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Developing a common narrative for civilian CSDP

Baseline Document for the
CoE Civilian CSDP Summer Forum
12 – 13 May 2025, Warsaw

Purpose and objectives of the Baseline Document

The title of this year's Civilian CSDP Summer Forum is "Developing a common narrative for civilian CSDP". The aim of the forum is to focus on how EU Member States (MS) - from a national perspective - can create a common narrative for civilian CSDP - which is part of the overall EU Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) - directed to relevant target groups. At the national level, a common narrative for civilian CSDP can underpin the added value of civilian CSDP tools, for example by explaining the linkages between security issues in host countries and in Member States.

This baseline document emphasises the importance of a common narrative. Together with the guiding questions below, it intends to provide food for thought on how MS can increase an understanding of civilian CSDP, secure political will, and increase secondments to civilian CSDP missions.

Civilian CSDP goals and context

The worsening security environment, marked by Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, hybrid warfare targeting MS and their partners, anti-democratic movements worldwide, and geopolitical shifts involving the USA and China underscore the necessity for more coordinated EU action in times of uncertainty. The new geopolitical landscape requires a stronger role for Europe to guarantee the security of EU citizens and partners and defend fundamental European values. The link between internal and external security has become increasingly evident. Threats such as terrorism, hybrid and cyber-attacks, organised crime, erosion of democratic structures including the progress on gender equality, and climate change highlight how events beyond the EU's borders can directly impact its internal security.

Especially in times of increasing military responses to external security threats, underscoring the significance of civilian CSDP and its missions as a complementary tool to military CSDP is ever more important. Therefore, MS must effectively convey its added value to key target audiences. These include national parliaments, ministries, seconding agencies and secondees, and the general public. To achieve this, MS need to develop a convincing narrative that highlights civilian CSDP as a crucial tool for crisis management and prevention and which can be tailored to their respective national context.

What is a narrative in the context of Civilian CSDP and why do we need it?

A narrative is a story that helps to communicate complex ideas, values, events, and experiences in a clear and accessible manner. In the context of civilian CSDP, it is a structured and coherent explanation

of why civilian CSDP is an effective tool to address security threats beyond the EU's borders, prevent conflicts, manage crises, and stabilise post-conflict societies, how it works, and what impact it has.

In a time when political decision-making is primarily focused on "hard security", it is even more crucial to enhance the visibility of civilian CSDP to secure long-term political support and ensure sustained resource allocation. Hence, creating both a common as well as a compelling national narrative for civilian CSDP is essential for raising public and political visibility and securing political and public support.

Building a narrative for Civilian CSDP – What is the story we want to tell?

While MS recognise the importance of a common narrative, the individual content and "building blocks" in shaping a narrative in the national context might differ. The following guiding questions should provide ideas for the structure and content of a common narrative, on which basis an individual MS narrative can be developed.

1) Outlining the purpose of a civilian CSDP narrative

- a. Why is it important that MS engage in civilian CSDP?
- b. What is the added value of civilian CSDP compared to other EU tools in addressing security threats and preventing and managing conflicts and crises?
- c. How is it complementing military tools?

2) Explaining the "world" of civilian CSDP

- a. Who are the main actors in civilian CSDP? What are civilian CSDP missions and what is their mandate?
- b. How does secondment work and what are the benefits for secondees and seconding authorities?
- c. Which capabilities do MS need to provide or improve to effectively engage in civilian CSDP?

3) Describing the intended impact of civilian CSDP missions

- a. How can civilian CSDP missions enhance the EU's credibility as a global security actor and align with broader EU common foreign and security policy objectives?
- b. How can civilian CSDP missions contribute to long-term stability and conflict prevention in host countries and to the security of European citizens?
- c. What is the impact of civilian CSDP missions on the development of national capabilities, in particular in the security sector, both in MS and host countries?

Identifying target audiences at the national level for a Civilian CSDP narrative

To ensure effective messaging of the civilian CSDP narrative, it is important to identify which elements of the narrative are relevant to each target audience. Key audiences for civilian CSDP are national parliaments, ministries, seconding agencies and secondees, and the general public. To tailor the relevant messages to the respective audience, a strategic communications approach is needed. Parliamentarians for instance must understand the "functioning" and effectiveness of civilian CSDP to incentivise political willingness and decision-making, for mobilising the necessary financial resources for civilian CSDP. National ministries must be encouraged to take the appropriate steps to ensure that adequate budgetary means and qualified personnel are available to meet the commitments made in the National Implementation Plans (NIPs). In addition, effective national governance structures including interministerial coordination mechanisms and sound legal frameworks are the backbone for successful support of civilian CSDP. Lastly, seconding agencies need to shape their communication of a narrative to attract future secondees and increase secondment numbers in the long run. This concerns especially the outreach to experts outside public service, climate and security experts, as well as experts on cyber and hybrid threats, and women applicants.

Even though messaging may differ depending on the target audience, all communications are rooted in a shared/common narrative. This narrative ensures that all communications serve the purpose of convincing the relevant body to support civilian CSDP in future – be it through political support, budgetary or human resources.

Outlook

A well-crafted national narrative should convince the target audiences on the necessity to invest in civilian CSDP now and in future. Targeted strategic communication is essential to engage key stakeholders, including parliamentarians, ministries, secondees and seconding agencies, and the wider public, ensuring their commitment to political, financial, and human resource support.

The Civilian CSDP Summer Forum 2025 will provide an informal platform to facilitate exchange between Member States on this topic, to lay the groundwork for the future development of a common narrative. The StratComms Cluster may build on the common narrative when looking for the appropriate communication strategies and instruments to address respective target groups.

Contact details of authors:

Bianca Balint

bianca.balint@coe-civ.eu

Dietrich Lingenthal

dietrich.lingenthal@coe-civ.eu

**European Centre of Excellence for
Civilian Crisis Management**

Kurfürstendamm 201
10719 Berlin, Germany

Telephone: +49 30 343 523 000

Email: office@coe-civ.eu



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