Preventing What for Whom?: EU Conflict Prevention Efforts in Pursuit of Autonomy

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Conflict prevention has formed an integral part of the European Union's (EU's) Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) since the early 2000s, with investments in civilian peacebuilding and conflict prevention competences suiting well with the Union's 'civilian' or 'normative' power role. The transforming international order is, however, changing the strategic environment also for the Union's and its Member States' conflict prevention and peacebuilding efforts. This article analyses the implications of the evolving strategic autonomy debate for the EU's role conception and concrete action in the realm of conflict prevention. While the search for a more capable EU in security and defence does not automatically counter the Union's self-conception as a conflict preventor and peacebuilder, it does appear to introduce meaningful shifts in the core objectives and values guiding its external action in conflict situations. An analysis of the EU's rhetoric and concrete uses of its institutional conflict prevention and peacebuilding tools in recent years in Africa suggests a growing centralization of security and geopolitical considerations at the expense of the core ethos of conflict prevention.

Keywords: EU, Conflict prevention, Strategic autonomy, CFSP- Arica, Instrument contributing to stability and peace (IcSP)

1   INTRODUCTION

The EU Global Strategy[1] (EUGS) that articulates and envisions the EU's role in the world was first published in June 2016, only days after the Brexit vote and a few months before the US presidential elections brought Donald Trump to power. Reflective of the trends that contributed also to these consequential political events, the EUGS called for a more assertive and capable EU that could better shape and secure its external environment and protect its interests amid shifting international dynamics. Somewhat departing from the ethos of the civilian power EU, the strategy nurtured the notion of strategic autonomy and highlighted the need to strengthen common security and defence (capabilities) as one of the core

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priorities when envisioning a less 'naïve' and more geopolitical EU.[2] Nevertheless, the EUGS also manifested strong continuity in the EU's role as a 'force for good' whose actions build on the values of peace, human rights, and democracy. The formulation of the integrated approach to conflicts and crises highlighted the importance of civilian conflict prevention and long-term peacebuilding and development support in the external sphere and the connection of these to the Union's own well-being and security.[3] Commitment to respond proactively to alarming situations exhibited an aspiration to be a constructive yet more assertive power, as stressed by the former High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and Vice-President of the European Commission (HR/VP) Federica Moghereni as she reflected the rationale behind the strategy in 2019:

'*I think that we realised at that time that we had to think beyond the emergencies, and focus on how to avoid the next crisis; how to build resilience so that we could prevent a crisis instead of managing it when it was already too late*'.[4]

Significant empirical developments have taken place since the Global Strategy was published. As this article goes to print, a war rages in Europe, with Russia having started a full-scale invasion on Ukraine on 24th of February, 2022. Yet even before this offense on European security order, geopolitical and geoeconomic competition among global and regional powers had intensified and also continued to draw the US' attention towards the Indo-Pacific; armed conflicts continued in high numbers; and new and old global threats (e.g., the pandemic and the climate crisis) added stress on the international community.[5] Within the EU, these developments have intensified calls for and debate over strategic autonomy, defined here as 'the political, institutional and material ability of the EU and its Member States to manage their interdependence with third parties, with the aim of ensuring the well-being of their citizens and implementing self-determined policy decisions'.[6] Albeit having become a more broadly applied concept, the bulk of the strategic autonomy debate – particularly the public discussions but also the scholarly work – continues to centre around the need for, capabilities, and performance of

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[2]   H. Delphin, *Above the Fog and the Fury: EU Stategic Policy Planning and the EU's Future in Times of Global Uncertainty*, 26(1) Eur. For. Affairs Rev. 41 (2021).

[3]   *See* Council of the European Union, *Council Conclusions on the Integrated Approach to External Conflicts and Crises* (2018), https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-5413-2018-INIT/en/pdf (accessed 30 Nov. 2021).

[4]   F. Mogherini, *Speech by High Representative/Vice-President Federica Mogherini at the Annual Conference of the European Union Institute for Security Studies (EUISS)* (2019), https://www.pressclub.be/press-releases/speech-by-high-representation-vice-president-federica-mogherini-at-the-annual-conference-of-the-european-union-institute-for-security-studies-euiss/ (accessed 30 Nov. 2021).

[5]   *See* Delphin, *supra* n. 2; T. Pettersson et al., *Organized Violence 1989–2020, with a Special Emphasis on Syria*, 58(4) J. Peace Research 809–825 (2021).

[6]   N. Helwig, *Introduction: The EU's Choices in Advancing Strategic Autonomy*, in *Strategic Autonomy and the Transformation of the EU: New Agendas for Security, Diplomacy, Trade and Technology* 21, 15–25 (N. Helwig ed., Finnish Institute of International Affairs 2021).

the EU as a global actor in the realm of 'hard' security and defence.[7] This was clear in the calls for a more autonomous security actor EU following the swift Taliban takeover in Afghanistan in august 2021 and the chaotic international withdrawal from the country.[8] This is likely to become even clearer as the war on Ukraine continues, its initial days having catalysed the EU and its Member States to adopt unprecedented action in support of Ukraine also in the realm of security and defence.[9] Even amid the larger debate, considerably less attention has been given to the role of development and civilian conflict prevention and peacebuilding tools in helping the Union to face the more competitive strategic external environment and safeguard its interests. Relatedly, there has been little focus on the ways in which the strategic autonomy pursuit influences the EU's agency in these policy realms.[10]

To address these research gaps, this article examines the implications of the strategic autonomy debate for the EU's role conception and performance within one of its core civilian and normative power realms, namely conflict prevention. Notably, civilian conflict prevention and peacebuilding efforts constitute a cross-cutting realm for the EU in that whilst they involve actions that fall under (unanimous) intergovernmental CFSP decision-making (e.g., civilian crisis management, sanctions, or diplomatic actions by the Council), the EU also has considerable supranational capabilities and institutional mechanisms in conflict prevention due to its origins and placing in the EU's broad development sphere.[11] It is important to study how such (pooled) capabilities are used amid shifting expectations from within and outside the EU towards its global role. Aside contributing to the strategic autonomy debate, the article contributes to the study of (EU) conflict prevention in two ways. First, it takes stock of the conceptual debate and understanding of core conflict prevention amid shifting conflict dynamics and increasing emphasis on crisis preparedness. Second, it expands empirical focus from Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP), institutional capability development, and the

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[7]   Aside this realm, particularly technological power and geoeconomics have gained attention. *See* the Introduction to this Special Issue.

[8]   *See* e.g., A. Brzozowski, *Post-Afghanistan, EU Defence Moves Closer Towards Military Coalitions* Euractiv, 2 Septembre 2021, https://www.euractiv.com/section/defence-and-security/news/post-afghanistan-eu-defence-moves-closer-towards-military-coalitions/ (accessed 30 Nov. 2021).

[9]   *See* e.g., T. Karjalainen & K. Mustasilta, *War in Ukraine: The European Union evolves as Putin Attacks*, 4 FIIA Comment (2022).

[10] Lippert et al. reflect strategic autonomy in the light of the EU's civilian instruments and call for a strategic culture that would include these aside the focus on hard instruments. *See* B. Lippert, N. von Ondarza & V. Perthes, *European Strategic Autonomy: Actors, Issues, Conflicts of Interests*, 4(19) Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik Research Paper, 20 (German Institute for International and Security Affairs 2019).

[11] E. Stewart, *Capabilities and Coherence? The Evolution of European Union Conflict Prevention*, 13(2) Eur. For. Affairs Rev. 229–253 (2008).

Member States' efforts to the concrete uses of the Union's institutional conflict prevention instruments.[12]

The article continues with a short conceptual discussion regarding conflict prevention, demonstrating the considerable space for interpretation in calling something prevention. The (in)compatibilities between the EU's roles as a conflict preventor and peacebuilder and as an autonomous, more assertive actor are then discussed using the analytical tools of foreign policy role theory. On the one hand, the role conceptions do not necessarily contradict each other, and the relatively strong institutional and value basis for conflict prevention can give it added value in the strategic autonomy pursuit. Simultaneously, however, the contemporary external and interactive dimensions of role construction push the Member States and the EU to adopt a security-focused notion of crisis prevention in pursuit of (re-) gaining internal security and geopolitical agency. This induces role ambiguity and can weaken the EU's role conception and performance in conflict prevention, as indicated by the declining rhetorical adherence to conflict prevention. Empirically, an analysis of the use of the Instrument contributing to stability and peace (IcSP) in Africa and the EU's response to the conflict in Northern Mozambique point to a growing focus on security and geopolitical leverage in the use of conflict prevention means and funds.

2   CONCEPTUALIZATION(S) AND AMBIGUITIES REGARDING CONFLICT PREVENTION

Much like the notion of strategic autonomy,[13] conflict prevention is not a new item on the EU's foreign and security policy agenda. While inherently part of the EU's internal *raison d'être*, the objective of preventing conflicts found its way also to the EU's foreign affairs already in the 1990s and has since become an important part of the EU's self-conception as a global actor.[14] The EU Programme for the Prevention of Violent Conflicts, the so called Gothenburg programme in 2001, first defined the ambitions and attributes of the EU in conflict prevention more explicitly: the programme referred to conflict prevention as a core foreign policy objective of the Union, a commitment that was reiterated by the European Security Strategy (2003), the Lisbon Treaty (2007), Council Conclusions (2011),

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12   For research on these topics, *see* A.E. Juncos & S. Blockmans, *The EU's Role in Conflict Prevention and Peacebuilding: Four Key Challenges*, 4(2–3) Global Affairs, 131–140 (2018); R. Alcaro & M. Siddi, *Lead Groups in EU Foreign Policy: The Cases of Iran and Ukraine*, 8(2) Eur. Rev. Intl. Stud. 143–165 (2021); T. Karjalainen & V. Savolainen, *The EU's Strategic Approach to CSDP Interventions: Building a Tenet from Praxis*, 11 FIIA Analysis (2021).
13   *See* Helwig, *supra* n. 6, at 15.
14   Stewart, *supra* n. 11; T. Tardy, *The European Union – From Conflict Prevention 'Preventive Engagement', Still a Civilian Power Lacking a Strategic Culture*, 62(3) Intl. J. 539–555 (2007).

and more recently the EUGS (2016).[15] Beyond envisioning the EU's agency as one that contributes to conflict prevention at large, the programme defined a broad range of concrete means and tools instituting the EU's conflict prevention toolset. The categorization of these tools followed a common two-dimensional under-standing of conflict prevention as falling under structural, or long-term preven-tion – engagements to tackle the root causes of conflicts, such as socioeconomic deprivation and inequalities, through development cooperation, for example – and operational, or short-term prevention – i.e., diplomatic efforts to defuse tensions and resolve them peacefully in situations of immediate threat of escalation.[16] Notably, the core attributes in the EU's understanding of conflict prevention have remained largely intact: The EUGS envisions an actor guided by the principle of contributing to peace and security and reiterates the dual commitment in addressing the 'root causes of conflict' and responding 'promptly' to early warning signs of conflicts.[17]

The EU's understanding of conflict prevention is largely in line with the dominant scholarly and practitioner conceptualizations, yet it also reflects some of the key ambiguities related to the concept. First, as others have noted, the EU understands conflict prevention both as a broad aim – not unlike security – guiding all its foreign policy behaviour, and as a narrower set of tools aimed at preventing the escalation of specific conflict threats.[18] Regarding the narrower understanding, the EU policy documents set the aim at preventing violent and major escalation of conflicts to avoid protracted conflicts and high human suffering. This notion of preventing violent escalation is shared among most scholars who note that conflicts are a normal part of any social interactions, and the issue lies in the way they are handled (peacefully versus destructively).[19] Simultaneously, conflict prevention is separable from impeding violence and forcing peace through its emphasis on

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[15] Council of the EU, *EU Programme for the Prevention of Violent Conflicts* (2001), https://data.consilium. europa.eu/doc/document/ST-9537-2001-REV-1/en/pdf; Council of the EU, *European Security Strategy: A Secure Europe in a Better World* (2003), https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/30823/ qc7809568enc.pdf; Treaty of Lisbon, Ch. 1, Art. 10 A 2c (17 Dec. 2007); Council of the EU, *Council Conclusions on Conflict Prevention* (2011),
https://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/docs/pressdata/EN/foraff/ 122911.pdf; EEAS, *supra* n. 1.

[16] A. Ackermann, *The Idea and Practice of Conflict Prevention*, 40(3) J. Peace Research, 339–347 (2003); Carnegie Commission on Preventing Deadly Conflict, *Preventing Deadly Conflict. Final Report* (Carnegie Corporation of New York 1997).

[17] EEAS, *supra* 1, at 18.

[18] L. Davis, *Betwixt and Between: Conceptual and Practical Challenges of Preventing Violent Conflict Through EU External Action*, 4(2–3) Global Affairs 157–169 (2018); L. Davis, N. Habbida & A. Penfrat, *EU-CIVCAP: The EU's Capabilities for Conflict Prevention* (European Peacebuilding Liaison Office 2017).

[19] Carnegie Commission on Preventing Deadly Conflict, *Preventing Deadly Conflict. Final Report* (Carnegie Corporation of New York 1997); D. Carment & A. Schnabel, *Introduction – Conflict Prevention: A Concept in Search of a Policy*, in *Conflict Prevention: Path to Peace or Grand Illusion?* 1–10 (D. Carment & A. Schnabel ed., United Nations University Press 2003).

supporting nonviolent ways to resolve and address conflictual relations. This ought to distinguish prevention conceptually from stabilization, another key term in the framework of the EU.[20]

A closely connected issue relates to the timing of conflict prevention. One approach holds that prevention has its space strictly in the pre-escalation phase and that stretching the concept to cover prevention of expansion and diffusion of conflicts decreases its added value.[21] Another perspective finds the added value of the concept more in the way it implies addressing the present and the future drivers of violent escalation of conflictual relations, hence maintaining relevance also after initial escalation.[22] This wider notion of the momentum for conflict prevention is perhaps better in line with the multi-layered nature of contemporary conflicts and their high propensity to regionalize and internationalize. The EU's understanding of conflict prevention as a specific toolset situates preventive measures ideally to contexts before major escalation, prevention therefore being interlinked but separated from conflict management and resolution efforts. However, there is understanding among EU policy officials that the contemporary nature of conflicts makes clear separation between different conflict phases increasingly difficult.[23] Moreover, the broader understanding of conflict prevention as a foreign policy objective appears to cover all efforts to this aim at any phase of a conflict cycle.

Finally, timing relates to a question concerning the means of conflict prevention. Whether conflict prevention covers the so called 'hard' measures of military support and security operations is of relevance here. Prominent studies and theorizations build their conceptualization on conflict prevention around civilian means and maintain that conflict prevention rests on constructive action and support to early peaceful resolution rather than forcing of peace.[24] The EU also appears to understand the core tools within operational conflict prevention as civilian engagement in response to early warning signs of conflict escalation, for example by providing mediation support, facilitating negotiations, or supporting local initiatives.[25] Indicative of the embeddedness of these civilian tools in the EU's

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[20] See A. K. Talentino, *Evaluating Success and Failure: Conflict Prevention in Cambodia and Bosnia*, in *Conflict Prevention: Path to Peace or Grand Illusion?*, 70–87 (D. Carment & A. Schnabel eds, United Nations University Press 2003); Davis, *supra* n. 15, at 159.

[21] See e.g., M. Lund, *Conflict Prevention: Theory in Pursuit of Policy and Practice*, in *The SAGE Handbook of Conflict Resolution*, 287–308 (J. Bercovitch, V. Kremenyuk & I. W. Zartman, eds, SAGE 2009).

[22] Talentino, *supra* n. 20; L. Nathan, *When the Flames are Licking at the Door: Standing Mechanisms for Conflict Prevention*, 10(2) Global Pol'y 46–54 (2019).

[23] Interviews with EEAS officials.

[24] See P. Wallensteen, *Reassessing Recent Conflicts: Direct v. Structural Prevention*, in *From Reaction to Conflict Prevention: Opportunities for the UN System* (O. Hampson & D.M. Malone eds, Lynne Rienner 2002).

[25] EEAS, *Conflict Prevention, Peace Building and Mediation*, https://eeas.europa.eu/topics/conflict-prevention-peace-building-and-mediation/426/conflict-prevention-peace-building-and-mediation_en (accessed 30 Nov. 2021).

common understanding of conflict responses is that efforts building on them have solicited intra-EU consent and foreign policy recognition even when they have been spearheaded by informal forums of differentiated cooperation and lead groups – such as in the case of the Normandy framework in the Donbas conflict.[26] Still, particularly when referring to conflict prevention as the broad policy objective, EU agents also often refer to investments in security and defence capabilities. For example, the adoption of the new off-budget instrument European Peace Facility to finance operational action under the CFSP with military or defence implications is stated to be aimed at enhancing the EU's ability to, among other things, 'prevent conflicts'.[27] Notably, the instrument is now being used to finance considerable material support – including lethal equipment – to Ukraine and its armed forces. This is the first time the EU uses the instrument's unprecedented provision to provide lethal equipment support to third parties.[28]

Given these on-going conceptual debates, it is not altogether straightforward to define conflict prevention. However, one can find consensus on its core attributes. Conflict prevention is generally understood to rely on civilian and constructive third-party support to address the drivers of violent escalation (i.e., escalatory actions and rhetoric, information dilemmas, trust issues) and to peacefully resolve a conflictual relation in a timely fashion, as well as to tackle the underlying motivations and opportunities for (continuing) violent mobilization. Subsequently conflict prevention can be understood as both structural and operational measures that aim at lowering the (potential) parties' rationale for future armed mobilization in a vulnerable context or during an ongoing conflict process.[29] In concrete terms, mediation efforts, preventive diplomacy, support to national or local dialogues, and structural measures building on conflict analyses to lower the risk of violent escalation are among the core means of conflict prevention. Whilst military and security operations and support to such can contribute to conflict prevention by helping cessation of violence and opening space for peaceful resolution, they fall outside the core ethos of prevention on their own in that they do little to address the past and future relational drivers of violent escalation.

Still, the ambiguities regarding the scope of conflict prevention are meaningful in that they give room to diverse interpretations of the types of foreign policy efforts that an actor – such as the EU or its Member States – can present as conflict preventive. As the next sections discuss, changes in the broader strategic

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26   *See* Alcaro & Siddi, *supra* n. 12.
27   EU Commission, *European Peace Facility*, https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/european-peace-facility/ (accessed 25 Nov. 2021).
28   Karjalainen & Mustasilta, *supra* n. 9.
29   K. Mustasilta, *The Future of Conflict Prevention - Preparing for a Hotter, Increasingly Digital and Fragmented 2030* (European Union Institute for Security Studies 2021).

environment of the EU's CFSP appear to further catalyse shifts in these interpretations, which then shapes the EU's foreign policy role conceptions and the ways they are performed.

3   (IN)COMPATIBLE STRATEGIC AUTONOMY AND CONFLICT PREVENTION ROLES?

The EU's common foreign policy behaviour – like any international actor's – is not random or issue-specific and can be approached through the notion of foreign policy roles that are (re-)constructed in an interplay of agents and structures that constrain them.[30] Foreign policy roles can be thought of as non-static yet consistent frames for *how an actor is placed and acts* in a given foreign policy context, embodying both that actor's own self-image, intentions, and norms as well as other actors' expectations towards and interaction with the actor.[31] As roles are interactive and contextually embedded, an actor can conceive multiple roles that guide its behaviour: the EU has been associated to play the roles of a regional stabilizer, promoter of democracy and human rights, global economic power, and, indeed, conflict preventor and peacebuilder, for example.[32] A more autonomous and geopolitically assertive EU can also be understood as an evolving role conception, one that has been catalysed by changes in both the external environment and the EU's and its Member States' own intentions and that is being socialized alongside the Union's other role concepts.

Notably, there is nothing inherently conflictual in an actor conceiving multiple roles as these tend to be salient in different foreign policy contexts. When compatible, the various role conceptions can be understood to form a stable role-set for an actor. This is a more general role that situates the actor vis-à-vis other actors and is constrained and held together by the actor's central norms and values.[33] The notions of a civilian or a normative power EU have been interpreted as having played such a general foreign policy role for the EU.[34] Coined by Duchêne and Manners respectively, these terms characterize and proscribe the role of the EU vis-à-vis other international powers based on the quality of its influence: the EU's power is conceived and expected to rely on 'civilian forms of influence and action'; on cooperative and benign action that rests on upholding and promoting values such as peace and human rights and that changes the world

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[30]   *See* O. Elgström & M. Smith, *Introduction*, in *The European Union's Roles in International Politics: Concepts and Analysis*, 1–10 (O. Elgström & M. Smith eds, Routledge 2006).

[31]   *Ibid*.

[32]   L. Aggestam, *Role Theory and European Foreign Policy*, in *The European Union's Roles in International Politics: Concepts and Analysis*, 11–29 (O. Elgström & M. Smith eds, Routledge 2006).

[33]   *Ibid*.

[34]   *Ibid*.

by changing what is normal.[35] Nevertheless, foreign policy role ambiguity and conflict can take place when an actor's dominant role conceptions are inconsistent in terms of their normative basis and objectives or the meaning and centrality of specific roles, thus becoming incompatible. Major shifts in the actor's environment and interactions, such as the ones discussed in the introductions to this article and the Special Issue, can induce role conflicts by shaping expectations and intentions (including that of the Member States) regarding an actor's role. Role conflicts can lead to considerable foreign policy change by opening space for dissent and evolution concerning the actor's general orientation within the international system.[36] From this perspective, the puzzle about the implications of the strategic autonomy debate becomes a question on the extent to which its construction process is (in)compatible with EU's conflict prevention and peacebuilding role and how it shapes the EU's role stability and concrete foreign policy behaviour.

On the one hand, this question can be viewed as falling under an older debate on whether the EU's pursuit to play a more militarily substantiated security and defence role is compatible with its general role as a civilian or normative power (and thus its conflict prevention role conception).[37] While the pursuit of a more military substantiated global role appeared at first ill-fitting to the notion of civilian power EU, later accounts have sought to reconcile the incompatibilities by emphasizing the shared normative basis of both civilian and security/military power EU.[38] Aggestam, for example, has referred to 'ethical power EU' to capture the shift in the EU's foreign policy role that accommodates 'hard' power capacity pursuit while having the ground for all role conceptions still firmly in the established norms (e.g., peace) and objectives (sustainable international peace).[39] Maull attests that '[s]o long as the EU's military means are used to pursue civilian or normative needs, the Union is a civilian or normative power'.[40] Still others have suggested – both in response to early days of aspirations for more robust CSDP and in the light of the strategic autonomy debate in recent years – that acquiring a more strategic role and military capabilities can in fact strengthen the EU's normative agency as it helps to protect and promote the Union's norms and values.[41]

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[35] F. Duchêne, *Europe's Role in World Peace*, in *Europe Tomorrow: Sixteen Europeans Look Ahead* (R. Mayne ed., Fontana 1972); I. Manners, *Normative Power Europe: A Contradiction in Terms?*, 40(2) J. Com. Mkt. Stud. 235–258 (2002).

[36] Aggestam, *supra* n. 31.

[37] This debate first became salient amid the post-Cold war systemic changes and the EU's perceived failure to prevent major escalation of conflicts particularly in the former Yugoslavia.

[38] *See* e.g., R. Whitman, *Muscles from Brussels: The Demise of Civilian Power Europe?*, in *The European Union's Roles in International Politics: Concepts and Analysis*, 101–117 (O. Elgström & M. Smith eds, Routledge 2006).

[39] L. Aggestam, *Introduction: Ethical Power Europe?*, 84(1) Intl. Affairs 1–11 (2008).

[40] H. Maull, *Europe and the New Balance of Global Order*, 81(4) Intl. Affairs 781–782 (2005).

[41] For an overview of the academic debate of early 2000s, *see* Ch. 3 in V. Sinkkonen, *A Comparative Appraisal of Normative Power*, 40–84 (Brill 2015); for a more recent discussion, *see* Lippert et al., *supra* n. 10.

From this perspective, the EU conceiving a more strategically autonomous role would not automatically challenge its conflict prevention role, provided that both role conceptions would remain tied to the values of preserving and building peace, human rights, and democratic and rule of law principles, even if this would be done in a more pragmatic manner. The shared normative basis would suffice to create compatibility in the 'ethical power EU' in which playing a more security and defence capable role would in fact contribute to the EU's ability to preserve peace and prevent conflicts. Simultaneously, investing in the EU's diplomatic and civilian capabilities would equally serve a more strategically autonomous agency. Herrberg, who writes from-within the EU's External Action Service and its Directorate Integrated Approach to Stability and Peace (ISP), refers to the latter when arguing that mediation remains a pivotal tool for the EU 'even and maybe because the EU is emerging as a geopolitical actor with a declared political will for enhanced EU military capacity'.[42]

Indeed, looking at the considerable development in the EU's policy and institutional capabilities over the last decade, conflict prevention appears to stand on a solidifying ground amid the strategic autonomy pursuit. Besides conflict prevention featuring saliently in the EU's integrated approach, the establishment of the External Action Service (EEAS) and the subsequent organizational reforms there facilitate growing in-house expertise and capacity to spearhead and main-stream a more conflict preventive EU culture. The establishment and continuous development of the EU's Conflict Early Warning System (CEWS) that the Directorate ISP manages, as well as the newly established annual reporting to the Council on the EU's conflict prevention and crisis response are examples of this.[43] Moreover, the EU's resources to tap into for early mediation efforts have been fostered, and EU institutions' overall contribution to civilian peacebuilding and conflict prevention and resolution have substantially increased in recent years.[44] Given the institutional basis and evolution of the EU's civilian conflict prevention capabilities, it could be expected that the civilian conflict preventor role would offer the EU and its Member States a relatively affordable and politically plausible mechanism to showcase European autonomy. This is especially so as it suits relatively organically to the general role of a normative or ethical power EU in comparison to the joined military capacity aspirations that have proved difficult to attain in the face of diverse Member States.

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[42]   A. Herrberg, *Translating the Peace Ambition Into Practice: The Role of the European External Action Service in EU Peace Mediation*, 26(1) Eur. For. Affairs Rev. 135 (2021).

[43]   *See* Council for the EU, *2019 EEAS Conflict Prevention and Crisis Response Lessons Report* (2020), https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-9510-2020-INIT/en/pdf (accessed 15 Nov. 2021); L. Musiol, *Better Early than Sorry: How the EU Can Use its Early Warning Capacities to Their Full Potential*, PeaceLab (2019), https://peacelab.blog/2019/10/better-early-than-sorry-how-the-eu-can-use-its-early-warning-capacities-to-their-full-potential (accessed 25 Nov. 2021).

[44]   Herrberg, *supra* n. 41; Mustasilta, *supra* n. 28.

On the other hand, there are significant differences in how the EU's role as a more autonomous foreign and security power is constructed today in comparison to the security and defence role aspirations in the early 2000s. These differences relate to the more salient prioritization of *internal security* and *geopolitical needs* aside (and beyond) normative needs in motivating the intent. The HR/VP Josep Borrell has expressed this prioritization when stating that pursuing more autonomous (security) agency is about 'political survival' and stems from the recognition that EU needs to practice the language of power as 'Europe is in danger'.[45] Although the content of the more autonomous EU is still being debated, strengthening the EU's *own* security and status in a more competitive world seem to form the core motivations (and will likely strengthen as such due to the ongoing war in Ukraine).[46] This marks a considerable departure from the conception of military (and broadly 'hard') capabilities serving first and foremost the EU's efforts to support peace, human rights, and democracy in its international interactions in situations where the civilian tools require backing.[47] This is not to say that the EU would not consider its role anymore as 'a force for good' and one that aims at preventing conflicts and preserving peace. However, in a system that the Member States and the EU institutions (rightly) perceive as increasingly threatening (both in terms of threat intensity and versatility) and competitive, preserving peace is more saliently tied to its value for the EU's own security and geopolitical agency rather than simply to the value of peace. This marks a shift in the centralization of norms and values guiding the EU's foreign policy role(s), which can exacerbate role conflict within the EU and result in ambiguities or change in concrete foreign policy behaviour.

Two types of implications emerge for the EU's conflict prevention role. The second one relates to the ambiguities in the concept of conflict prevention and the instrumentalization of conflict prevention for (the EU and partner states') security. This is analysed empirically in the next section. The first one relates to the overall implications for the political status of conflict prevention as EU's foreign policy priority. As captured in the notion of principled pragmatism in the Global Strategy, there is a conception that the EU needs to add political realism and strategic assessment into its toolbox aside its 'idealistic aspirations' to perform better in the geopolitical competition and to safeguard its ideals.[48] Paradoxically, to protect its value-based interests, the hardened interactive realm pushes the EU to invest in means and capabilities that correspond to the securitized means of its geopolitical

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[45]   J. Borrell, *Why European Strategic Autonomy Matters*, EEAS (2020), https://eeas.europa.eu/headquar ters/headquarters-homepage_en/89865/Why%20European%20strategic%20autonomy%20matters (accessed 30 Nov. 2021); R. Emmott, *'Europe is in Danger': Top Diplomat Proposes EU Military Doctrine*, Reuters (10 Nov. 2021), https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/europe-is-danger-top-diplomat-propose-eu-military-doctrine-2021-11-10/ (accessed 12 Nov. 2021).

[46]   Delphin, *supra* n. 2.

[47]   Aggestam, *supra* n. 38.

[48]   EEAS, *supra* n. 1.

competitors in order to gain leverage vis-à-vis them in the international arena. A concrete example of this is the use of geopolitical motivations to justify investments in the EU's capabilities to provide more effective military capability support to third parties. The argument (put forward by some Member States but also EU officials) that less benign actors will fill in the void and gain leverage vis-à-vis the EU if it does not strengthen its security-centred support demonstrates a perceived connection between the intent of maintaining international status and investing in more 'pragmatic' foreign and security policy means.[49]

Notably, there does not seem to be such association between the EU's aspirations of international geopolitical influence and core conflict preventive efforts. In fact, conflict prevention is justifiably perceived as politically sensitive as it intervenes in a country's internal political affairs by suggesting a looming conflict (rather than a security crisis) and tackles its societal drivers and incompatibilities. Indeed, the changed geopolitical environment is seen to render it ever more difficult to advocate political support for EU conflict prevention efforts.[50] Even if not considered counter-productive, core conflict preventive efforts are presented as quasi-optimal from the perspective of geopolitical competition. Policy recommendations on strategic autonomy advice the EU to maximize its leverage over the use of its funds in crisis regions and lament that the EU's significant humanitarian and development investments tend to produce little (geopolitical leverage) in return.[51] Moreover, whilst EU actors consider improved security and defence capabilities as imperative for strategic autonomy, relying mainly on normative power is equated with 'passivity'.[52] The absence of commentaries and analyses on the role of the EU's conflict prevention and peacebuilding efforts in strengthening the Union's competitiveness and autonomy is indicative of the conceived distance between the two roles. That many of the central attributes of conflict prevention, including support to human rights, inclusive governance and rule of law, are increasingly challenged as central norms not only outside the EU but also by some EU Member States adds to their political sensitivity and may weaken the centrality and consistency of the conflict preventor role conception.

Figure 1 replicates Stewart's analysis of the rhetorical use of conflict prevention in the Public Register of Council Documents, indicating a downward trend in

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[49]   *See* E. Hagström Frisell & E. Sjökvist, *To Train and Equip Partner Nations – Implications of the European Peace Facility* (FOI: International Military Missions 2021); G. Gressel & N. Popescu, *The Best Defence: Why the EU Should Forge Security Compacts with its Eastern Neighbours* (European Council on Foreign Relations 2020).

[50]   Interview with an EEAS official.

[51]   M. Leonard & J. Shapiro, *Strategic Sovereignty: How Europe can Regain the Capacity to Act* (European Council on Foreign Relations 2019).

[52]   J. Borrell, *Europe Cannot Afford to be a Bystander in the World: We Need a 'Strategic Compass'*, EEAS (2021), https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/105369/europe-cannot-afford-be-bystander-world-we-need-%E2%80%9Cstrategic-compass%E2%80%9D_en (accessed 25 Nov. 2021).

the explicit reference to conflict prevention in the last decade.[53] Looking solely at the EU's developed institutional capabilities for conflict prevention, one would expect the graph to point upwards (as did Stewart's graph for early 2000s). However, the graph becomes more understandable when taking into consideration the increased pressures on the EU's foreign policy role in a more competitive international environment where the EU is expected to take more responsibility over its own (and regional) security amid aspiring to 'advance a better world',[54] and where pushing for core conflict prevention may appear geopolitically counter-productive. Whilst the rhetorical trends do not tell us about the concrete conflict preventive efforts of the EU, which may not be explicitly referred to as prevention and that also take place through wider multilateral forums (e.g., the UN, through supporting regional organizations), they do pose questions over the (shrank) de facto political appetite among the EU decisionmakers for conflict prevention.

Figure 1   *Number of Publicly Available Documents in the Public Register of Council Documents with 'Conflict Prevention' Included in the Text (2012–2020).*

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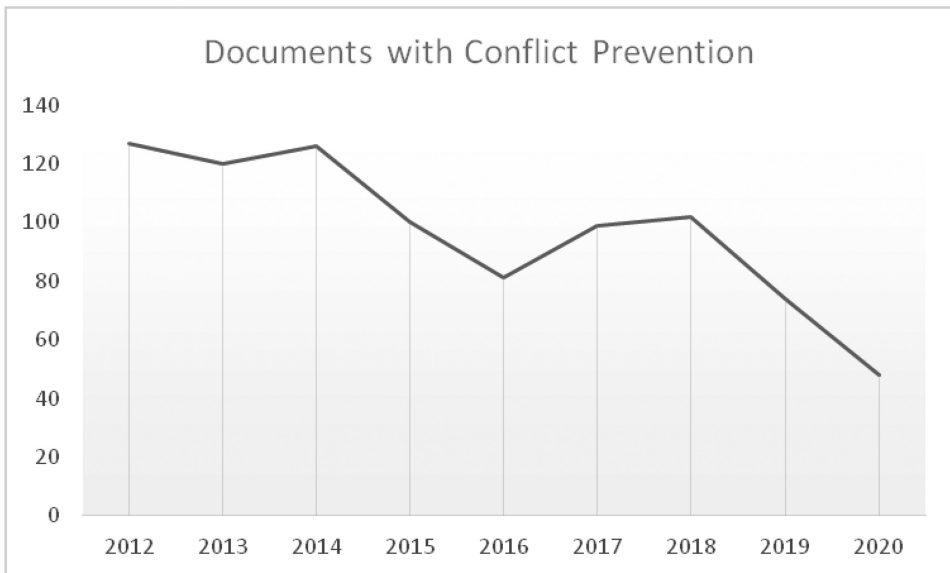
[53]   Stewart, *supra* n. 11, at 237.
[54]   EEAS, *supra* n. 1, at 8.

4   EMPIRICAL SHIFTS IN THE EU'S CONFLICT PREVENTION PERFORMANCE

This section turns to an analysis of the concrete performance and use of the EU's institutional conflict prevention capabilities. The conceptual ambiguity pertaining conflict prevention can make the EU's conflict preventor role amenable to the EU's internal security concerns and geopolitical interests, particularly as the strategic autonomy pursuit still misses consolidated operationalization. Such instrumentalization has been discussed in connection to securitization of the EU's broader development efforts, i.e., prioritization of the EU's and partner governments' security interests and the subjugation of other development priorities under security objectives.[55] The section analyses the over-time use of the EU's main conflict prevention and civilian response instrument, the IcSP, in Africa. It also zooms into the EU responses to the escalation of armed conflict in Northern Mozambique to exemplify and contextualize the discussion.

4.1   IcSP AND CONFLICT RESPONSES IN MOZAMBIQUE

The IcSP was the EU's main financial instrument in 'crisis response, conflict prevention, peace-building and crisis preparedness, and in addressing global and trans-regional threats' for the budget period of 2014–2020.[56] With an overall budget of EUR 2,3 billion, the instrument succeeded the Instrument contributing to Stability and expanded it with a purpose of strengthening focus on conflict prevention and peacebuilding.[57] Substantially, the instrument encompassed responses to emerging crises and conflict situations (article 3), support to conflict prevention, peacebuilding and crisis preparedness at various levels (article 4), and assistance to addressing global and transnational threats (e.g., terrorism, article 5), with management provided by the Service for Foreign Policy Instruments (for articles 3 and 4) and the Directorate-General for International Cooperation and Development[58] (article 5) in close cooperation with the EEAS.

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[55]   *See* J. Bergmann, *A Bridge Over Troubled Water? The Instrument contributing to Stability and Peace (IcSP) and the Security-Development Nexus in EU External Policy*, 6 Discussion Paper (Deutsches Institüt für Entwicklungspolitik 2018).

[56]   European Parliament and the Council of the EU, *Regulation Establishing an Instrument Contributing to Stability and Peace*, 230/2014 (11 Mar. 2014). In the beginning of 2021 and the new multiannual budget, the IcSP became part of a new Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI), i.e., the Global Europe. European Commission, *Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI) – 'Global Europe'*, https://ec.europa.eu/international-partnerships/system/files/factsheet-global-europe-ndici-june-2021_en.pdf (accessed 1 Nov. 2021).

[57]   EEAS, *The EU's Instrument Contributing to Stability and Peace (IcSP)*, https://ec.europa.eu/fpi/eus-instrument-contributing-stability-and-peace-icsp-2014-04-03_fi (accessed 25 Nov. 2021).

[58]   DG International Partnerships since 2021.

Core conflict prevention tools are prevalent particularly in the IcSP's first two articles, with mediation, dialogue, and confidence-building support being among the key designated means to respond to crises and the article 4 having conflict prevention capabilities at its core. As a budgetary instrument, the IcSP has excluded the possibility of financing operations with military and defence implications and the original spirit of the instrument was that of civilian support to civilian actors. However, in a step that connects intrinsically to the discussion here, the IcSP was amended in 2017 to enable civilian capacity-building support to military actors within the Capacity Building in Support of Security and Development framework (CBSD), with additional EUR 100 million added to the budget.[59] Behind this debated step were some Member States' and EU actors' motivations to strengthen the EU's security capacities in responding to crisis.[60] The centrality of the IcSP for the EU's supranational conflict prevention efforts and the possibility to investigate the use of the instrument throughout its lifetime makes analysing it particularly fitting.

The Service for Foreign Policy Instruments maintains a public dataset of all IcSP article 3 and 4 projects, enabling the analysis here.[61] Accordingly, there were 231 IcSP projects channelled to African countries between 2014–2020, excluding projects with global scope. The focus on Africa is justified as the EU considers the continent a key partner and as several sub-regions (such as the Sahel and the Horn of Africa) are also strategic priority regions for the EU from peacebuilding and crisis responses perspective: a majority of the CSDP missions today take place on the continent.[62]

While the original data categorizes most projects up until 2018, these categorizations are absent from the more recent projects and their determinants are not explicitly spelled out. Therefore, building on the theoretical discussion and the defined core conflict prevention attributes, the data has been recoded into three broad categories for the analysis: 1) core conflict prevention, peacebuilding and conflict resolution category encompasses mediation, negotiation and dialogue support (at any point of a conflict cycle), explicit support to conflict prevention and peacebuilding institutions, and projects that address drivers of conflict escalation and contribute to nonviolent conflict resolution potential; 2) capacity building and stabilization category encompasses projects that centre on supporting technical, socio-economic,

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[59]   Bergmann, *supra* n. 54, at 24–30.

[60]   *Ibid*.

[61]   The original data can be downloaded at, https://instrument-for-peace-map.ec.europa.eu/. The author's re-coded data is shared upon request.

[62]   European Commission, *Joint Communication to the European Parliament and the Council: Towards a Comprehensive Strategy with Africa* (9 Mar. 2020), https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52020JC0004&from=FR (accessed 30 Nov. 2021).

administrative and security capabilities of specific partners *without* directly addressing potential conflictual relations and their peaceful management; and 3) preventing and countering violent extremism (P/CVE) as well as counter-terrorism projects that focus specifically on terrorist and violent extremism threat (rather than on preventing or resolving a *conflict*). The level of projects falling under the second and third category can be interpreted as indicative of the centralization of the EU's security aspirations aside (and beyond) core conflict prevention efforts.

Zooming into a concrete recent case of EU conflict responses helps to contextualize the discussion further. The insurgency in the Cabo Delgado province in Northern Mozambique and the EU's responses to it offer an interesting case context for its main features[63] and for its unfolding during the period under particular interest here. Violent attacks first surfaced in 2017 and the insurgency quickly grew and escalated, drawing more attention and causing considerably high death tolls in 2019–2020. The insurgents' violence against civilians has induced considerable displacement flows within the country. Still, the security forces heavy-handed responses, including human rights abuses, have further exacerbated insecurities and tensions locally.[64]

4.2   CONFLICT PREVENTION AND PEACEBUILDING PREVAILS WHILE SECURITIZATION CREEPS IN

The findings regarding the over-time use of the IcSP are portrayed in figure 2. The steadiness of the absolute number of projects under the first category suggests that the EU's conflict prevention and peacebuilding commitment translates to considerable concrete preventive action even amid the evolving foreign policy roles. There are various types of core conflict preventive efforts implemented throughout the timeline, ranging from support to national reconciliation, political dialogue, and negotiation processes to local inter-communal dialogues, addressing of core grievances, and supporting local/regional early

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[63]   The evolution of armed violence in Northern Mozambique shares some key features present in may contemporary conflict contexts: it's primarily a country's internal conflict between a country's government and its armed forces on one side and a non-state armed group on the other side; the non-state armed group is affiliated with a transnational (jihadist) organization; despite the latter the conflict has highly localized roots and drivers stemming from high-level of inequalities, disputes over land and natural resources, and weak societal contract. *See* G. Pirio, R. Pittelli & Y. Adam, *Cries from the Community: Listening to the People of Cabo Delgado, Spotlight* (Africa Center for Strategic Studies 2021); T. Heyen-Dubé, *Evolving Doctrine and Modus Operandi: Violent Extremism in Cabo Delgado*, Small Wars & Insurgencies, 1–30 (2021).

[64]   *Ibid.*

warning and (civilian) response mechanisms. It is noteworthy that most of the conflict prevention and peacebuilding projects take place in countries with on-going conflicts. In addition to these specifically targeted projects across the continent, the EU has supported several regional and global conflict prevention capacity development initiatives during the period, further indicating active performance of the EU's conflict prevention role and partnerships with the UN and other multilateral partners.

The EU's response to the situation in Northern Mozambique also reflects considerable, if somewhat late, attention to core conflict prevention and peacebuilding needs. The EU first allocated IcSP projects in consideration of the Northern Mozambique crisis in 2019 (before this the EU had IcSP projects related to the peace process in the broader national conflict). Key interviews indicate that the alarming situation in the northern parts of the country was first acknowledged within the EU in 2017.[65] Difficulties in attaining knowledge on the situation on the ground, the Mozambican state partners' hesitancy to discuss the crisis, and the lack of agility in the EU's development instruments (including the IcSP) may have contributed to the slow reaction to the crisis. Since 2019, the IcSP allocations targeting Mozambique have considerably grown, with many of the projects centring on supporting local-level dialogue, mediation, or social cohesion projects with the aim of strengthening inter-group confidence and trust that would help building a basis for peace and stability. Initiatives to prevent spill-overs of the insurgency in the neighbouring areas to the crisis zone are also on the EU's agenda.[66] Notably, there is a notion within the EU institutions that the response to Northern Mozambique crisis represents a successful case from the perspective of the integrated approach in that the EU has been able to use its broad toolset comprehensively. Aside the CSDP military training mission that started in the fall 2021, officials emphasize the significance of humanitarian support, conflict (spillover) prevention and peacebuilding pro-jects, and plans to increase development support within the framework of the integrated approach.[67]

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[65] The author conducted six face-to-face and phone interviews with EU and Member State officials working closely with the EU's engagement in Mozambique for this section of the study.

[66] Phone interview with an EU official, Nov. 2021.

[67] Phone interview with EU Officials, Oct. 2021.

Figure 2   Over-Time Evolution of IcSP-Funded Projects in Africa. Data Based on the
Service for Foreign Policy Instrument's Database.
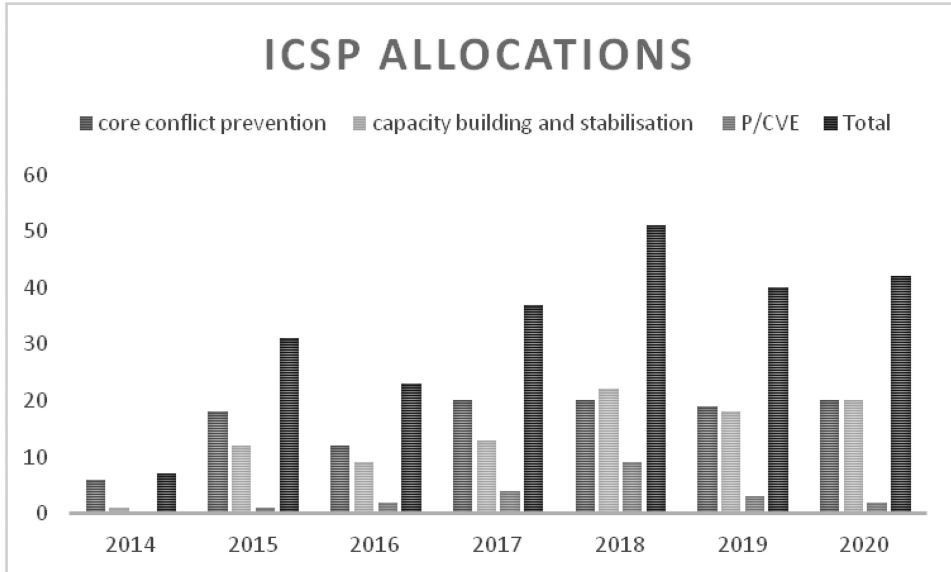
However, looking at the relative share of the conflict prevention, peace-building, and conflict resolution projects in the over-time IcSP data, a declining trend emerges. This is due to the considerable increase in capacity building and stabilization projects over time. Particularly in the last three years the share of support towards partners' capabilities has reached or exceeded the level of core conflict prevention and peacebuilding efforts. Adding the P/CVE projects to this and the core conflict preventive and peacebuilding support efforts are clearly in the minority. Whilst there are multiple types of capacity building and stabilization efforts, the mode category here is support towards security or technical capabilities of (state) partners. The growth in security actors' capacity building support is in line with the 2017 decision to amend the IcSP scope to include military capabilities support. In 2019, there were seven projects directly focused on building security sectors' capabilities, whilst only one project focused on supporting local government structures' non-security capabilities. The shift in the substantive emphases of the IcSP is visible also in the financial shares: whereas during the first three years of 2014–2016 the single biggest contribution fell under the first category, the capacity building and countering violent extremism projects took the lead in 2017–2020.[68]

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[68]   Author's analysis, *supra* n. 60.

Whereas most of the IcSP allocations in the Mozambique case fall under the conflict prevention and peacebuilding category, similar financial emphases on security capacity building projects pertain the case.[69] In fact, the Mozambican case more generally underscores the role of security and geopolitical considerations in directing the EU's integrated approach in practice. The newly established EU military training mission that has a narrow mandate to support the capacity building of a special military unit in counter-terrorism and protection of civilians is a clear example of this. Undoubtedly, the core justification for such a mission (rather than some other type of a CSDP operation), derives from the type of request received from the Mozambican partners. Yet, the stated motivations behind the capacity building mission also imply more internally driven rationale bound in the prioritization of security interventions and geopolitical considerations. Specifically, the military support operation – even when non-executive – is clearly seen to bring alive the EU's security and geopolitical agency in a manner that other support efforts would not: both formal records and officials emphasize the risks of the EU's competitors gaining more influence in Mozambique in the case of inaction from the side of the EU and – vice versa – a military training mission strengthening the EU's credibility as a global security actor.[70] The outspoken concern over the political risks deriving from inaction in the realm of militarized support reflects the centralization of geopolitical needs in guiding EU foreign policy, which security-focused interventions and capacity building support are conceived to better address than core conflict prevention efforts.

The devotion to security sectors' capacity building is understandable when considering the chronic insecurity and proliferation of violent extremist groups around conflict-affected societies and the diagnosis of these as consequences of weak state capacities. Yet to quote Manners, such efforts 'seem primarily directed towards attacking the symptoms, rather than addressing the causes, of conflict and insecurity'.[71] Hence, they fall outside the core attributes of conflict prevention and peacebuilding in that they do little to tackle the drivers of the escalating conflictual political relationships or strengthen institutions to peacefully resolve incompatibilities. Moreover, it is unclear to what extent the narrowly mandated non-executive missions can in fact even shape the security realities on the ground. As noted by previous research and evaluations, support efforts falling under the securitized-portfolio do not automatically contribute to peace and development objectives and – if not rigorously embedded in conflict-sensitivity – can even have counter-

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[69]   *Ibid.*

[70]   *See* Council of the EU, *Military Advice on Crisis Management Concept for a Possible EU CSDP Non-executive Mission in Mozambique* (21 June 2021), https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-10022-2021-INIT/en/pdf (accessed 30 Nov. 2021).

[71]   I. Manners, *European Union 'Normative Power' and the Security Challenge*, 15(4) Eur. Sec. 409 (2006).

productive effects on inter-group and state-society relations.[72] In this light, albeit corroborating the EU's considerable investments in core conflict preventive measures through the IcSP instrument, the findings here support the (concerned) remarks on the securitization of EU's development efforts.

5   CONCLUSION

This article has approached the strategic autonomy debate from the perspective of its implications for the EU's conflict preventor and peacebuilding role. The EU continues to conceive itself as a force for good (e.g., an ethical power) and its institutional capabilities translate to considerable concrete conflict prevention activities, as indicated here by the analysis of the IcSP.[73] However, changes in the strategic environment in which the EU plays its role(s) have catalysed movement in the EU's foreign policy priorities, with (geo)political competitiveness and internal security being more challenged (and therefore) more urgent than before. As a result, the needs and objectives of the EU's CFSP role are increasingly tied to the EU's own security concerns and protection rather than merely the need to prevent and manage the escalation of external conflicts more effectively. This catalyses role conflict as the core norms and attributes of conflict prevention are not necessarily in line with the short-term geopolitical struggles. The downward trend in the rhetorical use of conflict prevention – despite considerable institutional development – can be indicative of this growing role ambiguity within the EU's foreign policy role.

Simultaneously, in the absence of joined vision among the Member States on how to strengthen security and defence capacities, institutionalized conflict prevention and peacebuilding tools become more easily instrumentalized for safeguarding internal security and geopolitical interests. From the strategic autonomy perspective, the increasing investments in capacity building of partners' security sectors achieves multiple goals. Most importantly, it is seen to translate more readily to international influence both vis-à-vis the third partners and the EU's competitors, as seen in the Mozambique case, than core civilian conflict prevention measures. Moreover, amid decreasing willingness of Member States

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72   *See* L. Mills et al., *External Evaluation of the Instrument Contributing to Stability and Peace* (2014-mid 2017), Final Report (June 2017); Bergmann, *supra* n. 54.
73   For a comparative analysis of the EU and other major multilateral security actors, *see* L. Debuysere & S. Blockmans, *The EU's Integrated Approach to Crisis Response: Learning from the UN, NATO and OSCE*, in *The EU and Crisis Response* (R. Mac Ginty, S. Pogodda & O. P. Richmond eds, Manchester University Press 2021); for the EU's conflict prevention role vis-à-vis the United States, *see* K. Mustasilta, *Preventing Our Way Back to Friendship? Conflict Prevention and the Future of Transatlantic Relations*, in *Turning the Tide: How to Rescue Transatlantic Relations*? (S. Soare ed., European Union Institute for Security Studies 2020).

to contribute to executive security missions, capacity building and training offers a plausible, least interventionist, and most technical (yet internationally influential) means to act. Yet, as the Taliban's takeover of Afghanistan suggests, capacity building of partner states' security forces without advancements in addressing the conflict incompatibilities and failures of societal contracts produces ambiguous results at best even in terms of stabilization and containment of security threats.

It is noteworthy that with the strategic compass the EU once again pursues to move from words to deeds when it comes to its agency as a strategically autonomous security and defence actor.[74] In the first days of the full-scale war on Ukraine, the EU also appears to demonstrate its ability to evolve in a crisis in this regard. As discussed, such development does not itself counter the EU's conflict prevention and peacebuilding role. Rather, challenges derive from the increasing subjugation of core conflict prevention objectives and means to the Member States' own security concerns and the EU's geopolitical ambitions. By continuing to instrumentalize its conflict prevention and peacebuilding tools for security and geopolitical competition, the EU does not only risk to weaken its conception as a an ethical power but also to catalyse counterproductive peace and security repercussions in the long-term.

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[74] EEAS, *Towards a Strategic Compass* (15 Nov. 2021), https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/89047/towards-strategic-compass_en (accessed 30 Nov. 2021).