

# EU comprehensive approach and its implications for the coherence of EU external action

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The European Union adopted by 492 votes to 94, with 28 abstentions, a resolution on the EU comprehensive approach and its implications for the coherence of EU external action.

**The EU in a changing world:** Parliament recalled that significant geostrategic changes are taking place, owing in particular to the rise of a multipolar international scene with new actors pursuing competitive regional and global ambitions, growing interdependency, the rise of multidimensional asymmetric threats, the refocusing of US security policy towards the Asia-Pacific, the growing struggle over energy and resource security, the increasingly serious effects of climate change and a severe and long-lasting global financial and economic crisis affecting all EU Member States. Members stressed that in such a geopolitical climate, a **fresh approach** is needed in order to shape a new multipolar world order that is inclusive, credible, just, cooperative, underpinned by respect for human rights, to resolve differences without recourse to armed conflict.

**EU comprehensive approach: state of play in implementing the political framework:** Parliament stressed the importance of effective coordination and coherence in the European Union's external action. It underlined the fact that the Lisbon Treaty provides the framework for the Union to achieve a more **coherent, joined-up and comprehensive approach** for the effective pursuit of the Union's external relations, including by creating the **triple-hatted High Representative (HR) of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy**, who is also Vice-President of the Commission and Chair of the Foreign Affairs Council, and by establishing a unifying and **effective European External Action Service (EEAS)**.

In this regard, Parliament regretted that, despite the Lisbon Treaty innovations, lack of progress in the consistency of the Union's external action persists in areas relating to security, humanitarian matters, development, trade, energy, environment, migration and other global issues. It is concerned that the Commission often takes a restrictive approach, protecting its own competences in these areas and **minimising coordination functions with the EEAS**.

**Priority areas for a comprehensive approach:** Parliament considered that as a basis for moving from concept to action in the pursuit of a comprehensive approach, the following four areas must be addressed:

**1. Institutional coherence:** all relevant institutions (the EEAS and the Commission's relevant services, including ECHO, DEVCO, TRADE and ELARG, but also Parliament and the Council) should work together to pursue common objectives within an agreed framework designed at EU level, and mobilising its most relevant instruments, **including the CSDP**.

This general approach should be supported by the **EEAS** and promote: i) mediation and dialogue; ii) the principles of humanitarian aid. Members welcomed in this regard Joint Communication "A comprehensive approach to the European Union against external crises and conflicts" ([JOIN\(2013\)0030](#)), which represents an opportunity to clarify and operationalise this approach in the new post-Lisbon institutional setting. Plenary insisted that **foreign policy objectives should not be placed in opposition to development principles** and principled humanitarian action, as all three policies are complementary. Parliament recalled that Article 208 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU) establishes the principle of Policy Coherence for Development (PCD), and emphasised the potential for tension between PCD on the one hand and the comprehensive approach to crisis management outside the EU on the other. It stressed that the main goal of the EU's development policy is the **eradication of**

**poverty** and that it is therefore essential that **anti-poverty objectives are not marginalised in EU foreign policy** and that the **comprehensive approach does not erode the civilian character of development cooperation**.

Parliament called for the safeguarding of the humanitarian principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence which are crucial for both the effectiveness of humanitarian action and the **safety of its actors**.

Parliament also focused on other related aspects of the comprehensive approach:

- the importance of conflict prevention;
- joint analysis, joint assessment and planning as well as the clear division of responsibilities in this context.

**2. Financial coherence:** Parliament recalled its determination to ensure that the Union's external financial instruments for the period 2014-2020 are designed so as to facilitate the pursuit of a comprehensive approach to external relations Union.

It regretted that the **lack of ambition** in the EU budget for external action for the period 2014-2020 and called for better anticipation of the funding needed for the implementation of EU strategies. It recalled the need to **review the financing mechanism for military CSDP operations** (known as the ATHENA mechanism), so as to allow for a more adequate and fairer burden-sharing of the costs of EU military operations, thus enabling all Member States to contribute through force generation or financing the supporting costs.

**3. Coherence in practice:** Parliament insisted that such strategies should clearly set out the EU's objectives and priorities and the specific timeframe for implementation and determine what instruments are best suited for action (ranging from inter alia humanitarian and development aid to diplomatic action and mediation, economic sanctions, and the CSDP). It stressed that the role and contribution from the CSDP should be part of the initial political analysis and definition of policy objectives. It regretted that, even when strategies are defined, the EU often does not manage to implement them, and is instead forced to take **contingency and emergency action** (as was the case in Sahel region, for which a very comprehensive and well-prepared EU strategy document had been unanimously approved but did not lead to satisfactory implementation until the situation in Mali deteriorated dramatically). There is a need to improve upstream action by operating a policy shift from reactive-centric approaches to a more adequate and efficient prevention-focused approach.

Members are convinced that, in cases where crises cannot be avoided, the **EU must be able to plan and deploy the appropriate civilian and military assets**, as well as mobilise complementary EU instruments, rapidly and effectively across the whole spectrum of crisis management operations, including in cases of humanitarian crises. They called on the Member States to commit to **unified EU action in third countries** and to make sure that coordination and articulation of actions on the ground are duly concerted with the EU institutions, namely the Commission and the EEAS. Members regretted in this regard that autonomous action by Member States in third countries, especially post-conflict and democratising societies, without proper articulation between them and the EU local Delegation has proved damaging to the EU's goals and interests.

**4. Partnerships:** Parliament stressed that a successful comprehensive approach also requires **developing partnerships outside the Union's institutions** and Member States, to include other international and multilateral partners, strategic partners, host countries, regional organisations, civil society actors and the private sector, with due respect for the decision-making autonomy of the EU. It reiterated its view, in keeping with the purposes of the Lisbon Treaty in enhancing EU foreign policy and the role of the EU in global peace, security and regulation, that an **EU seat in an enlarged UNSC remains a central, long-**

**term goal of the European Union.** Parliament, therefore, invited the VP/HR to take the initiative to develop a common position of the Member States to that end.