



The European Union's External Action Walks a Tightrope: The challenge of balancing dynamics between humanitarian aid and counter-terrorism policies - Case studies from Syria and the Sahel

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Abstract

While the European Union (EU) is one of the world's largest humanitarian aid donors and intends to become an important player in global governance in the fight against terrorism, the question of the dynamics between humanitarian aid and counter-terrorism policies is a major issue for the EU's ambitions as a global external actor and has not been researched before. These policies often share the same ground and are subject to sensitive interactions as one is very political and the other, by principle, is not. Thus, it is interesting to see how these dynamics can influence the effectiveness in achieving their objectives and in ensuring overall coherence of the EU's external action, in accordance with article 21(3) of the TEU. For this purpose, this thesis will explore the following questions: To what extent do the dynamics between humanitarian aid and counter-terrorism contribute to the effective achievement of their respective objectives? What is the impact of these dynamics on the overall coherence of EU foreign policy?

Firstly, an empirical study allowed the distinction of horizontal coherence and consistency, and explored the notion of effectiveness to establish a theoretical framework. The study is then anchored in an analysis of official EU documents, which revealed that some of the objectives inherent to the two policies may overlap but differ in the way in which they are achieved. Furthermore, the positions of these policies in the strategic documents for external action show that the policies tend to converge within the integrated approach. Then, through a dozen of interviews, the dynamics of their implementation were analysed. This revealed that a certain complementarity could exist in the prevention of violent extremism and terrorism, field expertise, and the capacity of humanitarians to cooperate with local actors. However, contradictions through sanctions and criminalisation of aid, as well as the antagonism materialised by the humanitarian principles, mark a difficult effective or coherent dynamic between these policies. Finally, a case study on the Sahel and Syria illustrates these policy interactions where the EU has decided to fight terrorism through different means with sanctions and CSDP missions. These cases demonstrate that the policies are forced to coexist on the ground and that the EU has to some extent been able to meet the challenge of contradictions but did not reach coherence. In the conclusion, recommendations were formulated for the EU to meet the challenge of coexistence of these two very different policies.