

The EU Delegation and Missions as an Interstitial Organization: Findings from Bangui

Abstract

After the entry into force of the Lisbon treaty, the European Union (EU) has established a network of delegations abroad and has launched military operations and civilian missions in many of the world's hot spots. However, there is no clear articulation of the relations between the European external action service (EEAS) delegations and the Common security and defense policy (CSDP) missions and operations. This article explores from the angle of the sites of intervention two institutions that constitute the EEAS. I argue that together the delegation and missions illustrate the “interstitial” nature of the European external action service (Bátora, 2013). Using insights from institutionalism and EU studies, I propose that the delegation and missions exhibit features that belong to two different models of institutions in the international realm. On the one hand, the delegations are based on the blueprints of national embassies, while missions are modelled after interventions led by international organizations (IOs) such as the United Nations peacekeeping operations. Interestingly, despite those divergences, there is evidence of functioning coordination between them. Based on qualitative interviews, surveys and fieldwork conducted in Bangui and Brussels from January 2020 to August 2021, this article first discusses the role that the EU is playing in the world and in the Central African Republic and underlines the importance of looking at the EU’s global actions from capitals abroad and not solely from Brussels.

Keywords: EEAS, isomorphism, EU delegations, CSDP missions and operations, comprehensive approach, Central African Republic.

After the entry into force of the Lisbon treaty, the European Union (EU) has established a network of delegations abroad and has launched military operations and civilian missions in many of the world's hot spots. Currently, there are about 140 diplomatic representations in third countries and in headquarters of multinational organizations like the African Union (AU) or the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and 20 active missions and operations; half of those are located in sub-Saharan Africa. Along with the development of this presence abroad, the EU has been promoting an integrated approach that coordinates the various elements of its external policy (economic, political, security, aid and development).

However, there is no clear articulation of the relations between the European external action service (EEAS) delegations and the Common security and defense policy (CSDP) missions and operations. Institutionally, they are both reporting to the double-hatted High-Representative for foreign affairs and security policy and Vice-President of the commission (HR/VP). This position was created with the Lisbon treaty and “[t]he HR/VP must navigate the political pressure from several institutions, resisting pressure from member states as well as the Commission throughout the policy-making cycle. Although challenging, this is also an opportunity for EU foreign policy leadership, as the HR/VP has the ability to bridge the two worlds of EU external relations using the resources of the EEAS” (Bremberg, Danielson, Hedling, & Michalski, p. 100). This article explores from the angle of the sites of interventions two institutions that constitute the EEAS.

As I interviewed European Union staffers, I collected contradictory responses to my question on the relationship between the delegation and the missions present. Some declared that there was no relation “*stricto sensu*” and that “they work in parallel” (interview WSX), while others would assert that the missions are “under the political umbrella of the delegation” (field notes 2020) or that the delegation gives the “political steering” to the missions (interview UIO). These inconsistencies were the impulse for this article.

I argue that together the delegation and missions illustrate the “interstitial” nature of the European external action service (Bátora, 2013). Using insights from institutionalism and EU studies, I propose that the delegation and missions exhibit features that belong to two different models of institutions in the international realm. On the one hand, the delegations are based on the blueprints of national embassies, while missions are modelled after interventions led by international organizations (IOs) such as the United Nations peacekeeping operations.

Interestingly, despite those divergences, there is evidence of functioning coordination between them.

Based on qualitative interviews, surveys and fieldwork conducted in Bangui and Brussels from January 2020 to August 2021, this article first discusses the role that the EU is playing in the world and in the Central African Republic and underlines the importance of looking at the EU's global actions from capitals abroad and not solely from Brussels. Then, I turn to the theoretical framework which focuses on the debate on the sui generis nature of the EU, the concept of interstitial organization and the process of isomorphism as described by Powell and DiMaggio (1991). I will very briefly describe the data collected, before turning to the three main aspects of the delegation and mission and comparing them to national embassies and peacekeeping operations. In a second section of the empirical analysis, I will look at the coordination that has been able to develop between the delegation and the missions, despite their differences. I will conclude by coming back to the notion of interstitial organization.

The EU in the world

A comprehensive approach toward security issues has been promoted by many international and regional organizations and states for more than two decades under different labels: integrated, multidimensional, 3D, etc. (Faleg, 2018; Lavallée & Pouponneau, 2016). It aims at improving crisis management by coordinating military and civilian means in order to achieve strategic goals (Lopez Lucia, 2017, p. 451). The EU has enshrined this approach in its treaty; article 21 is calling for “consistency between the different areas of external action and between these and its other policies” (Treaty of the European Union).

Since the entry into force of the Lisbon treaty, the EU has transformed and further institutionalized its foreign affairs and security policy. It did so first and foremost by consolidating the role of ‘foreign minister of the EU’ as the HR/VP that links the commission and the EEAS (Maurer & Morgenstern-Pomorski, 2018). This external affairs service is organized into three main components: political, economic and security.

The political and economic departments are deeply interlinked sharing the geographical desks: Africa, Asia, Americas, East and South neighbourhoods, and multilateral relations. In addition, Special Representatives and Special Envoys on specific topics (human rights, non-proliferation, space) or regions (Bosnia and Herzegovina, Sahel, Central Asia, Horn of Africa,

Columbia's peace process) have been appointed, reflecting the particular concerns of the EU and its member-states, and report directly to the HR/VP.

Abroad, the former commission delegations, which exist in some countries like the United States since the 1950s, became EU delegations and are more numerous than most member-states embassies (only France and Germany have more diplomatic representations). Delegations are established and accredited in discussions with the host country or institutions. "In those formats, the EU is considered as a state" (interview TD) with a seat at the table next to countries' representatives. They are meant to be permanent representations of the EU interests in the host country and to be the eyes and ears as well as the mouthpiece (Jönsson in Cooper, Hocking, & Maley, 2008, p. 32) of the EU reporting on the security, economic and political situation and meeting and negotiating with the national and local actors. Depending on the importance of the EU interests as well as the date of establishment in the host country, delegations can be of different sizes ranging from fewer than 10 people to more than 100 employees. Besides those tasks, which are similar to those of a national embassy, the EU delegations also coordinate the EU member-states present in the third country. However, they do not offer consular services (Kerres & Wessel, 2015).

The EEAS is often understood as the diplomatic service of the EU, but this is only a portion of its activities and mandate (Bátora, 2013). Indeed, in addition to its delegations, and representatives and envoys, the third component of the EEAS is the crisis response department, which functions with its own chain of command. Its role is to design, plan, execute and monitor the missions and operations¹ conducted abroad.

CSDP missions and operations are decided (authorized? Approved?) by the Council of the EU and need the invitation of the host state or a resolution of the UN security council under Chapter VII of the UN Charter to unfold (or to operate? Or to take place?) (Tardy, 2019, p. 237). They are designed as responses to specific crises and needs of the host country (Smith in Richardson, 2012, p. 254). This is why there is diversity in those missions and operations: some are geared toward consultation and capacity-building, while others have more robust equipment and directly intervene. To illustrate, EU NAVFOR Somalia is an operation that supports the Somali government with the help of two vessels and aircraft to curb piracy and ensure the protection of commercial and humanitarian naval transport in the Gulf of Aden, EUCAP Sahel

¹ The EU distinguishes between operations, which are military in nature, and the mission, which are civilian.

Niger aims at reinforcing the capabilities of the interior security forces in Niger through advisors and trainers, and EUBAM has been promoting EU standards for the control, customs and trade of goods at the borders between Moldova and Ukraine since 2005.

This article focuses the analysis two manifestations of the EU abroad: the delegations and the CSDP missions. There already exists a lot of research that analyzes the EEAS through different angles (Devine, Agius, & Devine, 2011; Duquet, 2018; Jørgensen, Kaas, Knudsen, Svendsen, & Landorff, 2020; Keukeleire, 2003; Mérand, 2006; Rieker, 2006; Thomas, 2011), but all these look at the EEAS from Brussels. As many have argued, it is essential to look at sites of interventions to understand how the policies of multinational organizations like the EU are implemented (Bremberg et al.; Gross, 2010; Okemuo, 2013; Oksamytna, 2012; Styan, 2012). The main goal of the EEAS being to reinforce the EU presence abroad, it is only in examining the actions in third countries' capitals and territory that we can understand how the EU has been employing its political and crisis management capabilities (Merlingen, 2007, p. 3)

The EU in the Central African Republic

The Central African Republic has been plagued by violent confrontations since its independence from France in 1960. In reaction to those cyclical political and security crises, multiple multinational and bilateral interventions were conducted by France, Russia, the United Nations, and the African Union. The first EU operation in the CAR, EUFOR Chad/CAR (EU force for Chad and the Central African Republic), took place in the northern part of the country. EUFOR Chad/CAR was authorized in the fall of 2007 and lasted until 2009. This mission was launched in response to the humanitarian crisis that had internally and externally displaced populations from Central African countries in refugee camps at the border of CAR and Chad. The goal was to allow humanitarian help to reach these refugees by protecting the infrastructures and personnel of NGOs and the UN agencies. As many others EU operations and missions, the staffing and equipping were difficult, and it took a year for the mission to be fully operational (Haine, 2011). This mission was heavily criticized for its alignment with the French and, in turn, Chadian political and strategic interests (Simon, 2010, p. 36).

A few years later, when President Bozizé was toppled, the Séléka, a coalition of armed groups led by Michel Djotodia, took power in Bangui. This political instability was accompanied by violence and unrest. In 2014, the UNSC deployed a multidimensional mission (MINUSCA) and the EU launched another operation, EUFOR RCA, which aimed at securing

the Bangui area and, in particular, the airport to ensure the delivery of aid. After a year, this force handed over to another mission, EUMAM, a military advisory mission, for which the EU sent experts to professionalize the Central African armed forces (FACAs). This was then transformed into the current EU training mission (EUTM) which is tasked with supporting the reform of the security sector by training soldiers and advising the military bodies. In 2019, the interoperability cell of EUTM became a mission in its own right. This resulted in the creation of EUAM, which is geared toward advising and transforming the internal security forces and the judicial system rather than the military. Hence, there are currently two active EU missions in the CAR.

Aside from its interventions, the EU and its member-states are also very active politically and in cooperation and development. With its member-states, the EU is the second largest donor in the CAR (interview UIO). It is one of the main partners to the CAR government through direct and indirect budgetary aid (interview GFD and OL). The delegation has about 40 employees with a small political section reporting on the situation in CAR and representing the EU to the CAR governmental partners, and a larger cooperation section that channels the funds to the different contractors, including NGOs which manage the projects. The Békou fund pools the resources from the EU, Germany, France, Italy, Switzerland and the Netherlands and distributed around 300 million euros since 2014.

Theoretical framework and argument

This article is based on insights from the EU studies, more specifically on the notion of the interstitial organization, which sheds light on the evergreen debate on the *sui generis* nature of the European Union. To explain the manifestation of this interstitial feature, I mobilize isomorphism in its three declinations: coercive, mimetic and normative.

How unique is the EEAS?

The *sui generis* nature of the European Union has been sparking debates among EU scholars for decades. Some emphasize the uniqueness and originality of the EU as an “unidentified political object”² in the international realm (Phelan, 2012). The partisans of this position focus on the scope, width and depth of the EU regulations, instruments and policies:

² According to Jacques Delors’s expression.

“the EU does indeed display unique characteristics, be it in its scope, institutional design, decision-making procedures or supranational legal identity” (Øhrgaard in Tonra & Christiansen, 2004, p. 26). The existence of numerous research agendas and theories (intergovernmentalism, neo-functionalism, etc.) emerging from the study of the EU strongly advocates for this view. The EEAS, with its dual nature, has been held as a prime illustration of the uniqueness of the EU (Bremberg, Danielson, Hedling, & Michalski, 2022, p. 100).

However, the potential downside of emphasizing too much the distinctiveness of the EU is that it can prevent researchers from analyzing the many ways in which the EU inspires but also draws from other regions and other organizations (Söderbaum & Sbragia, 2010). It can also lead to unproblematically accepting and even perpetuating the discourse of EU as “a unique polity projecting a universal set of norms” (Breuer & Kurowska, 2011, p. 2). The EU’s action and actorness abroad can be accused of the same neo-colonialism and paternalism that have been reproach to its member-states.

Without resolving the debate, analyzing the EU and in particular the EEAS as an interstitial organization can shed some light on how the EU is inspired by and modeled after existing organizational forms. An interstitial organization is situated “in the interstices between established institutional domains, tapping into resources, rules and practices from multiple fields and recombining these into new organized patterns” (Bátora, 2021, p. 1434). Those organizations are blending the rules, norms and structures of established institutions. Unlike boundary organizations, “they do not mediate relations across fields but fulfil functional needs emerging in spaces between fields by recombination of practices, rules and norms into new sets of patterns.” (Bátora, 2021, p. 1438). It is by comparing them that we can focus our attention to the commonalities between the EU and other entities and distinguish between what is borrowed and what is truly novel. This begs several questions: how is this interstitial organization formed? Between which institutional fields is the EEAS situated? How can interstitial organizations coordinate between the different institutional fields?

This article argues that the missions and operations, on the one hand, and delegations, on the other, are based on two different models of organizational forms. The delegations have been designed, staffed and perceived similarly to national embassies. The missions more closely resemble the interventions of organizations like the UN peacekeeping forces or NATO, with military organization, compounds, and relations with the authorities that are based on the technical and operational support offered by these missions. Moreover, despite their

differences, in the sites of interventions, delegation and missions seem able to coordinate their action, speak with one voice and leverage their shared influence.

The delegation and missions in the CAR reflect the interstitial nature of the EEAS, as they are modelled after two different types of organizations. “[T]he structural arrangements within the EEAS [...] partially resemble those of foreign ministries, and partially those of other types of organization.” (Bátora, 2021, p. 1443) Along those lines, the delegations are modelled after national embassies and for the CSDP missions and operations: “[t]he EU has—more or less intentionally—developed its crisis management policy in reference to other international organizations, most notably NATO and the United Nations” (Tardy, 2019, p. 237).

Isomorphism: three processes

The mechanism that can explain how those similarities emerge is isomorphism. In their seminal article, DiMaggio and Powell state that “bureaucratization and other forms of organizational change occur as the result of processes that make organizations more similar without necessarily making them more efficient” (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983, p. 147). Their model has been tested on numerous types of organizations both domestically (Deephouse, 1996; Kezar & Bernstein-Sierra, 2019), internationally (Bernstein & Cashore, 2007; Massey, 2009) and even in the EU (Radaelli, 2000; Song & Della Sala, 2008). According to this model, organizational forms are built based on existing models that are then recombined and reshuffled to create ‘new’ arrangements. Isomorphism does not imply exact replication. Instead, the existing organizational forms inspire new ones during this process. The form is also adapted and altered. Importantly, the selection is not based on efficiency, but on perceived legitimacy. Organizations copy “the most prominent and secure entities in their fields” (Suchman, 1995, p. 589).

They go on to present three processes that led to isomorphism: coercive, normative and mimicry; I will briefly describe each of them. Coercive isomorphism is a process that is based on the search for legitimacy, which can be granted by authorities (state, professional associations, certification agencies, etc.). Coercive isomorphism can be mandatory, like the accreditation to be able to give a diploma for a university, but it can also be the result of social, political or cultural expectations for conformity. Mimetic isomorphism occurs under uncertainty. When the impacts of certain institutional choices are unclear, organizations imitate organizations that are perceived as successful in their field. Normative isomorphism functions

through the networks of professionals and their interactions. Shared professional and educational backgrounds lead to the adoption of practices that are perceived as legitimate by other members in the network. “At an analytic level, only coercive isomorphism is linked to the environment outside of the organizational field. Mimetic and normative processes are internal to the field and help explain the spread of roles and structures” (Kezar & Bernstein-Sierra, 2019, p. 3). Interestingly, all three processes of isomorphism are present when one looks at the EU representations abroad and they all reinforce each other.

It is important to note here that I am not commenting or evaluating impact of the EU activities abroad. There are numerous articles detailing the potential adverse effects that the EU operations and missions can have in sites of interventions (Oksamytna, 2012; Skeppström, Hull Wiklund, & Jonsson, 2014) as well as their success (Asseburg & Kempin, 2011), but assessing the influence of the EU on CAR politics and development is beyond the scope of this article.

Data collection: Interviewing in a small pond

The empirical material that supports this article comes from 60 interviews³ conducted during two rounds of fieldwork in Bangui, Central African Republic in winter 2020 and summer 2021 and in-person and online interviews conducted in Brussels, Geneva, and New York between 2019 and 2022.⁴ These interviews were conducted with staff from international and regional organizations, personnel of embassies, experts, consultants, and journalists. They were conducted as part of the research for my Ph.D. dissertation. They tackled the main current topics of interest regarding the international and regional interventions in CAR as well as their interactions and perspective on the work done by other organizations. It is the inconsistent understanding of the relations between the delegations and the missions that piqued my interest and inspired this article.

One of the characteristics of the group I study especially in an environment like Bangui is that it constitutes a relatively small community. This situation has both advantages and disadvantages. On the one hand, it was easier to understand the network and make sure that I targeted the right people for interviews and gathered the perspective from all EU actors. On the other hand, it makes recognizing interviewees, especially by people who know this community

³ Interviews were conducted in French or in English to facilitate the legibility of this paper, excerpts in French have been translated by the author.

⁴ Three-letter identifiers indicate interviews conducted in Bangui, and two letter identifiers indicate interviews conducted in headquarters (Brussels, Geneva and Brussels).

possible. With the exception of the Minusca, the organizations and embassies have very few employees.⁵ To ensure the confidentiality of the people who trusted me with their opinions and who often reminded me that they did not align with the institutions for which they work, this article is not associating excerpts with a specific organization and just uses a randomly selected identifier.

Empirical analysis

There are three main aspects of the manifestations of the EU abroad that follow the isomorphic logic described earlier. First, their staff and infrastructures denote normative isomorphism. The delegation is mostly operated by civilians coming from foreign affairs ministries and the commission, and they use national embassy as a legitimate model. The missions' heads and personnel are career military and gendarmerie officers who previously worked in other multinational operations (NATO or UN) and these operations have become the standards for building their compounds. Second, the nature and conduct of their activities display a mimetic process. Funding and managing programs in the Central African Republic can be quite tentative and it is difficult to evaluate the outputs. As a result the delegation and missions have imitated the roles of existing actors: embassies and peacekeeping missions. Third, the EU wants to be perceived as “a stabilizing element [in the CAR] that is able to provide force with its missions and soft power through its delegation” (interview EDC). The perceptions of the national authorities and other international and regional actors are primordial for the EU to achieve its objective. These expectations can be understood as an informal version of the coercive isomorphism.

The fact that the delegation and the missions have opted for different models substantiates the idea that the EEAS is an interstitial organization navigating among multiple fields: diplomacy, defense, peace-enforcement, etc. It is the coordination among the delegation and missions that create this interstice that connect them.

Staff and infrastructures: Normative isomorphism

The staff of the delegation and the missions are quite different. They hire people that come from the different career and educational backgrounds who, in turn, have developed networks of professionals that understand the world, and their role in a specific way. They organize their work in a similar fashion. This constitutes a powerful drive for conformity. This

⁵ For example, the EU delegation employs 5 expatriates, including the head of delegation.

is present in the different hierarchical levels and their rotation sequences, and reflected in the infrastructures.

Staff

The delegation is organized around an ambassador, who often begins her career in the foreign services from their national country or from the commission. It was the case for Samuela Isopi⁶, former EU ambassador to CAR who used to be the Italian ambassador to Cameroon. Her successor, Douglas Carpenter⁷ started his career in the Scottish government and worked for decades in the European institutions. The Ambassador is helped in her work by two departments: a political one and a cooperation one. The expatriate or European staff comes either from the European Commission, the Council or are seconded-national staff (Bremberg et al., 2022; Kerres & Wessel, 2015, p. 102). They studied in social sciences in European universities, often with part of the curriculum focusing on the European Union (field notes 2020-2021). They can move from one delegation to another or go back to Brussels, just like diplomatic corps does. Compared to missions and operations, the delegation hires more local staffers. At the delegation, Central African employees are working as assistants, budget and project managers,⁸ again just like embassies who hire local staff to do clerical and administrative tasks (field notes 2021 and interview JHG).

The heads of EUTM and EUAM, are military or military police officers. The current head of EUAM is a Portuguese gendarmerie officer and the EUTM's force commander is Brigadier General Cabo, a Belgian officer. Missions are also staffed with different experts on different topics (gender, security sector reform, intelligence, etc.) They come from national armed forces and often compare their experience at the EU to other multinational interventions with NATO or the UN (interviews GHJ, OPA and KLZ). In missions, Central African personnel is almost solely doing gate security (field notes 2020).

Another distinction that follows the fault line between the embassies and the UN peacekeeping missions is the rotation time. EUTM and EUAM military and police staff rotate every 4 to 6 months depending on the nationality (interview DFG) similar to the rotation period of Minusca. The delegation works on a schedule that resemble that of the embassy, contracts

⁶ https://www.eeas.europa.eu/nigeria/about-ambassador_en?s=114

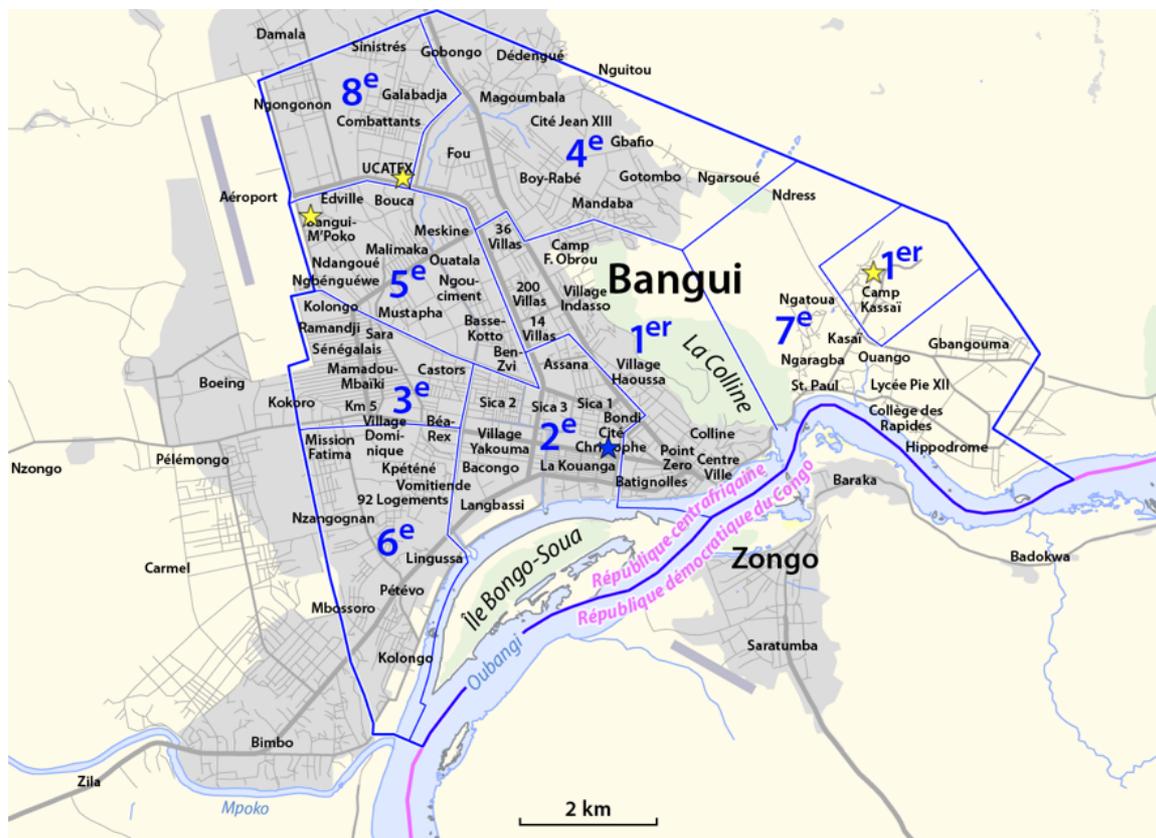
⁷⁷ https://www.eeas.europa.eu/central-african-republic/about-ambassador_en

⁸ https://www.eeas.europa.eu/central-african-republic/qui-sommes-nous_fr?s=89

are for a year or two with limited renewal considering that Bangui is a difficult posting (interviews UIO and WER).

Infrastructures

Another indication that the delegation and missions are modeled after different organizational forms is the site and types of buildings where they are housed. On the map below, I marked in dark blue the location of the EU delegation and in yellow the sites of the EUTM⁹ offices. The delegation is positioned on one of the main roadways in Bangui, avenue Barthélémy Boganda, and close to the downtown area. The EU delegation is next to what is called the administrative building, the main offices for four ministries.¹⁰ It is in a white two-story building that resembles the French embassy with high ceilings and the typical high windows that allow for air flow without too much sun (field notes 2020) surrounded by a wall with a one-way-mirror security post. This location and type of offices are similar to what national representations have selected in Bangui: on a major road, close to the center of the city, a permanent building surrounded by walls. This allows representatives to easily access the main



⁹ I did not visit the EUAM offices, therefore this section will focus on the EUTM.

¹⁰ <https://www.gouv.cf/realisation/59/rehabilitation-du-building-administratif>

political and judicial institutions of the Central African Republic: the parliament, the constitutional court, and the offices and residences of the President and the Prime Minister.

EUTM has a very different feel. It was situated in the UCATEX compound, a former textile factory, that was created during the launch of EUFOR RCA in 2014. It was shared with the UN. It is built almost solely in white prefabricated buildings¹¹, just like the two UN compounds of logbase (the logistical base) and HQ (the departments base). In 2020, it was moved to the M'Poko base next to the airport,¹² a French camp that served as a refugee camp in 2014. Most of the training activities of EUTM were¹³ located in two camps: one in Bouar, base Lelerc (interview CXY), at the border with Cameroon, and one at the east of Bangui, camp Kassai (interview IOP). This reflects the temporary nature of the UN and EU missions. They are supposed to be a response to a crisis and a sporadic and urgent need of the host country. When a crisis arises, they can be built within weeks. Once peace is 'reestablished' or armed forces are trained, the mission is completed and they can leave. Of course, in practice, we have seen UN peacekeeping stay for decades in a country. Although EU missions have ended, until now in CAR they have been continuously replaced and transformed, always occupying the temporary compound that they built several years ago.

in their buildings and in the staff they hire, the two expressions of the EU abroad studied here seem to have adopted the form of two types of actors (temporary and military interveners and permanent diplomatic representatives). Those choices of models were not unavoidable or even obvious. Delegations and missions could have been designed differently. For example, delegation and missions could share offices and the quick rotation of the missions' staff could be lengthen to be closer to the one of the delegation. The people that are being employed could come from the same pools of candidate and missions could hire civilian experts.

Mandates and Activities: Mimetic isomorphism

This section will describe the mandates and activities of the delegations and the two missions. The development and execution of those mandates are done under great uncertainty. This uncertainty triggers the delegation and missions to conduct their operations in a similar

¹¹ https://eeas.europa.eu/archives/csdp/missions-and-operations/eufor-rca/news/archives/20140801_02_en.htm

¹² https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eutm-rca/eutm-rca-european-training-mission-central-african-republic-military-mission_en?s=334

¹³ EUTM suspended its training activities in reaction to the involvement of Wagner, a Russia private company, that provides mercenaries and who have been acting side by side with the Central African armed forces (interview ZH).

fashion to existing organizations, as it is perceived as a safer option than developing procedures from scratch.

The delegation has two major components to its mandate. First, the EU delegation, much like bilateral embassies, is a permanent presence of the EU in CAR. Its role is to represent the EU interests in the country and to the Commission of the Economic and Monetary Community of Central Africa (CEMAC). This involves frequent meetings with the Central African political actors (parliament, executive, ministries, etc.) and coordination with the other external partner (UN, World Bank, national embassies). It is also providing reports and analyses on the situation in the CAR to numerous EU institutions and member-states. “The Delegations are highly valued in Brussels and the Member State capitals for their insights and knowledge” (Kerres & Wessel, 2015, p. 12). In Bangui, the only member-state with diplomatic representation is France; the expertise provided by the delegation is an important tool for the other 26 member-states to get independent information on the situation. This is strikingly similar to the job described by embassy staffers who told me that they divide their time between meetings with the national and international actors and reporting to the capitals (fieldwork 2020-2021).

Second, the delegation in Bangui is working in large part as a funnel for the investment of the EU in humanitarian aid, development and cooperation including the Instrument for Stability and Peace and the earmarked trust fund Bêkou.¹⁴ This is done through subcontracting partners (interview CXY): “Those include AFD [French agency for development], Oxfam, Danish Refugee Council, Acted, UNICEF, some local non-governmental organizations” (Interview MJ). The EU delegation facilitates the delivery of the aid through negotiations with local and national authorities (roadblocks, tariffs, red tapes, etc.) and the implementation of the programs, but it is not directly involved in the monitoring¹⁵ and realization of the programs funded by the EU.

The mandates of EUAM and EUTM are complementary, contrarily to the delegation, and they are both meant as temporary missions. EUTM has three components to its mandate. First, it provides strategic advice to the ministry of defense and the armed forces as well as to the President’s cabinet, the ministry of interior and the gendarmerie. Second, EUTM as a training mission is in charge of training the Central African armed forces (FACAs). Third,

¹⁴ Bekou means hope in Sango.

¹⁵ The EU employees are largely restricted in the places where they can travel in the CAR and even in Bangui, therefore the monitoring and evaluation is delegated to consultants.

EUTM also provides teaching to officers and special units of the FACAs such as the amphibian unit, intelligence, and telecommunication (interview ZH, KLZ and GHJ).¹⁶ In June 2020, EUTM had “completed the training of five battalions of the national defence forces as well as 50 per cent of the non-commissioned officers. It also supervised the basic training of 1,647 recruits into the army ” (Report of the Secretary-General S/2021/571). There is a concerted effort to limit the duplication between the activities of the EUTM and the Minusca. Nonetheless, EUTM overlaps with some of Minusca’s departments on issues like security sector reform and strategic advising to the ministries.

EUAM emerged from the interoperability cell of EUTM (interview KLZ) and was created in consultation with the Minusca. Its main mandate is to provide strategic advice to the ministry of interior and public security and the internal security forces (ISF) which include the police, gendarmerie, customs, and the water and forest services as well as the ministry of justice (interview ZH). One of the main partners and the intervener with which there was the larger overlap is the United Nations police (UNPOL). UNPOL is the section of the Minusca which is in charge mentoring and advising the police and judicial system as well as maintaining order by patrolling alongside with the police services of the CAR. “The launch of EUAM was done in consultation with UNPOL, they both work well together” (interviews RF and DSA). Detailing the division of labour between EUAM and UNPOL an interviewee told me: “UNPOL is training individual personnel and doing joint patrols, effectively ensuring the security in the streets. EUAM is more top-down and in charge of increasing the administrative capabilities of the interior forces to reestablish the national forces” (interview ZH).

Even if logical divisions of labour was found, both EUTM and EUAM have roles and activities that are close to the role of departments of the Minusca and shared a common approach toward peace-enforcing in post-conflict countries. This is confirmed by Thierry Tardy who describes:

“In the field, EU and UN operations exhibit some similarities across levels. First, both EU and UN peace operations are consent-based and support rather than substitute local authorities. Although the EU’s approach towards the use of force can be more robust than the UN’s, both institutions are risk-averse and resent peace enforcement. Indeed, the three key principles of UN peacekeeping—impartiality, limited resort to force, and consent—by and large apply to EU-led operations. Interestingly, the EU and the UN are closer on the issue of the use

¹⁶ Although, CAR is a land-locked country but has a network of rivers.

of force than either organisation is to NATO or even the AU, which are both more comfortable with the idea of “enforcing peace” through military operations.” (Tardy, 2019, p. 238)

This idea of a ‘comfortable’ or ‘safe’ vision of what it means to enforce peace aligns with coercive isomorphism based on uncertainty. Enforcing peace is a challenging and vague task and since both those organizations are unsure of how to proceed, they cling to the well-known ‘military’ approach that trains and advises the national forces without too much concern for the democratic oversight and risks of defection (Oksamytna, 2012). This is in line with the assessment by Skeppström, Hull and Jonsson “[w]ith the EUTM missions, the EU has ventured into partially new territory, providing military capacity building in direct conjunction with an ongoing conflict, while having a limited ability to influence how its trainees subsequently conduct themselves in combat operations” (Skeppström et al., 2014, p. 363). Facing this new territory, missions mimicked the existing form that UN peacekeeping could provide.

Perceptions of the authorities and other partners: Coercive isomorphism

Coercive isomorphism is based on the search for legitimacy. This legitimacy domestically and internationally can be awarded by state authorities. This section demonstrates that the EU delegation and the missions are perceived differently by the national authorities in the CAR and that those two visions are aligned with the different relations that they have with one the one hand national representatives of other nations like France, Cameroon, the United States (interview TD) and on the other, the relationships they have with intervening organizations like the UN and its multidimensional mission (Tardy, 2019).

When opening a delegation in a third state, the EU follows the Vienna convention procedures (Duquet, 2018; Kerres & Wessel, 2015, p. 17). “Despite the EU not having sovereign state power, the EU delegations are recognized as diplomatic missions by their host countries; and although diplomatic relations are not developed on the basis of reciprocity but on the basis of an agreement with the host country (a so-called Establishment Agreement), they are conferred the same kind of privileges and immunities accorded to national diplomatic missions by the Vienna Convention.” (Bremberg et al., p. 116). There were two exceptions to this recognition. In Washington, the Trump administration demoted the EU ambassador to the status? of an IO’s representative for a few months without any official explanation for the decision or its reversal. The United Kingdom, also “refused to confer diplomatic status on the EU delegation set up in London after the withdrawal from the EU. This decision became a bone

of contention with the EU and further deteriorated the relations between the EU and the UK.”(Bremberg et al., p. 116).

In the CAR, the delegation is considered with all the consideration that is awarded to the embassies. the head of the EU delegation is a respected member of the international community. The EU is a large funder and its voice carries weight in the discussion fora and in negotiations with the CAR government officials. But, as they do with other states, the CAR authorities negotiate with the EU delegation on the level of budgetary help, the allocations of humanitarian aid, etc. (interview HGF). There are instances of disagreements and tense relationships between the delegations and some CAR officials (interview CXY), which are similar to disagreements that happen between the French embassy and CAR (interview PAS), although not on the same basis and not with the same magnitude.

The delegation, not the missions, participates and represents the EU in the coordination meetings with the other international and regional partners, the main one being the G5. The G5 is a semi-formal group at the ambassadorial level meeting every Monday in Bangui. Its membership has changed throughout the months reflecting the level of consensus and the willingness to compromise, but the ‘permanent’ members are: the European Union delegation, the United State embassy, the French embassy, the African Union representative, the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS) representative, the United Nations Special Representative of the Secretary-General and World Bank Country Manager, while the Russian and Chinese ambassadors come more sporadically. According to first and second-hand accounts of these meetings, they serve as a forum to share their opinions, exchange information, and coordinate their activities (interview UIO). In this format, the EU is considered as the other external actors in the CAR.

In general, the perception of the EU missions is quite positive (interview XXX). EUTM and EUAM are operational and technical in nature and they offer services to the CAR government in improving the provision of security throughout the country by professionalizing the armed forces and internal security forces. Unlike the delegation which negotiates and discusses with the CAR authorities directly, the missions are a tool provided by the EU and that can be rescinded if the political and geostrategic position of the CAR government changes. After the presidential and legislative elections in 2020, a group of mercenaries called Wagner increased its involvement with the FACAs. Wagner is a Russian private company, allegedly

close to the Kremlin,¹⁷ that provides fighters coming from various countries (Russia, Syria, Libya, Chechnya, etc.) as well as material. They have been fighting side by side with the FACAs, these combats have intensified in the spring of 2021 resulting in important territorial gains for the government.¹⁸ This group was sanctioned by the EU in 2021 and large parts of the EUTM's mandate were cut back: "because of the control exerted by the Wagner mercenaries on the FACAs, the EU, concerned of the respect for international humanitarian law, decided to suspend temporarily its training program" (the General commanding the force, Jacques Langlade de Montgros, in an interview with AFP).¹⁹ This withdrawal illustrates that missions and their activities are conditional to the situation in CAR and the efforts of the authorities to see the CSDP involvement continue. Technically, the UN's contribution is also dependent on the respect for its mandate and the possibility to work unhindered. Several violations of this freedom to work (attacks against UN convoys, refusal of entry in FACAs camps, etc.) were reported leading the UN to be more assertive and seek reassurance that the CAR government wanted the Minusca to remain active in the country.²⁰ This UNSC has not yet made a choice as drastic as the EU by reducing its mandate but has made clear signs that it expected changes.

One of the main differences between the delegation and the missions is the way in which they conduct their activities. "The delegation is not at the service of the local authorities, it is not there to provide them with something (training, advice) unlike the missions and operations" (WSX interview). The EUTM and EUAM directly provide trainers, advisors and equipment to the CAR government. Like the Minusca, it is present at the invitation of the CAR government and provides direct support to its internal and external security forces which can be withdrew or cut back. The delegation is not directly conducting programs, it is using contractors to do so. But these differences provide an opportunity for leverage by using the missions as a negotiation chip with the CAR authorities.

¹⁷ <https://www.economist.com/the-economist-explains/2022/03/07/what-is-the-wagner-group-russias-mercenary-organisation>

¹⁸ Since the signing of the peace agreement between the government and the armed groups in 2019, the government only controlled 25% of the national territory, with the greater involvement of Wagner this share has grown to 75% to 80% depending on the estimate.

¹⁹ <https://www.france24.com/fr/afrique/20211215-en-centrafrique-l-ue-suspend-la-formation-de-soldats-%C3%A0-cause-du-groupe-russe-wagner>

²⁰ <https://www.un.org/press/fr/2021/cs14698.doc.htm>

Coordination

The previous section compared the EU delegation to national embassies and the EU missions to Minusca's departments, I argue that together the delegation and missions as the expression of the EU abroad constitute an interstitial organization "that is, as an organization emerging in interstices between various organizational fields and recombining physical, informational, financial, legal and legitimacy resources stemming from organizations belonging to these different organizational fields. This interstitial status creates a situation in which there are different and sometimes conflicting organizational principles and practices introduced within the organization of the EEAS and different and sometimes conflicting sets of expectations in relation to the Service from actors within the organization as well as from outside. In broader terms, the emergence of the EEAS hence provides a fertile ground for studying patterns of institutional innovation in organizational fields via the establishment of interstitial organizations."(Bátora, 2013, p. 599)

One could assume that the delegation and the mission work in parallel and are separated involvements of the EU in the CAR. But considering the comprehensive approach developed by the EU, what I found in Bangui are instances of coordination and common work. Being based on two different models increase the complexity of coordinating and collaborating between those different elements of the EU presence. In Brussels, inter-services rivalries can run high (interview CXY). In 2011, Asseburg and Kempin noticed that the coordination of activities among member-states, delegation, and what was called ESDP at the time, now CSDP was "conspicuously under-developed. [...] Even if cooperation has worked well on the ground, the institutional rivalry has meant that such cooperation has sometimes been viewed with suspicion from Brussels and been undermined" (Asseburg & Kempin, 2011, p. 192). This discrepancy between coordination on the ground and in headquarters is also what my finding points to.

In Bangui, there was no evidence of widespread institutional competition. There are in fact numerous successful attempts to coordinate the actions and the messages that are delivered to the authorities and other international partners. The importance of bringing the same message to the authorities was underlined by many interviewees: "aligning the message is obvious, but more than that we need to take advantage of all the missions and representations to hit the same nail"(interview WSX). Another interviewee expanded on this idea: "There is the feeling that the EU is a family and that they share the same position" (interview UIO).

This is done through different and weekly coordinating meetings between the heads of missions and delegations and their political advisors (interview DSA). “This trilateral [delegation, EUTM, EUAM] format is often used” (CXY). Moreover, the coordination is also done through access to the reports and documents that are shared and can be commented on by the others (interview MJ). Prior to the G5 meetings with the other international and regional interveners and to meetings with the CAR government, the EUTM commander, the head of EUAM and the EU ambassador meet to present a common message which often carries weight (interview POI). To illustrate this, an interviewee claimed that “[t]hose missions are a way for the EU to maintain its place at the table and to be invited and consulted when discussing issues with other big actors such as the United States, the United Nations, and the African Union. It is a question of influence and reputation” (interview JK).

Concluding remarks

Henry Kissinger famously asked: “what is Europe’s phone number?” The EEAS was a response to this quip. This service plays many roles that in national and multinational contexts are distributed among multiple ministries or departments. “[T]hese combined functions are reflected in the structural arrangements within the EEAS, which partially resemble those of foreign ministries, and partially those of other types of organization.” (Bátora, 2021, p. 1443). This article analyzed this proposition by looking at the three representations of the EU abroad: the delegation, the EUTM and EUAM. I argue that EU delegations are created, developed and recognized in similar ways to national embassies, while EU missions and operations are like interventions by multinational organizations like the United Nations.

The EEAS has been inspired by the experiences of its bureaucrats in other “in other institutions, including best practices from foreign ministries and diplomatic services, defence ministries, crisis management agencies and even global corporations” (Bremberg et al., 2022, p. 102). These shared professional paths have shaped the delegations and the missions in a process akin to normative isomorphism. This is reflected in the choices and locations of the offices. Moreover, the EU delegation and missions in Bangui have been emulating the mandates and activities of the embassies and the Minusca. Despite the overlaps, there are instances of division of labour, in particular, between UNPOL and EUAM. This proximity between mandates and activities have led national actors in the CAR to treat the delegation as another embassy, albeit a powerful one and the missions like the Minusca. The EU has leveraged the common impact of the delegation and the mission to get its point across to the CAR government,

especially by suspending part of the activities of EUTM and conditioning its return to a change in policy.

This article is solely focus on two types of manifestations of the EU abroad: delegations and missions, but as mentioned earlier there are numerous other expressions that could be explores: the Special representatives, the military operations, the trade missions, etc. Another interesting extension of this research would be to analyze the interactions in other contexts, the Central African Republic is a country that hosts a variety of international and regional actors where security concerns are prominent. There might be more or less synergies depending on the safeness of the third county, its ties to member-states and the EU in general (trade, political, historical, etc.), whether it is in an accession process (Bosnia and Herzegovina, for example).

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