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Subject: Project Cells in Civilian CSDP Missions: Background, State of Play and  
Way ahead

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Delegations will find attached document EEAS(2021)53.

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# EUROPEAN EXTERNAL ACTION SERVICE



Civilian Planning and Conduct Capability – CPCC

## Working document of the European External Action Service

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## Project Cells in Civilian CSDP Missions: Background, State of Play and Way ahead

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## 1. Background

The need for civilian CSDP Missions to be able to avail of funds for activities in support of their mandates was identified in 2003, shortly after the establishment of the first civilian CSDP missions, both as enabling function but also as possible leverage in the interaction with local authorities.

After initial discussions with Member States and Commission services dating back to the years 2007/8, it was agreed to introduce a first such 'Project Cell' in the EUPOL DR Congo mission<sup>1</sup>. The scope and intent at that time was to provide for purchase of equipment and material needed directly for the purposes of mandate implementation. This was thought to be useful particularly in contexts where local absorption capacities of civilian CSDP Missions' mentoring, advising and training were hampered by a lack of relevant infrastructure in situ. As regular budget lines of the missions/budgets generally only covered mission staffing, housing and maintenance costs, they did not provide for the purchase of office furniture or printing material for national partners etc and, thus, this had to be regulated. The original intent was to keep such expenditure minimal; thus, amounts of only several thousand Euros were allocated to the missions. Execution of such funds was at the time left to the discretion of the Head of Mission, controlled *ex post* by the regular financial control mechanisms.

The legal basis for these Project Cells (hereafter PCs) is the Council Decisions establishing the Missions which state that "*the Mission shall have a Project Cell for i) identifying and implementing projects as well as for ii) facilitate, and provide advice on projects implemented by Member States and third States under their responsibility in areas related to the Mission's mandate and in support of its objectives*". The main functions of the Project Cell are:

- a. in close cooperation with the other relevant Mission departments, to identify, design, implement, monitor and evaluate projects on the basis of the budget allocated for this purpose;

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<sup>1</sup> 2007/405/CFSP of 12 June 2007

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- b. in the framework of the EU Integrated Approach, support EU Member States, the European Commission, Third States and other actors in theatre, by providing specialised technical advice and support - within the Mission's means and capabilities - on projects implemented under their budget and responsibility, with a view to create useful synergies able to support the implementation of the Mission's mandate;
- c. to assist the Mission in bringing its technical input in any relevant donor coordination structure, steering board, common fund or any other mechanism devised to define and coordinate actions and projects in the Mission's theatre - and this with a view to create synergies and avoid duplication of efforts.

In the years since their initial creation, Project Cells have expanded significantly in scale and scope including through bilateral funds executed on behalf of Member States in mission projects. The Council Decision establishing the Mission is very general, and there has been no more specific guidance defining the functioning of Project Cells. In the absence of these more detailed guidelines, the establishment and functioning of Cells in each of the Missions has followed quite different paths: some developed Standard Operating Procedures on project planning and implementation, while others proceeded with targeted and case-by-case solutions. In addition, there are missions with a Line of Operation 'Coordination' that somehow links into this, particular for projects funded by other donors.

Requests for projects by Missions are clearly increasing and its use is expanding. But before further development of this area of mission activities, it is timely to engage in an assessment of Project Cell activities particularly in evaluating the added value of the projects in the implementation of the mandates as well as in ensuring that there is no risk of duplication with other actors. This is particularly important against the background of latest attempts to further streamline the so-called 'integrated approach', not least in the framework of the Compact implementation.

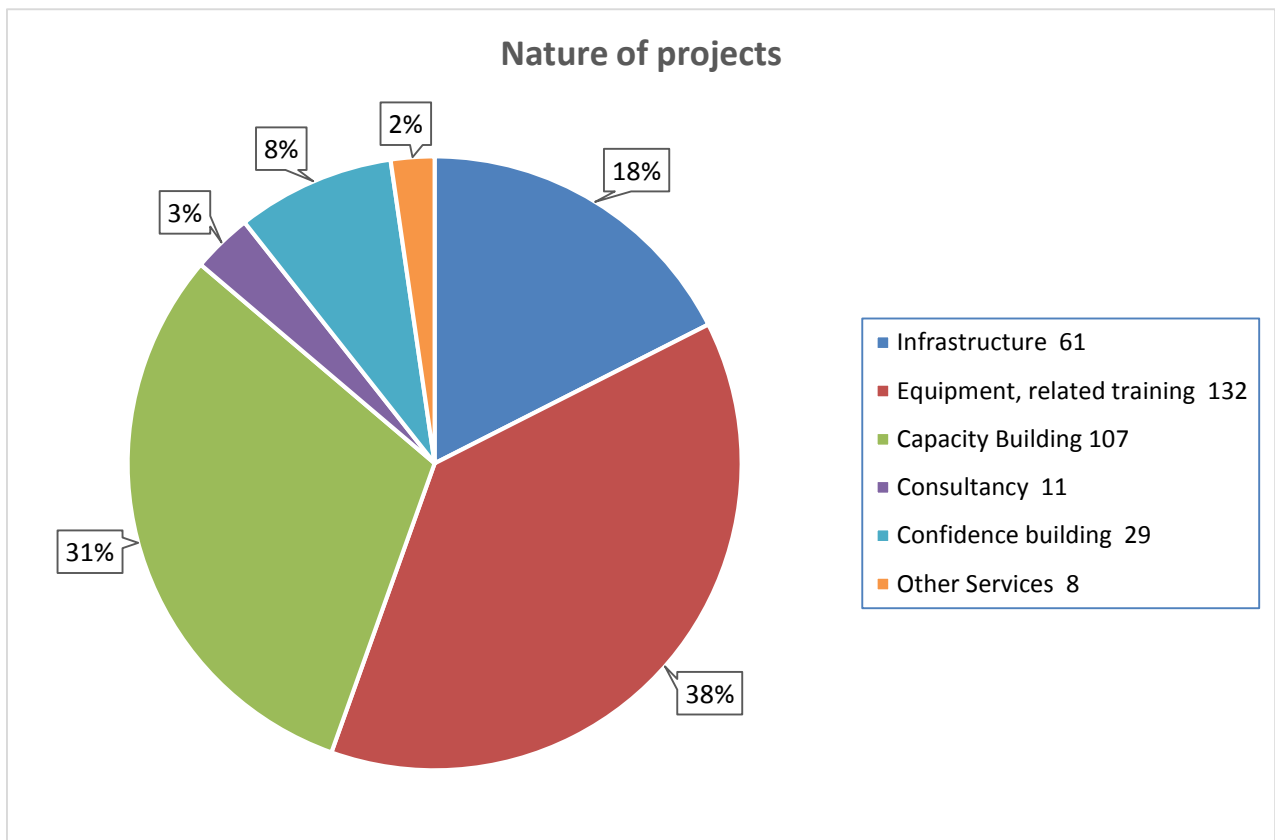
In this context, CPCC, in coordination with FPI, has conducted a survey including a questionnaire sent to all civilian CSDP missions on their experience with Project Cells. The present note includes a summary of the survey's main findings by theme – funding, staffing, and structure. It then presents main conclusions and recommendations for a possible way ahead.

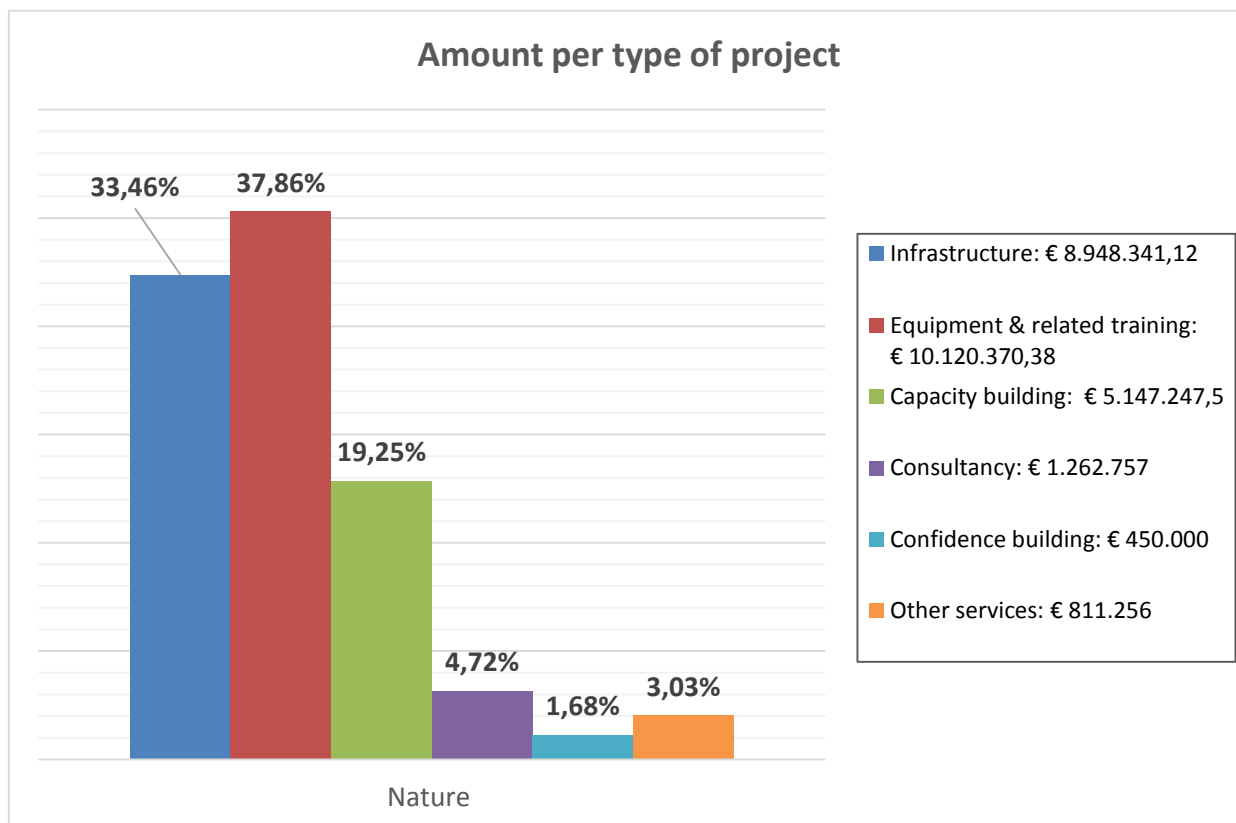
## 2. Survey Main Themes and Findings

### 2.1 Type of projects and related amount

The chart below outlines the type of projects, which are in some cases a combination of different types. It is worth noting in this context the different and not uniformed terms used by the Missions to identify the projects: “Small Scale Projects” (SSP), “Quick implementation Projects” (QIP) and “Large scale projects” (LSP) are the most used and they refer to the internal SOPs enacted for managing the projects.

Table 1





**Observations:** *It is important to note that there is no harmonised definition of types of projects. This notwithstanding, the graph indicates that most projects focus on the supply of equipment and the delivery of capacity building activities (training, seminars, study visits), even if the budget allocated for infrastructure is the highest, due to the extensive costs of building works or restoration of existing infrastructure. Consultancy services represent a much smaller amount. Confidence-building projects are only implemented by EUMM Georgia, due to its specific mandate. It should also be noted that EUCAP Missions such as EUCAP Sahel Mali and EUCAP Sahel Niger do not include training in the Budget Line 6 – “project costs”*

**2.2 Funds allocated for projects**

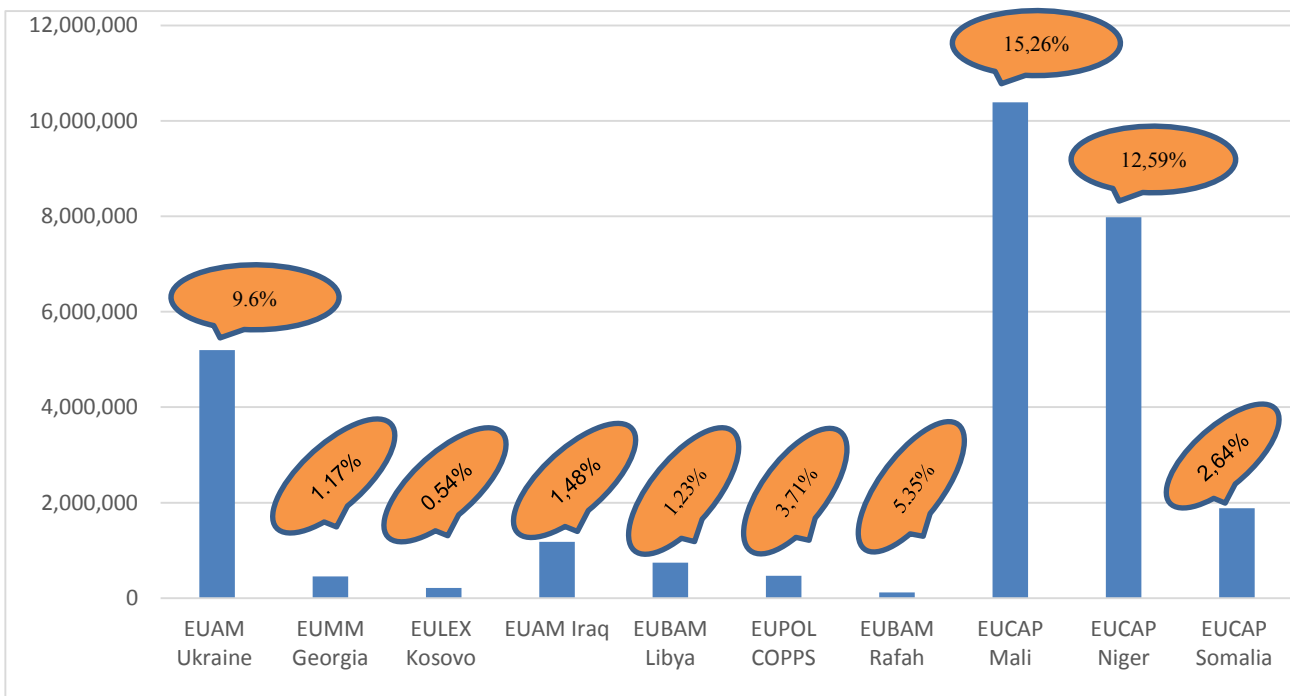
The Council Decisions establishing the civilian Missions foresee that the Missions can manage projects funded by their budget but also facilitate and provide advice on projects implemented by Member States and third States, provided that both categories of projects support the implementation of the Mission's mandate and the achievement of its objectives.

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The total amounts allocated for projects by each Mission in the current mandate, as approved in Budgetary Impact Statements (Budget Heading 6: “Projects”), is indicated in the table below (blue columns) which gives also information about the percentage of the impact of the projects compared to the total mission budget.

*Table 3*

### Projects' total amounts and percentages in comparison to the Missions' total budgets

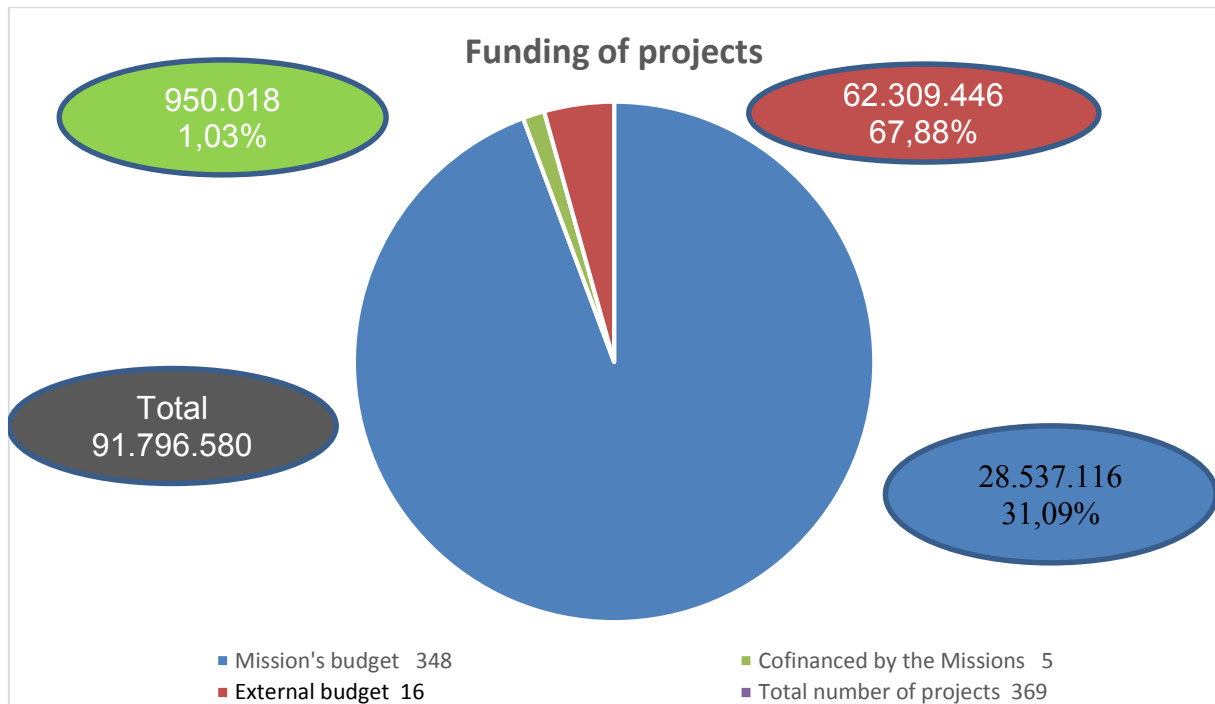


**Observations:** *There is a significant difference in scale: the percentage varies in a range between 1,17% of EUMM Georgia to 15,26% of EUCAP Sahel Mali of the total mission budget. It is worth mentioning that different factors seem to affect this : date of the creation of the PC and use of the projects, numbers of staff allocated for the PC and other concerned services (procurement, finance), interests expressed by the local counterparts, bilateral funds being executed, political pressure, see also next point on additional funds from MS executed by missions. It is also important to recall that the amounts indicated above for projects are not inclusive of the costs of project cell staff included in other budget lines, which combined with the amounts allocated in Budget Heading 6, would provide a more exhaustive picture of the overall costs of projects in civilian Missions.*

### 2.4 Projects financed from funds outside Mission's budget

Some Missions are participating in the implementation of projects co-financed or entirely financed by other partners (both within the EU family or other international actors present in the area of operations). In addition to the technical involvement of Missions (advice, assessments, drafting ToR or Project Fiches), a very small number of projects are co-financed by Missions and EU institutions or MS (Taixex, Twinning, Seminars, Study visits, training). On a total of **369 projects** planned or currently being implemented by all the Missions, **348** are fully funded by the Mission's budget, **16** by external funds (EUAM Ukraine, EUBAM Libya, EUCAP Mali and EUCAP Niger) and **5** co-funded by the Missions (EULEX Kosovo, EUAM Iraq, EUBAM Libya, EUCAP Mali). However, it is worth mentioning that **the total budget allocated for the external projects is much higher than that allocated by the Missions** for the 348 internal projects (67,88 compared with 31,09%). Finally, very limited is the percentage of co-financing by the Missions (1,03% of the total budget), mainly linked to support training, study visits and seminars. From the survey conducted, there is no uniformity on the formalisation of the agreement between the Missions and the stakeholders for their participation to the realisation of projects funded externally, which is fundamental to determine tasks, responsibilities and resources, as well as to have reliable statistics and figures.

Table 4



**Observations:** *All Missions have underlined the importance of external projects both for supporting mandate implementation and for strengthening the relations with the local counterparts. Missions engaged in implementation of external projects are extremely positive as it allows for high impact projects for relatively little use of Mission budgetary resources, which are greatly appreciated by the local counterparts and provide a high degree of visibility for the Missions. However, little information has been supplied concerning the involvement of the Missions in terms of expertise, advise or technical assistance and how it impacts on the implementation of the Mission’s core activities. A clear ex-ante assessment should be done by the Mission along with the identification in advance of the activities and tasks to be conducted in the framework of external projects.*

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### 2.5 Project Cell staffing levels and expertise

All Missions have confirmed that the PC deals with many aspects of project management such as: operational and financial planning, drafting of Terms of Reference, budgetary management, tendering and procurement, contract and monitoring and evaluation.

The staffing of the PC largely depends on the budget allocated to the projects and, in some cases, on the size of the Mission (table below). It is important to underline that all the staff allocated to the PC is skilled and have strong experience in programme and project management, including the use of relevant IT tools. This indicates that project management is critical to ensure effectiveness and sound financial management. In some Missions, the PC is staffed with all the functions (with the exception of procurement) needed for the implementation of the projects (EUCAP Mali, EUCAP Niger, EUCAP Somalia) regardless of the positioning of the PC in the Mission structure, while others (EUAM Ukraine, EUPOL COPPS, EUMM Georgia, EUAM Iraq, are staffed with a limited numbers of project officers/managers supported for the projects by other relevant Mission's departments.

Table 5

#### PC Staffing

Mission	Staff	Experience/Skills	Support by
<b>EULEX Kosovo</b>	1 International staff (Head)	Experience in engineering and Project management	15 Staff Members from different Departments outside the Project Cell
<b>EUAM Ukraine</b>	3 international staff (including the Head) 6 National staff	Experience in Project Management, including on the use of Prince 2 IT system or other PM tools. Experience in procurement and contracts.	Other departments in relation to the needs.
<b>EUMM Georgia</b>	1 International staff	Background within political reporting and analysis, development and previous experience in project management	Other departments in relation to the needs
<b>EUBAM Libya</b>	3 International staff	Qualifications and experience with program management, mainly from the NGOs or MS Cooperation Agency	Other departments in relation to the needs
<b>EUPOL COPPS</b>	1 International (Head) 1 national staff	Previous experience on programmes and project management.	Other departments in relation to the needs

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<b>EUBAM Rafah</b>	1 international staff	Previous experience on cooperation, programmes and project management	Other departments in relation to the needs
<b>EUAM Iraq</b>	1 international (including the Head) 2 national staff	Experience includes programmes and project management, including on the use of Prince 2 IT system or other PM tools.	Project Leader, the initiator The Project Core Team (PCT), including specialist from other Departments
<b>EUCAP Somalia</b>	4 internationals 4 local staff	Different background and experiences, including law, procurement, engineering, finance, project and programme management.	Other departments, if needed
<b>EUCAP Mali</b>	4 international staff (including the Head) 2 local staff	Experience in Project Management, including on the use of Prince 2 IT system or other PM tools. Experience in works, procurement and contracts.	Other departments, if needed
<b>EUCAP Niger</b>	3 International staff (including the Head) 3 Local staff	Experience on ich includes programmes and project management, including on the use of Prince 2 IT system or other PM tools.	Other departments, if needed

**Observations:** *Even if the Missions are already staffed with personnel skilled in project management, it is important that the PC also have access to training and resources to effectively manage the Mission's projects, including the use of specific IT tools which can facilitate monitoring and evaluation activities.*

### 2.6 Project Cell decision making process, Monitoring & Evaluation

Although there is no “logical framework” in the sense of the EU Commission services, the Missions refer to the implementation of a “logical approach” during the planning of the projects. They also refer to the OPLAN and MIP as reference documents while establishing the relevance of the projects for the implementation of the Mission's mandate and achievement of the objectives.

Even if the process for the approval of the projects is not completely harmonised, the following phases could be identified as part of the decision-making process, which can

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however differ in relation to the organisation of the Project Cell and the interactions with other Missions departments/structures.

1. **Initiation**: presentation, normally by Advisors or Department of Operations, of a project idea/proposal describing in general terms the objective, the activities to be carried out and estimation of the costs. In all the Missions this is a result of a request of the counterpart e/o of a need assessment conducted by the Mission. Very low level of involvement of the PC for all the Missions.
2. **Relevance to the mandate**: assessment of the relevance of the project in relation to the Mission's mandate and identification of the OPLAN/MIP correspondent task/s. In some Missions this activity is done in the initiation phase, in others is done by the PC, in one is done based on pre-established criteria included in a SOP. The PC is involved in the process, but the assessment is done normally by the initiators and by the Planning and Evaluation service.
3. **Approval of the List of Projects**: identification of the projects considered relevant and eligible to be funded. In many Missions this activity is done normally by a collegial body (Project Management Committee, Project Selection Committee etc.) composed by representatives of the main Mission's departments involved in their implementation, including the PC.
4. **Financial circuit**: The list of eligible projects (including details about the subject, cost, final beneficiary etc) is assessed by Finance services and approved based on the budget availability. Some Missions are following the above-described process, others are determining the budget for the projects in advance. Very low level of involvement of the PC for all the Missions.
5. **EU Delegation involvement**: The approved list of projects is shared with the EU Delegation. All the Missions consider the timely consultation of the EU Delegations very important in order to avoid duplications especially in countries where EU Delegations have ongoing or planned portfolio in the same thematic areas covered by the Mission. The PC participates in the process.
6. **Approval by CPCC and validation by FPI<sup>2</sup>**: The project list is approved by CPCC which conducts an assessment on the content of each project and validated by FPI. For

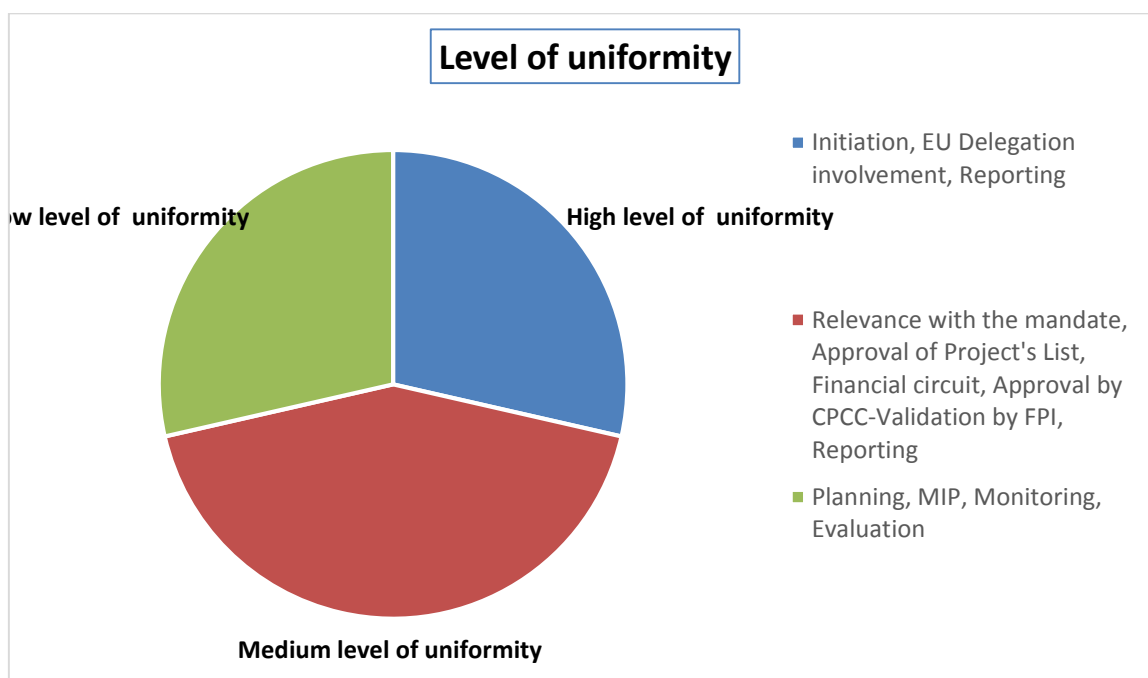
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<sup>2</sup> Provided that related budget funds are available, FPI shall validate the list of projects based on three requirements: not military nature, approval by CPCC on the merit and green light by the EU Delegations

almost all the Missions there is a detailed Q&A session with both CPCC and FPI with a significant involvement of the PC.

7. **Monitoring, evaluation and reporting:** Almost all Missions have confirmed that the monitoring of the projects largely concerns the financial and administrative circuit while there is a lack of clear specific Objectively Verifiable Indicators for the projects impact, as frequently they are only partially included in the MIP/Benchmarking process. The added value of the projects in relation to the mandate is not assessed. However, the results of the implementation of the projects are reported either in the Six-Monthly or in special reports.

Table 6



**Observations:** *From the survey, it appears that while for some phases there is a high level of uniformity among the Missions, for others the level is medium, including for the assessment of the relevance, relations with CPCC/FPI and reporting. Design and planning of the projects are not always carried out according to proper indicators and with the exception of seminars/workshops included in the OPLAN, projects are rarely part of the Benchmarking and MIP to allow for efficient monitoring and effective evaluation. Consequently, while all*

*Missions consider projects to be very important complementary tools, there is currently no system in place to assess to what degree projects contribute directly or indirectly to mandate implementation.*

### **2.7 Project Cell main competences and linkages between PC and other Mission departments**

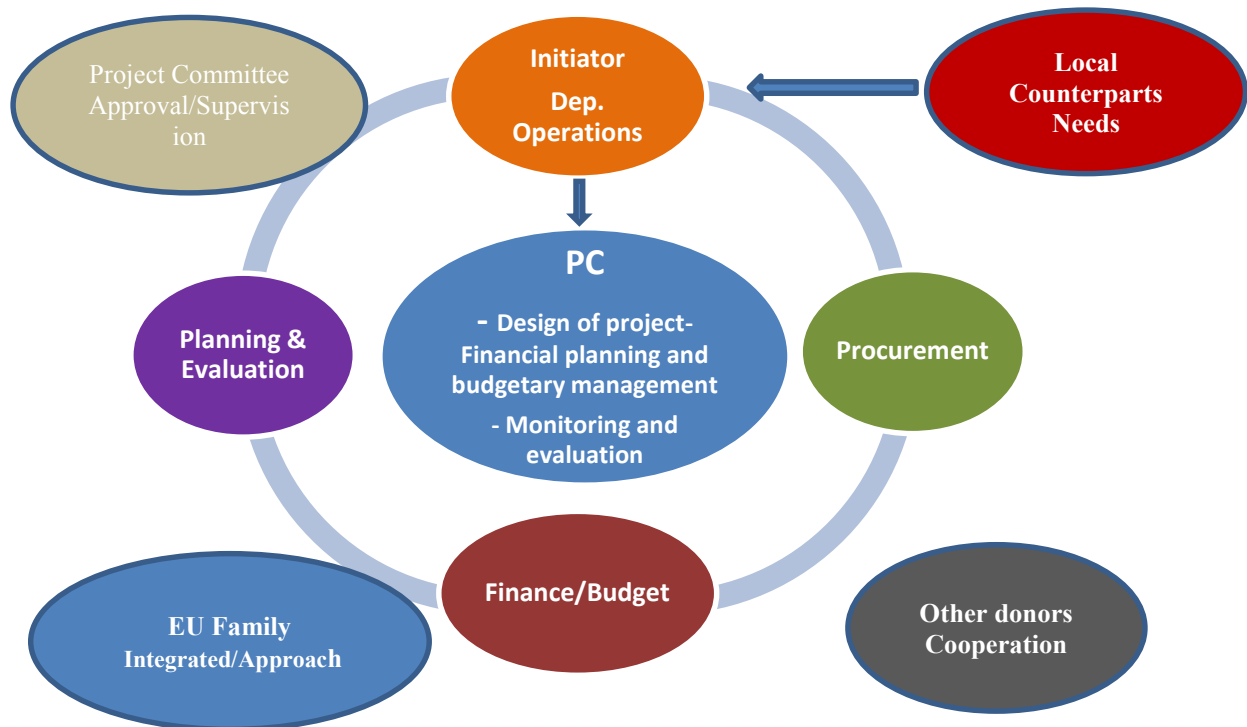
The survey shows that the competences assigned to the PC in the Missions are quite varied, nevertheless, some common issues can be highlighted:

- ✓ the majority of the PCs are assigned to **design the Projects**, through drafting of ToRs or Project Fiches, with the support of the Project Initiator;
- ✓ **the operational planning/initiative** is normally carried out by, or with significant involvement from the Operations Departments;
- ✓ large parts of PCs are involved in the **financial planning and budgetary management**, generally together with the support of the “financial service”;
- ✓ **procurement procedures** are not conducted by the PCs, but by the "*procurement service*";
- ✓ **monitoring and evaluation** are mainly conducted by the PC, with the support of the planning and evaluation department.

As the graphic below illustrates, even for a small PC, a high degree of coordination between Mission departments and external actors is necessary as it plays a fundamental role for ensuring the timely realisation of the projects.

The links between the PC and the cooperation/coordination functions should be also emphasised, particularly when it comes to the implementation of projects funded by other donors in the framework the integrated approach, both within the EU family or externally.

Table 7

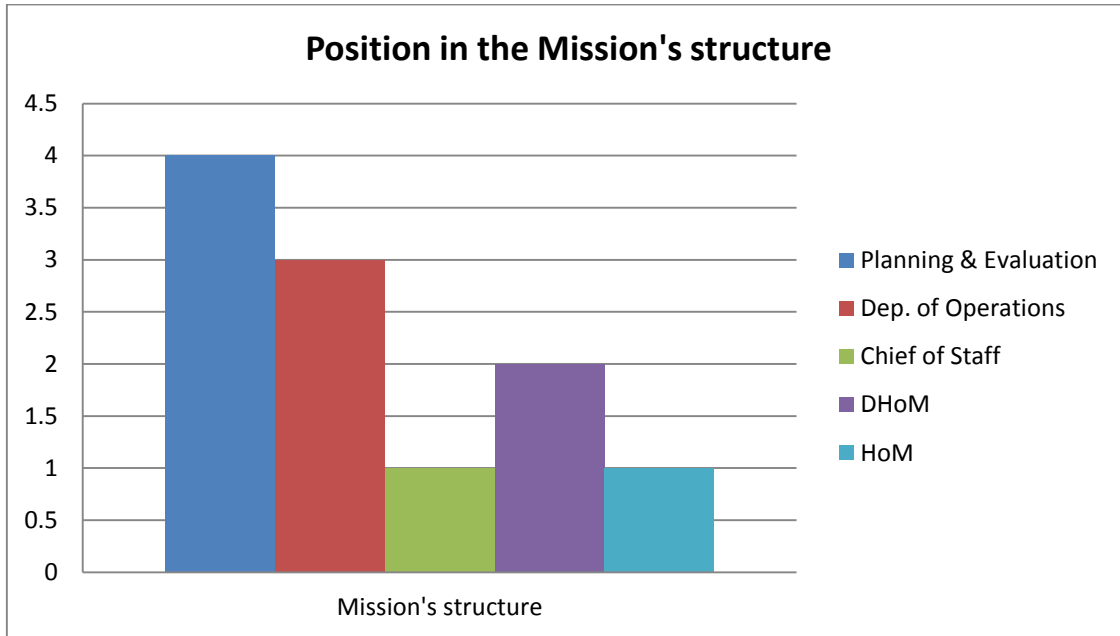


It should be noted that, while in the past the **cooperation/coordination** was more a cross-cutting function throughout all the Lines of Operations, during the last years in several Missions (EUCAP Sahel Mali, EUBAM Libya, EUPOL COPPS and EUAM Iraq) ‘Cooperation and Coordination’ became a LO in itself, with the aim to strengthen relations with other partners in the framework of a more operational integrated approach, with the PC playing an important role. However, the survey conducted shows that the specific Line of Operation dedicated to cooperation/coordination, normally positioned under the Department of Operations, does not always ensure the necessary internal integration (for example with the PC and PED) and the external proactivity and visibility for the Mission, as required for one of the most important EU tool when it comes to conflict prevention and crisis response.

**Observations:** *The complex interlinkages of functions and services needed for the effective implementation of the projects require first and foremost a strong and well-structured internal coordination. Some Missions questioned the real added value of the creation of a specific Line of Operation dedicated to cooperation/coordination (with external partners, be it EU, donors or other), proposing to return to the horizontal nature of these functions. This is a key point for a balanced and efficient distribution of tasks within the Mission and needs to be addressed in a more coherent and uniform way.*

2.8 Project Cell's positioning in the Missions' structure

Table 8



In the majority of missions, the PC is posed **within the Planning and Evaluation function** (e.g. EUPOL COPPS, EULEX Kosovo, EUCAP Somalia, EUBAM Rafah).

In other cases, the PC is placed:

- ✓ within **Department of Operations** (EUCAP Sahel Niger, EUBAM Libya, EUAM Iraq);
- ✓ under the responsibility of **CoS** (EUAM Ukraine);
- ✓ under the responsibility of the **DHoM** (EUCAP Sahel Mali);
- ✓ under **the HoM** starting from the new mandate (EUMM Georgia).

**Observations:** *The above chart shows a fragmented approach to the positioning of the PC within the Mission's structure, due to many factors (its size and competences, the amount of the projects managed, the presence of a specific Line of Operation dedicated to the external cooperation and coordination by the Mission in line with the IA). However, considering the interlinkages between the PC and other Mission's services (see points 3,2), particularly with project management functions, a more uniform approach should be defined in order to ensure*

*the links between the projects and the Missions' mandates along with the effective and sustainable management of the projects.*

### 3. Conclusions

One clear result of the CPCC survey is the unanimous **added value of Project funds** as an enabling function for mandate implementation. In fact, all Missions have strongly emphasized the strategic role of the projects for achieving the Mission's objectives, regardless of how they are funded: by the Mission budget or by external funds, entirely or partially. They constitute an added value, both in terms of supporting the implementation of the Mission's mandate and *vis- a-vis* the relations with the local counterparts.

The **lack of a uniform approach** however that is primarily linked to a lack of any written guidance on how to implement Project cells gives a rather **heterogeneous** picture of project Cells being defined locally in a manner that suits the immediate needs. **Furthermore, this can potentially divert attention from the core mandate implementation and thus adversely draw ever greater attention towards project implementation to the detriment of the focus of civilian CSDP on the delivery of hands-on mentoring, advice and training.**

It is worth recalling in this context that commitment 14 of the Joint Action Plan implementing the Civilian CSDP Compact foresees that EEAS shall work to "*strengthen efforts within the framework of the EU Integrated Approach, to ensure ownership and buy-in at local and regional level in order to achieve effective and sustainable results*". Working with all actors and partners as well as through all instruments available, the multiple dimensions to a conflict can be addressed more effectively and the civilian CSDP Missions with their technical expertise on the ground are important actors, particularly in supporting EU actors, MS and other international stakeholders with technical advice and assistance and in the framework of the Integrated Approach.

#### **4. Way ahead with a view to ensure a uniform and consistent approach by the Missions:**

1. CPCC and FPI will jointly assess whether the current formulation of the Council Decisions - establishing the Missions - are sufficient as the legal basis for the PC and/or whether some type of Standard Operating Procedures should be developed to better guide missions on the establishment and functioning of Project Cell. A proposal for a revised Council Decision will be presented to MS for consideration as appropriate.
2. SOPs would include inter alia parameters on how to assess projects' coherence and sustainability as well as the relevance to the implementation of the Mission's mandate will be established and respected by the Missions when identifying and formulating the projects, either funded by the Mission or by external actors. Terminology and methodological approached should also be harmonised to ensure a common understanding, including for statistical purposes.
3. They also have to make better understood that a project is not the aim in itself but primarily costs that are to be covered for a given operational activity. In this vein, 'projects' or rather costs linked to certain operational activities will be clearly marked as such in the Mission Implementation Plan and Benchmarking Table. This would then also much facilitate recording their relevance in terms of mandate implementation and later enhanced systematic monitoring and evaluation.
4. When the Mission is supporting a project funded by external actor/s (EU, MS or other partners), the SOPs will provide that a Memorandum of Understanding should be signed by the Mission with the concerned partner/s, to establish clear tasks, responsibilities and resources. Such Memorandum of Understanding should clearly spell out that administrative costs for projects implemented by the Missions, but financed by external actor/s, must be borne by the latter. This will help also in the preparation of future figures on PC.
5. The ongoing revision of the Mission Model Structure (MMS) document will be used as an opportunity to clarify the positioning, chain of command and functioning of the

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PC. Considering the level of coordination/integration of tasks required between the PC and other Mission's departments, the positioning of the PC under the Chief of Staff responsibility seems to be the most appropriate. Even if the inclusion of the PC in the Department of Operations would appear more logical, the PC requires strong project management capacity and financial oversight not present in the Department of Operations staff. On the contrary, this expertise is present in the Planning, Reporting and Evaluation Department operating under the Chief of Staff. Possible overreliance of PC on Mission's support functions such as procurement and finance will be carefully assessed.

6. An in depth assessment will be carried out to identify the needs for a proper IT tool to manage projects to be provided to the Missions.
7. The value of a specific Lines of Operation 'Coordination' in the Department of Operations should be reconsidered during upcoming OPLAN reviews given the cross-cutting nature of these activities. A high level of visibility in proactive engagement with the EUDEL and EU Member States in the field can be ensured by the recently standardised responsibilities of Deputy Head of Mission, who can internally oversee and coordinate the whole Mission's activities, particularly those related to the implementation of the integrated approach.