquin, 2023, p. 5). However, the continuity of such assistance might be impaired by the recent establishment of a military junta following the coup d'état on 26 July 2023 and the ensuing imposition of economic sanctions by the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) (Schotte, 2023; Felix, 2023).

Assessment of EPF's Use as of September 2023

This chapter sets itself the ambitious objective of assessing the functioning of the EPF, especially if we consider the narrow time frame of the analysis due to the instrument's extremely recent establishment. It does so by taking inspiration from the preliminary considerations made in the previous chapter about the use of the EPF in the three geographical contexts at issue. The first sub-section highlights the EPF's operational strengths, which include the opportunity to support the armed forces of the war-torn country in cash and in kind, the ability to encapsulate a wider scope of military operations falling under the CSDP framework, and the more flexible nature of funding as the EPF does away with the need to divert financial aid to security activities. At the other end of the spectrum, we find

considerable operational drawbacks which end up generating low-common-denominator compromises. These range from the exclusion of the EPF from the Union's budget to the voluntary nature of contributions, without forgetting the opportunity for member states to exercise the so-called 'constructive abstention' in case they object to the funding scheme proposed at the Council level. Such weaknesses are coupled with an ethical dilemma which has been repeatedly pointed out by peace-building NGOs, research institutes and civil society organisations: a Nobel Peace Prize winner adopting a more military role.

Strengths: a Wider Scope of Operations Covered and a More Flexible Funding Mechanism

Many practitioners regard the EPF as a fundamental instrument to fulfil the EU's image as a worldwide security provider expanding its influence in the realm of armed conflict (García, 2022, p. 3; Immenkamp, 2021). There are manifold reasons to believe that it can succeed in this mission: to begin with, the instrument's 'off-budget' nature allows the Council to directly finance military actors involved in a broad set of operations within the CSDP framework, from capacity building in 3rd states to support regional or international organisations in addressing security threats (Council of the EU, 2018a; Hauck, 2020). Thanks to such degree of operational flexibility, the EU can act in a wide array of circumstances without facing too strict legal requirements (Santopinto & Maréchal, 2021, p. 12). In the African context, this has had positive repercussions on the bilateral partnership on peace and security with the EU,

as demonstrated by the repeated financial and military support provided by training missions to local armed forces (Plank, 2022). With an instrument funded by member states themselves and not subject to the prohibition to use its budget to finance military operations and defence-related activities, the EU can pursue its own strategic interests in Africa and around the world with more flexibility (Lumina, 2022).

As for EU's competences in CFSP matters, art. 24(1) TEU stipulates that these should cover all foreign policy fields and questions related to the Union's security, including the progressive establishment of a common defence policy (EU, 2012). Para. 2 of the same article conditions this open-ended competence upon the development of inter-state political solidarity, general interest and convergence of member states' actions in the field (Bartoloni, 2022, p. 380). Moreover, EU's foreign policy activities are, in principle, functionally constrained by clear objectives like conflict prevention, maintenance of peace and reinforcement of international security (art. 21(2)(c) TEU); nevertheless, given their wide scope and the fact that the CFSP area is of purely intergovernmental character, their implementation relies upon states' discretion, thus allowing the Council a broad margin of manoeuvre (Bartoloni, 2022, p. 380).

Such an accommodating framework without competence and regulatory mechanisms can be suitable for the implementation of the EPF, with member states taking advantage of its wide geographical and teleological scope to undertake initiatives aimed at preserving or restoring international peace and security, as well as safeguarding sovereignty and territorial

integrity of the countries requesting financial and military assistance. As a result, as long as member states give the Council the political mandate to operationalise this instrument, arms supply to 3rd parties can be contemplated, thus tearing down a long-standing taboo in the Union's foreign policy (Bartoloni, 2022, p. 383). Additionally, a less bureaucratic procedure to deliver financial and military aid can be appropriate in sensitive security scenarios like the African sub-Saharan states, whose armed forces struggle to cope with periodical military coups, civil wars or interferences by neighbouring states or multi-national mercenary troops like Wagner. In this sense, the shift from the APF's cumbersome institutional framework to the EPF's intergovernmental one can allow the EU to establish straightforward relations with the requesting actors and provide them with the relevant assistance measures without waiting for regional institutions to have their say on the matter and, should political consensus not be reached, compromise the whole process to the detriment of the recipients.

Weaknesses: the Voluntary Nature of Financial Contributions and the Absence of Coordination Between EU-Internal and CSDP Instruments

Despite its promising features, academics and practitioners have raised noteworthy criticisms against the EPF and its mission. As underlined by some civil society organisations, by financing military training and supplying lethal equipment, this instrument can militarise the EU's security and defence policy through a shift from soft to hard power

(Frisell & Sjökvist, 2021; Maletta & Héau, 2022). According to this line of thought, the EPF would inadvertently become a vehicle to exacerbate ongoing conflicts and human rights abuses, with ultimate spill-over effects on the civilian population (European Peacebuilding Liaison Office, 2019 and 2020; Joint Civil Society Statement, 2020). These risks are more likely to materialise in countries whose security forces are affected by equipment embezzlement and corruption (International Crisis Group, 2021; Lumina, 2022). In this respect, when it comes to the African context, some concerns arise about the transition from the APF to the EPF: to begin with, the direct financing of hard-security actions can have lock-in effects of the EU's commitment to realities like Mali, where the EUTM has been training soldiers periodically engaged in overthrowing democratically elected governments (Plank, 2022; Plank & Bergmann, 2021). The voluntary approach to defence cooperation is equally problematic: it had already been flagged in the 2016 Global Strategy, which hoped that supranational initiatives like a coordinated annual review of military spending would lead to greater coherence in defence planning and capability building among EU member states and in line with NATO's defence planning process (NDPP) (EEAS, 2016, p. 46). To date, however, no significant progress has been registered in this direction: indeed, the EU has devised CSDP initiatives (above all, PESCO, the CARD and the EPF) which would have been unthinkable without the efforts over the last decade on defence cooperation and spending. Still, these do not foresee legally binding mechanisms obliging all member states to participate in

such schemes. Furthermore, recourse to the EPF on a global scale might scale down some crises or conflicts in the African continent compared to other scenarios around the world considered as higher priorities: in this sense, the comparison with the material support provided to Ukraine is unmerciful (Hauck, 2020; Plank, 2022). Consequently, to try to maintain good bilateral relations and demonstrate continuous interest towards compelling, but not appealing realities not only in Africa but also in regions like the Western Balkans, the Council has periodically issued 'stand-in' allocations in money and in-kind which only ensure temporary relief and postpone the resolution of the conflict/crisis.

Such an issue becomes even more worrisome if we take into account the way EU member states contribute to the EPF's funding mechanism, with the opportunity to invoke a constructive abstention in case the provision of lethal aid goes against their foreign policy principles (Marcos & Ruy, 2021). This was done, for instance, by the neutral Austria, Ireland and Malta when, in the early stages of Ukraine's invasion, the Council proposed to supply military equipment to Kyiv's armed forces through the EPF (Liboreiro, 2023). In accordance with art. 31 TEU, the states making recourse to a constructive abstention are not bound to apply the Council's decision while accepting that the latter still commits the EU to implement it (EUR-Lex, n.d.). Nevertheless, such an instrument inevitably scales down the decision's legitimacy and level of ambition: on the one hand, it does not provide the aid recipient with the picture of a cohesive EU; on the other hand, it creates inter-state imbalances in terms of the con-

tributions to be made and reduces the scope of support measures to the detriment of the country affected by an ongoing conflict or crisis.

The financing of arms provision to Ukraine arouses concerns from a budgetary and legal viewpoint. To begin with, the impressive but equally cluttered allocation of most of the EPF's initial budget in support of Kyiv's armed forces poses questions about EU member states' intention to perpetuate their financial and military efforts not only in Ukraine but also in other contexts (Danilov, 2023). As for the EU monitoring mechanism to ensure compliance with international law, it would be difficult to ascertain the Union's responsibility in scenarios like weapons misuse resulting in damage in the Ukrainian context, not only because of the lack of foreseeability that they would be misused, but first and foremost because it is up to member states' competent authorities to organise and finance the transfer (Leonardo, 2023). In doing so, they all apply different standards which, notwithstanding the need to comply with international humanitarian and human rights law, risk undermining harmonisation attempts at the EU level, which would be paramount for a straightforward enforcement of the EPF funding and monitoring mechanisms.

To put it in another way, the EU's intervention on Ukraine's side was dictated by the state of emergency arisen since the invasion's unleash (i.e. acute military conflict and active hostilities), which precludes on-field control over EPF's procedural requirements, which range from the importer's compliance with its international humanitarian law obligations to the impossibility for external observers like

the European Parliament and/or civil society actors to access relevant information and, consequently, assess assistance measures' legitimacy (Danilov, 2023). Similar criticisms about lack of oversight over aid provision have been raised with regard to the African context: since the EU's new funding strategy deprives the African Union Commission of its coordination role before funds are provided to the designated beneficiaries, it might cause the AU to lose grip over continental peace and security while allowing unaccountable security and military actors from benefiting from EU training and equipment (International Crisis Group, 2021, pp. 19-21; Lumina, 2022).

Room for Improvement and Future Outlooks

The final chapter tries to identify room for improvement to make the EPF a financially robust and fully operational instrument in the short-term period. To begin with, it reflects upon the assertions in security and defence matters by the 2022 Strategic Compass to identify the role such a tool might have within the CSDP framework in light of the fast-evolving and war-torn security landscape in Continental Europe and beyond. Secondly, the chapter ponders the opportunity to coordinate the EPF with a rather piecemeal CSDP toolbox to overcome the so-called 'failing forward' approach and undertake a 'bellicist integration', thus triggering a threat-induced alignment of EU member states' interests in peacebuilding and crisis management abroad. In its third and final sub-section, the chap-

ter examines the proposals coming from the European Parliament, whose role in foreign, security and defence policy is almost negligible. In particular, it takes into consideration the potential creation of a second off-budget facility to manage the development and the generation of the entire life cycle of the EU's security and defence capabilities. In parallel, it discusses whether the Council can benefit from parliamentary oversight over external



action initiatives.

The 2022 Strategic Compass as a Solid Baseline for Improvement

The Strategic Compass on Security and Defence is aimed at providing elucidations and guidance on the CSDP framework while trying to come up with a comprehensive understanding of the short-/medium-term security threats and challenges to the Continent, including geopolitical competition, economic rivalry, technological advancement, disinformation, climate change and regional/global instability (Council of the EU, n.d.-a). Adopted just eight months after the EPF's entry into force, the document envisions a four-pillar strategy to bolster EU security

and defence: partner, invest, act and secure (EEAS, n.d.; EEAS, 2022b). Within the ‘act’ domain, the Strategic Compass acknowledges the need for the Union to increase its capacity and willingness to strengthen its resilience, ensure inter-state solidarity and deliver mutual assistance in line with art. 42(7) TEU, while stepping up its worldwide presence through strategic courses of action embracing democratic values, promoting human security and respecting defence policy commitments of some member states (EEAS, 2022b, p. 10). In a nutshell, the Strategic Compass could operationalise the EU’s vital foreign policy interests (i.e. the promotion of security, prosperity, democracy and a rules-based global order) across a wider geographical scope encompassing European neighbourhood and the rest of the world through targeted engagement (Molenaar, 2021, p. 20). To fulfil these objectives, the document calls for increased recourse to the EPF by replicating the proactive assistance efforts in Ukraine: in case EU ad-hoc missions or operations act in the same or adjacent contexts (references are made to the Sahel, the Horn of Africa and the Hormuz Strait), it encourages their mutual reinforcement and coordination from a logistical, intelligence sharing and medical evacuation capacities level (EEAS, 2022b, p. 26). In this sense, the EPF could turn into a formidable platform not only to restore or maintain peace and security but also to promote interoperability among EU and local armed forces. To build partners’ defence capabilities, the Union pledges to embrace a tailored and integrated approach consisting of training, advising, mentoring and equipping programmes: to promote them, EU member states should continue relying

on the Neighbourhood Development and International Cooperation Instrument which, if complemented with the EPF, can contribute to intensify African and Western Balkan partners’ capacity building and resilience against hybrid threats, thus helping the Union become a fully-fledged crisis management actor (EEAS, 2022b, p. 57 and 60).

On its side, to match such level of ambition, the EU will need to bolster its capacities, critical enablers and equipment to support well-trained civilian and military personnel for the successful completion of their tasks (EEAS, 2022b, p. 29). In particular, EU member states will have to devise a more transparent and structured picture of CSDP personnel through political consultation, facilitate a fair share of contributions to missions and operations, make troops rotation more predictable and transparent and expand the common costs’ scope: should these efforts be successfully undertaken, EU member states will also be able to fulfil the commitments made under the PESCO framework (EEAS, 2022b, p. 29).

Coordination With Other CSDP Instruments to Avoid a ‘Failing Forward’ Approach

In a policy field like defence and security, the combination of little competence of EU institutions with the high leverage enjoyed by member states gives rise to the so-called ‘failing forward’ approach, where consensus can only be reached through lowest-common-denominator bargains (Jones, Kelemen & Meunier, 2021, pp. 1519-1520 and 1529). Such sub-optimal policy outcomes, however, can encourage competent authorities to under-

take an ‘experiential learning’ process by generating feedback effects which are incorporated into subsequent reforms (Bergmann and Müller, 2021). As a result, by understanding the limits of the EPF’s intergovernmental dynamics, EU member states can embark on a slow but steady revisitation not only of the EPF itself but of the CSDP framework as a whole so as to encourage the harmonisation of defence standards and practices at supranational level, as well as the alignment of EU’s crisis management with an adaptive form of peacebuilding (de Coning, 2018; Jones, Kelemen & Meunier, 2021, p. 1529). In the conflict-affected contexts at issue, this should be read as a call for the EU to embrace a comprehensive approach to capacity building through a wide array of security and defence instruments alongside the EPF (Molenaar, 2021, p. 21).

Along these lines, to make sure that it can generate added value to the EU’s external action, the EPF should be made coherent with the existing CSDP toolbox and enjoy adequate human resources for its management (European Peacebuilding Liaison Office, 2019). Along these lines, for a smoother delivery of on-field assistance, coordination should be reached between the EPF staff and the on-field EU military personnel already dealing with the crisis or the conflict at issue, either through military training or assistance missions for local armed forces. On the financial side of the matter, the EPF would benefit from the coordination with the European Defence Fund for a larger pooling of resources. Such a move would, first, save the Council the effort to periodically increase the financial ceiling with budgetary allocations from scratch. Secondly,

it would encourage member states to undertake multi-year investments rather than short-term allocations which, rather than swerving conflicts and crises towards resolution, only postpone it to a later stage.

Thirdly, and most importantly, it would bring the EPF within the multi-annual financial framework; however, to comply with the ban imposed by art. 41(2) TEU on allocating EU budget to activities with military and defence implications, such a move could be confined to less sensitive assistance measures like the provision of non-lethal equipment. From a transparency and accountability standpoint, the EPF could be subject to the CARD: in doing so, not only would the funding mechanism be subjected to public scrutiny, but it would also give a say to what is arguably the key body alongside the Council in defence matters, i.e. the EDA.

European Parliament’s Proposal of a Second Off-Budget Facility and the Implications of Parliamentary Oversight Over EU External Action

The adoption and enforcement of the EPF has aroused some debate among members of the European Parliament: on the one hand, a faction of them hailed it as a ‘logical step’ to prevent 3rd states’ armed forces requiring assistance from further weakening vis-à-vis domestic rebels or terrorist actors (Siebel, n.d., p. 39). On the other hand, others flagged the risk of misusing or selling weapons supplies to exacerbate conflicts or crises or argued that the EPF shifts the Union’s understanding from soft power to a military actor (Siebel, n.d., p. 39). On such grounds, ever since the instrument’s entry into force, the Parliament

has advocated for a supervisory role on the funds' expenditure (European Parliament, 2021b). In its 18 January 2023 resolution, it even went as far as calling for the launch of a second off-budget facility to manage the development of the entire defence capabilities' life cycle, including common military research and development, procurement, training, maintenance and security of supply of assistance measures (Bilquin, 2023; European Parliament, 2023). To date, however, the Council has only agreed to inform it, with no real intention to either involve its co-legislator in the decision-making process or to take the proposal into consideration (Council of the EU, 2020a).

Indeed, the Council's approach to the EPF's functioning is very coherent with the inter-governmental nature of the CFSP and CSDP domains; nevertheless, time has arrived for EU member states to increase transparency on the way the EPF's budget is spent by grounding it on a solid balance between fi-

nancial, economic and political interests: by liaising with 3rd countries' political elites, business community and military industry, they can establish long-term expenditure patterns (Danilov, 2023). In parallel, a more pondered, predictable and human security-oriented spending plan ensures that EPF's resources are not disproportionately allocated in one context over another, are delivered to trustworthy recipients and the assistance measures do not impair EU's image as peacekeeping/peace-building actor (Syrjänen, 2023, p. 58; European Peacebuilding Liaison Office, 2021, p. 4). To ensure these conditions are satisfied, it will be paramount for the Council to coordinate efforts with international or regional organisations and civil society institutions (e.g. human rights defenders) which can potentially exercise a significant influence over the assistance's procedural steps in conflict-affected scenarios (Danilov, 2023; Joint Civil Society Statement, 2020).

CONCLUDING REMARKS

This paper has aimed to illustrate the features and the functioning of the EPF in a world order whose security is being challenged by unprecedented instability through (un)conventional warfare means and, as far as Continental Europe is concerned, a war of attrition whose end does not seem to be in sight. It has tried to unpack the hidden potential of such an instrument when it comes to peacekeeping, military training and transitioning from armed conflict to, ideally, democracy. In light of its recent entry into force, the paper did not aim at making conclusive assessments on the EPF's performance in the states/regions at issue: in fact, we should still wait for the end of this decade for EU member states to take stock of their actions.

What remains sure is that the EPF came to life at a moment in which the EU needed an instrument to coordinate its peacekeeping and crisis management efforts within the CSDP framework and, from there, put member states in the position to make their financial and manpower contributions to out-of-area missions and operations more coherent. Nevertheless, the time has arrived for the Union to integrate this instrument within a common long-term vision of what it wants to achieve and the position it wants to gain as crisis management actor in the international arena: in this sense, the Strategic Compass can act as the perfect platform to push member states to think and act as Europeans vis-à-vis their security partners around the globe (Molenaar, 2021, pp. 21-22). In other words, it should trigger strategic dialogue between member states and EU institutions with the aim to develop a shared culture and lexicon in the CSDP (Kar-

jalainen & Savoranta, 2021, p. 18). To translate such intentions into policies and turn into an autonomous crisis management actor, the EU needs to adopt a two-fold approach: on the one hand, it should embrace an internal-looking regulatory power to strengthen its sovereignty on defence through ambitious political and financial commitments; on the other hand, it should preserve an outward-looking *modus operandi* grounded on peace, democracy and human rights protection (Radu, 2022, p. 83).

With hindsight, the EPF's entry into force established a funding floor which allowed the Union to support Ukraine after Russia unleashed the full-scale invasion militarily and financially on 24 February 2022. Nevertheless, as the conflict goes on, the EU runs the risk of diverting its financial and human efforts to Ukraine to the detriment of the other contexts (notably in Africa) in which it is engaged, thus snapping back to the pre-EPF years when the geographically narrow-scope ATHENA and APF were in place. To avoid this scenario, the periodical increase of the EPF's financial ceiling should be accompanied by legally binding initiatives: for instance, its incorporation in the multi-annual financial framework would oblige member states to contribute to CSDP activities, of course depending on their defence capabilities. Additionally, it could take inspiration from PESCO's functioning so as to foresee a commonly agreed set of binding commitments for each mission/operation funded by an EPF scheme. The ultimate variable would be whether member states can build political consensus at Council level, as unanimity is required to act in such a sensitive area as the CSDP.

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