

# DCAF Days in Brussels 2023

## Event Report



Photo: DCAF





The 2023 edition of the 'DCAF Days in Brussels' was held on 4 October. The purpose of this annual meeting is to bring EU and DCAF colleagues together around an event that provides a space for frank discussions on security sector governance and reform (SSG/R) and emerging security challenges. Building on the strategic partnership between the EU and DCAF, this annual in-person exchange creates an opportunity to develop a shared analysis of current SSG/R needs, identify opportunities for engagement, as well as to reflect critically on what is working well and what isn't. This year's meeting was timely, given that the EU is in the process of reviewing the EU SSG framework and DCAF is developing its next 5-year strategy.

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Photo: DCAF



# Summary of key issues

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## Current challenges and opportunities for SSG/R

**The world is becoming more polarised, and security policy more isolationist, while in tandem multilateralism and the international legal order are being called into question.**

The Russian Federation's invasion of Ukraine in violation of the UN Charter, the series of *coups d'état* in the Sahel and Myanmar, continued violence in Sudan, Libya, Yemen, and Ethiopia, gang violence and State responses in Central and Latin America, among others, have brought security sector reform to the fore of international policy debates. Defence spending is at a record high, yet security is deteriorating in many regions, resulting in multiple crises which threaten European peace, stability, and prosperity.

**High Representative Borrell has termed the war in Ukraine an “existential threat for Europe.”** The armed conflict in Ukraine continues to have a significant impact on Europe's security and defence architecture and priorities; and concerns remain high regarding the security implications of political focus and development funding shifting away from regions outside of Europe. The conflict in Ukraine has also demonstrated the value of investing in resilient and accountable security institutions. Multiple stakeholders have noted an unquestionably strong political will in the Ukrainian government to take difficult but necessary decisions related to continued security sector reform. Threats to good security sector governance certainly exist, from conflict-related sexual violence to the effects of martial law in inhibiting civic space. Yet, there is also clear evidence that the prospect of eventual EU membership is a powerful stimulus for reforms, as is the recognition that longer-term reconstruction and recovery require strong, transparent, and accountable institutions. Noteworthy progress has already been made in addressing corruption and the influence of the ‘deep state’.

Engagements in Ukraine, Yemen, and other contexts have also demonstrated that security sector reform and **improvements to security sector governance are possible even amidst armed conflict.** In Ukraine, DCAF accompanies, supports, and reinforces the efforts of the government and the parliament to align Ukrainian

laws, policies, and institutional practice with international and Euro-Atlantic norms and standards in ways which address not only current challenges emanating from the Russian invasion, but also frame future recovery efforts and EU membership prospects. DCAF also supports the Ukrainian Ministry of Defence and the Armed Forces in reinforcing their compliance with International Humanitarian Law (IHL), including by providing appropriate sensitisation and training on IHL to army units. In Yemen, a series of dialogues on SSG/R has proven to be an effective confidence building measure to bring together different parties to the conflict and begin identifying elements of a common vision for the future of security in Yemen. While it is clear that institutional reforms which may be possible in peacetime will not be possible in conflict, agile support to meet evolving needs can build trust and serve as a strong entry point or catalyst for future reforms.



From left to right: Ambassador Natalie Chuard, Director of DCAF; Stefano Tomat, Managing Director, Civilian Operations Commander – EEAS; Katariina Leinonen, Head of Division, Peace, Partnership and Crisis Management 1, integrated approach for peace and security – EEAS; and Mark Downes, Deputy Director and Head of Operations Department at DCAF. Photo: DCAF



**The spate of military coups in the Sahel has raised questions on whether and how to remain engaged when there is clear democratic backsliding.** In any context, the reputational, security, political, or programmatic risks of SSG/R engagement need to be weighed against the associated risks or consequences of non-engagement. This includes the fact that disengaging from a context significantly reduces the ability of the international community to provide timely and relevant support upon normalisation of the political and security situation. Recent experience in The Gambia, Sudan, and Ethiopia has shown that when normalisation (and renewed opportunity for reform) does occur, re-starting national reform efforts, building trust with national stakeholders, and identifying needs is a time-consuming process.

Moreover, the usually very brief window of opportunity to re-start reforms, which often exists during the initial stages of normalisation, is easily squandered if the international community scrambles to find entry-points for engagement. Ultimately, disengagement also creates a void in which actors who support greater accountability are isolated, marginalised and gradually disempowered, accelerating the deterioration of governance and security, and often leading to the permanent departure of the few voices calling for reform. Finding ways to stay engaged without legitimising de facto authorities and to continue to support vital oversight of security institutions is therefore key.

**Efforts to prevent violent extremism,** particularly in the Sahel, where borders have historically served as hotspots for intense criminal activities, continue to suffer from insufficient understanding of local political, economic, and social dynamics. Except for some isolated technical successes, PVE initiatives have often failed to achieve strategic, sustainable impact. Particularly in contexts where there is a complex interplay between criminality and violent extremism, attempts to contain violent extremists at borders are unlikely to be effective. Deeper analysis of the root causes of violence (political, economic, social, and cultural), along with stronger and more consistent engagement with local communities, are essential for future programme design and implementation.

**Globally, gender equality and gender mainstreaming are being undermined,** with more authoritarian approaches, rising insecurity, and disinformation all contributing to a context in which gains in achieving the objectives of the Women, Peace and Security agenda can easily be reversed. While considerable effort has been invested by the EU and DCAF to better mainstream gender in programming, much more can and should be done. Good examples exist, including the catalytic effect of undertaking a gender-self assessment of, for example, a police service. In some cases, gender self-assessments have also served as an important entry point for broader reform of the security sector. It is also demonstrated that gender-responsive leadership is critical for good security sector governance.



Photo: DCAF

One of the goals of SSR is to help the justice and security sector understand and effectively respond to people's diverse security needs and meet these as part of security provision, management, and oversight. Justice and security providers need to understand the role played by gender to fulfil their duties in a non-discriminatory manner and to be able to fully address the security needs of the entire community.

**Finally, climate change and environmental degradation are deepening vulnerabilities and exacerbating inequality,** thereby contributing to greater insecurity and instability in many regions. While environmental protection is not in most cases a traditional mission for the security sector, recent research demonstrates that security sector responses to environmental risks (including natural disasters and environmental crime) impact community perceptions of the security sector and state institutions more broadly. Prevention of environmental harm and

disaster risk reduction are clearly collaborative efforts which require contributions from a wide range of governmental and non-governmental stakeholders. There are opportunities for security institutions to play a more effective and in some cases more preventive role, many of which imply closer collaboration with local communities. Mainstreaming climate and environmental risks in SSG/R programmes makes an important contribution to international climate adaptation and mitigation efforts.

**There is a need to think carefully about risk tolerance and how to invest in prevention as well as crisis response.** International support to SSG/R is increasingly associated with post-conflict or stabilisation environments, as often in such contexts needs are perceived to be greatest. Yet, these are also contexts in which progress may be most difficult - it is equally important to consider where earlier investments in SSG/R may prevent cycles of violence and the outbreak of conflict. Adequate entry points coupled with sufficient domestic political will and momentum are all prerequisite for change, in turn yielding opportunity for investments to stand a chance at effecting outcomes. At the same time, as noted above, advances are possible even in contexts of armed conflict. In a world that is steadily becoming more volatile, being able and willing to support SSG/R throughout the continuum from conflict to peace offers important strategic advantages to partners like the EU. Accepting a pragmatic tolerance for risk is essential for engagement in fragile states, coupled with conflict-sensitivity and a focus on prevention. Donors limiting themselves to lower risk contexts may inevitably find their engagement increasingly irrelevant as the global context becomes more and more volatile.

**People-centred approaches must be mainstreamed in SSG/R,** particularly in contexts witnessing democratic backsliding and an erosion of democratic norms. Too often, however, there is a presumption that any intervention with a community engagement component, working on public security issues, or aiming to tackle governance challenges is inherently a people centred approach. The often varying, vague or even overly comprehensive notion of a 'people centred approach' is one factor which has limited the practical influence of this concept on policies and programmes. Ensuring any intervention is based on a correct set of assumptions is vital, as is ensuring that it is compliant with best practices in SSG/R (namely a focus on effectiveness

and accountability in the security sector), if the objective is to have some influence on the well-being of communities. Programmes are most likely to be people-centred when they address:

- **Needs:** the primary threats/security needs of communities (rather than State security threats);
- **Barriers:** the actual and perceived barriers that influence whether and how communities access security services;
- **Engagement:** giving communities a voice in management and oversight of the security sector and ensuring the security sector reflects the communities they serve;
- **Accountability:** tackling deficits in the security sector (e.g. corruption or human rights abuses) that negatively impact public perceptions and undermine trust and legitimacy.

Criticism of the role of the state is rising in many contexts and **approaches to SSR which have focused mainly on public institutions have had mixed results.** The traditional emphasis of SSG/R on state security and justice institutions is based on the state's role as the ultimate guarantor of safety and security for the entire population. However, in many contexts, a range of actors and influences beyond the state shape whether people feel safe and secure, and hybrid security is more than norm than the exception. Hybrid security relationships between and among communities, self-defence groups, militias, private military and security companies, the private sector, and state security institutions (acting in both formal and illicit capacities) tend to produce security and insecurity alike, presenting challenges and risks as well as opportunities to international partners engaging in these spaces.



Photo: DCAF

Even in highly complex contexts, there are often opportunities to bring issues of security sector governance onto the table. Focusing on key principles of good governance, and on better security outcomes for local communities, is also an important way to identify and mitigate risks in SSR programme design and implementation. Moving forward, SSG/R needs to better integrate public and non-public actors in reform

processes, and focus on evolving concepts of legitimacy, rule of law, the role of the state in service provision, and the social contract. Greater efforts should also be made to integrate security and development programming for sustainable solutions to human security challenges. These issues will be particularly important in fragile and transitional contexts.

## The EU & SSG/R: Roles and resources

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**The EU now has a comprehensive toolbox to support SSG/R** and CSDP missions remain a crucial part of that toolbox. These missions have evolved over the years and are now asked to tackle many security-related issues including not only technical support to law enforcement and justice, but also the management of human and financial resources, leadership and professionalism, and even cybersecurity. CSDP missions are part of the EU's integrated approach, which requires collaboration, coordination, and complementarity with other actors. The integrated approach also requires new skills for deployed staff which might be more difficult to find in EU Member States: while solid technical expertise is present, staff in missions often lack the soft skills necessary to advise. An evolution is needed from a primary emphasis on technical expertise (in policing and justice, for example) towards a focus on skills related to political analysis, change management, and strategic advisory capacities.

**To increase its leverage, the EU needs to better link its different instruments.** This includes not only CSDP and INPA engagements but also its political dialogue and socioeconomic development partnerships, framed by the Global Gateway strategy. Support for peace and governance is only sustainable if partner countries develop robust economies with basic social services, resilient critical infrastructure and functional connectivity.

**A values-based approach to engagement is critical to leveraging the EU's comparative advantages** as an international partner. The importance of democratic governance of the security sector is being directly challenged in many of the contexts in which the EU and DCAF work. Democratic ideals are core European values and should be central to EU

engagement, especially in a time of shrinking civic space. However, although central to the EU SSG Framework, **governance remains an underfunded component of security assistance programmes.** There is a risk of further disconnect between increasing investments in train-and-equip initiatives and the need to develop transparent, accountable, effective, and efficient institutions which have the capacity to responsibly employ and sustain new capabilities. Further efforts are needed to fully realize a values-based, inclusive, and gender-responsive approach to SSG/R in increasingly difficult contexts, and to better emphasize the positive role democratic governance of security can play during conflict, in mediation processes, and as part of political transitions.

**The Global Gateway initiative is an important expression of the strategic autonomy of the EU,** investing at scale to support economic development while mainstreaming European values. This stands in contrast to the more transactional approach of China's Belt and Road Initiative. A major challenge in implementing Global Gateway projects is ensuring these values are applied in infrastructure projects in fragile and conflict affected settings. There is a significant, under-explored potential to advance the goals of both the Global Gateway and the EU's approach to SSR by actively pursuing synergies between the two.

On the one hand, economic incentives through Global Gateway projects can generate political will at the national levels. On the other, SSG/R can provide a set of clear benchmarks and programmatic entry points for both the EU and partner nations to ensure such projects promote democratic security governance while safeguarding the security and human rights of individuals and communities. Actors including the



EU, its members states, the UN, and the OECD, all prioritise both SSG/R and business and human rights, but these efforts tend to be disjointed and piecemeal. There is a need to better understand the different instruments available, while recognising the increased leverage available through better alignment and coordination.

**The coming months are a key time to reflect on and feed into discussions around the review of the EU SSG framework.** It is crucial such discussions emphasise the need to integrate governance within each EU engagement (rather than depending on governance being tackled by another instrument); the need for greater awareness of the SSG Framework within EU missions and delegations; and the role the Framework should play in shaping member state SSG/R activities. To create impactful synergies, it will also be important to make, and capitalise on, connections between SSG/R and other initiatives such as climate and security, gender empowerment, cyber security, and the New Agenda for Peace, among others.



Photo: DCAF

## Recommendations for 2024

1. At the strategic level, sustained support for values-based, governance-driven SSR was identified as critical to the overall effort to support Ukraine. High level recommendations included the need for a long-term commitment to SSG/R that is at the same time responsive to the specific 'real time' needs of Ukrainian partners. Providing such support now is essential to build trust and a sense of partnership for the future. Intelligence sector reform, the women peace and security agenda, and capacity building and other support for law enforcement were highlighted as priorities, as was the need to address psycho-social risks linked to former combatants. While institutional reforms within the security sector are a clear priority, inter-institutional cooperation was also identified as an under-emphasised area for engagement.
2. In rethinking SSG/R in the current context, it is important to integrate human security and people-centred approaches at local levels, while also concentrating on efforts which clearly link development and security. At the same time, working with the central government, directly with security and justice providers, and with other executive, legislative and judiciary bodies, remains essential for the EU and Member States. For example, providing long-term support in DRC to the strategic steering of reform processes with executive, legislative and judicial actors, should be linked with concrete actions in specific provinces in terms of access to justice, the fight against impunity, community policing, and opening the military health system to the population. Similar examples can be extrapolated from the transitions out of the Balkan conflicts, where comprehensive efforts emphasising both top down and bottom up measures shifted the political paradigm and its practical implications - e.g. multiethnic policing in Bosnia and Herzegovina, South Serbia, and the North of Kosovo, where reforms of the law enforcement system at state levels took into account the needs of local populations.

3. Develop and integrate effective tools and mechanisms in planning and programme design that can improve understanding of political factors which either inhibit, influence, or support SSG/R. This in turn can create more resilient, tailored, and relevant approaches to SSG/R that better address or engage with incentives for reform. Ensure some degree of political economy analysis is mainstreamed throughout the design of SSG/R programmes.
4. Develop basic and practical guidance for Political Sections in Delegations on how to monitor, analyse, and report on political developments influencing SSG/R in-country so as to provide more relevant and timely reporting on the security sector.
5. Integrate into planning and support processes considerations on the affordability and financial sustainability of SSG/R interventions that are being designed or supported. Use the budget process as a key tool to guide discussions on priorities, sequencing, and approaches. At periodic and strategic intervals of the reform process where international financial assistance is a key part of national security financing, encourage national partners to undertake a security sector expenditure review in order to recalibrate the reform process towards more affordable and efficient pathways.
6. When developing more coherent international partnerships, strive for a better balance between governance, accountability, and conflict prevention on the one hand; and train-and-equip components, on the other hand.
7. Making better use of existing tools, such as the Conflict Analysis Screening (CAS) and Human Rights-Based Approach (HRBA), can improve SSG/R programme design and implementation.
8. Combine the EU's financial instruments in priority countries/regions and bring more actors (EU Member States, Multilateral Development Banks, private sector) on board in the EU's international partnerships, including Team Europe Initiatives (TEIs) on governance, peace, and security. Principles of democratic (security) governance should be made central, and not added as an afterthought, as the Global Gateway strategy and its flagship initiatives take shape. This can ensure a more concerted approach to external conflicts and crises, as well as the sustainability and stability of the EU's investments in partner countries.
9. Missions' impact assessments are key to lesson learning and could be strengthened through use of the EU court of auditors or an independent evaluation of CSDP missions. Missions often lack a holistic perspective and tend to focus on technical and short-term activities, therefore stronger links need to be made to the EU's political dialogue. Within CSDP missions, mandates need to reflect the core goals of the Common Security and Defence Policy. In-mission or in-country training can facilitate better integration of governance, improved internal coordination, and improved understanding of the holistic approach. Additional improvements could be achieved by including partners at all levels (beyond the government level) in the design of mandates.
10. There is a need to map different business and human rights instruments, including the EU mandatory human rights due diligence, the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights, the OECD's work on responsible business, and multistakeholder initiatives such as the Voluntary Principles on Security and Human Rights to identify how they can interact with and reinforce SSG/R. More specifically, positive examples where applying SSG/R best practices has led to improvements in security sector governance (e.g., in the extractives sector in DRC and Mozambique) merit further analysis and broader application through Global Gateway projects in order to achieve results at scale.



## About DCAF

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DCAF – Geneva Centre for Security Sector Governance is dedicated to improving the security of states and their people within a framework of democratic governance, the rule of law, respect for human rights, and gender equality. Since its founding in 2000, DCAF has contributed to making peace and development more sustainable by assisting partner states, and international actors supporting these states, to improve the governance of their security sector through inclusive and participatory reforms. It creates innovative knowledge products, promotes norms and good practices, provides legal and policy advice, and supports capacity-building of both state and non-state security sector stakeholders.

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