



KONINKRIJK BELGIË

Federale Overheidsdienst

Buitenlandse Zaken,

Buitenlandse Handel en

Ontwikkelingssamenwerking

Comprehensive Approach - Strategy Note

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Introduction

In an increasingly complex world, with diversified and rapidly evolving challenges and opportunities, our foreign policy needs to ensure that the instruments and resources available to implement these policies are used coherently and effectively. In addition, the reality is that complex situations - with challenges that are political, social, environmental, economic, military and security-related in nature - cannot be resolved with isolated solutions, but instead call for greater coordination and synchronisation at all levels of policy.

As such, the government has already taken the first steps by introducing the policy documents of the concept of '3DLO'¹, the precursor to a Comprehensive Approach² (CA). Through this strategy note, this policy will be further deepened and transversally entrenched, as a guiding principle for all federal departments that contribute to the accomplishment of one or more of the objectives of our broader foreign policy.

It follows from this that there is a need to better align our policy options and related instruments which are spread across various levels of government, without compromising our own objectives. This element consequently forms the basis of a CA. Cooperation focused on complementarity and mutual support, starting at the federal level, is a 'political' process in the first instance, a new mindset on how to relate to our foreign policy. Other federated authorities, as well as non-governmental actors, will be invited to subscribe to this approach. It will also need to be embedded in an international context that has made CA a priority. Synergies with our European and international partners are crucial to the effectiveness of our foreign policy.

This strategy note sets out a CA concept which has been agreed at the inter-departmental level, as well as a reference framework and methodology to implement the approach in practice. CA remains a means of strengthening our foreign policy in the broad sense, it is a working method and not an end in itself. It is based on permanent dialogue, evaluation and the adjustment of our stance towards certain countries, regions and issues. It has the aim of jointly identifying, where possible, overarching priorities and increasing the coherence and effectiveness of our foreign policy.

A foreign policy based on a common analysis of the risk and environmental factors, and underpinned by commonly recognised strategic objectives, coherently translates these objectives into the many instruments available to the various departments and, where appropriate, institutions and organisations, and can also strengthen them in their individual missions.

As this strategy note constitutes a reference framework and methodology for foreign policy in the broadest sense, it will be submitted to the Council of Ministers for approval. Possible amendments to this strategy note will also be submitted to the Council of Ministers for approval.

1. General context

¹ Diplomacy, Development, Defence, Law and Order

² A Comprehensive Approach as referred to here builds on the concept of the same term in the EU context, namely: "*To combine, in a coherent and consistent manner, policies and tools ranging from diplomacy, security and defence to finance, trade, development and human rights, as well as justice and migration.*" [...] "*The comprehensive approach is both a general working method and a set of concrete measures and processes to improve how the EU, based on a common strategic vision and drawing on its wide array of existing tools and instruments, collectively can develop, embed and deliver more coherent and more effective policies, working practices, actions and results. Its fundamental principles are relevant for the broad spectrum of EU external action.*" (Foreign Affairs Council, Council Conclusions on the EU's Comprehensive Approach, Brussels, 12.05.2014)

Our broader foreign policy is focused on protecting both our **interests** and the **values** we hold dear and wish to promote in the world, as well as the European and international context which influences all of this. As such, the elaboration of a CA methodology should be based in the first instance on these **jointly identified interests and values**. Peace and security interests play an important, but not exclusive, role.

Pending the joint listing by the government of Belgium's interests and values, the analysis of the international (security) context and the elaboration of a national strategy projecting this framework in the global context, the CA **will focus on countries, regions and issues that can already be considered relevant now because of their impact on what is important for Belgian foreign policy in the broad sense**.

The Belgian interests and values that we take into account are generally positioned at the intersection between domestic and foreign policy. They transcend purely material considerations, but they are also about ideas and values that are dear to us. As stated in the Coalition agreement *"the foreign policy pursued by the federal government[...] protects our interests and values in Europe and the world. This concerns our political, economic, social, cultural and security interests and the interests of Belgian nationals abroad, but also the fundamental values that we hold dear and wish to promote in the world."*³ Fundamental aspects of this include, inter alia, pursuing European integration, stimulating economic growth, reducing poverty, sustainable development, a (European) energy and climate policy adapted to today's needs, promoting and safeguarding security, fundamental rights and freedoms, as well as better and more effective management of migration flows, effective joint action throughout the world, promoting multilateral cooperation, pursuing an integrated security policy and further guarantees for the protection of international law and the international legal order, promoting and protecting human rights and multilateral trade policy.

It is essential that our broader foreign policy forms a complementary and coherent whole.

The Belgian CA policy is not starting from a blank sheet of paper: initiatives have already been taken at the national, European and international level to help create the framework within which the Belgian approach can further develop. **We must avoid a situation where the Belgian CA develops in isolation, on the contrary, it needs to seamlessly integrate with what other bilateral and multilateral partners already have to offer**. This will also guide us in identifying the niches where there can be **real added value** for the development of a specific Belgian CA in a given country, region or issue. A non-exhaustive overview of some relevant national and international developments in this respect can be found in the appendix to this strategy note.

2. Main strands and level of ambition

³ Coalition agreement, page 181.

In the first instance, the CA focuses on the **participation of federal departments**, but is also open to the **involvement of other government departments (including at the federated level), parastatal or non-governmental entities (NGOs, private sector, academia, etc.)**. These actors invited to participate in the federal CA also retain their autonomy in terms of policy, and can decide for themselves the level at which they wish to commit themselves, across the broad cooperation and synergy spectrum. Nor does this approach need to be disseminated immediately in all countries and across all continents; the initial emphasis may be on the application of CA in countries or regions which are characterised by a high degree of fragility or which are prone to crises.

2.1 Comprehensive approach – ambition in terms of content

The level of ambition of the CA relates to both the geographical and/or thematic scope and the depth of application of the approach; this will **determine the identification of potential cases/situations**.

The **main guiding principles** are:

- In principle can the CA be applied **in any region, country or sub-national arena, regardless of the issue or the specific humanitarian, development or security situation**. As such, CA can cover a wide range of situations, including, for example, military intervention (linked to a humanitarian and political element), situations where the conflict situation calls for enhanced cooperation between defence and diplomacy, and cooperation with countries with low or high middle-income status which are in need of a policy where diplomacy, international development (ID) and/or economic/commercial incentives go hand in hand.
- **'3D'⁴ dimension:**
 - The CA favours a methodology aimed at **making Belgian foreign policy worldwide more efficient, and not necessarily in the partner countries of International Development or countries where military cooperation is already active**. Moreover, it is not essential either (although it is often desirable) that all 'D' departments in a given country or region are present with significant deployment of resources in order to implement a CA. Nor should the implementation of a CA case mean that all policy instruments always need to be deployed in the same way: pragmatism and flexibility must remain the guiding principle.
 - In this context, it will also be necessary to consider **the relevant phase of security, stabilisation and development in which the country finds itself**: e.g. the perspective (and complexity of a CA) varies according to where a country is situated on the (not always linear) continuum of the *conflict prevention/mediation - conflict resolution (military or non-military) - post-conflict rehabilitation - development* axis, with all possible variants of the security/development and development/humanitarian nexus. These elements can weigh heavily in the final implementation of a CA case, even if only because the relevance and difficulty of a CA increases or decreases in certain situations.

⁴ Diplomacy, Development, Defence

- The CA is an inter-departmental, inter-institutional and multi-layered construction, in which the input of the various participants will vary according to the issue, the countries and regional situations selected, and their own **autonomous assessment of the extent to which the depth of CA cooperation corresponds to the participating body's own priorities.**

2.2 Comprehensive approach – level of ambition in terms of participation

In naming the approach, the government has resolutely chosen for a level of ambition that goes further than the previously proposed 3D(LO), in which the field of participation was limited to 5 departments (Foreign Affairs, International Development, Ministry of Defence, Justice and Home Affairs). In the first instance, the departments involved in this exercise will be the administrations which, due to their organisational objectives, travel to a large extent to foreign countries (the familiar 3Ds) and besides this, the other departments will also be invited at federal level. The fact that the approach is comprehensive also means that where useful or desirable, governments at the federated level, or participants in civil society, the private sector, or academic stakeholders may also be invited/involved in the CA.

3. Comprehensive Approach in practice: from joint analysis to strategy (objectives and deployment of resources)

In policy-related areas, the CA will be managed by a *Steering Group (SG)* coordinated by the FPS Foreign Affairs. This SG will commission the setting-up of specific *Task Forces (TFs)* which will act as a consultation platform.

For the CA, participants will seek to develop a collective thematic, country or regional approach, taking into account specific, overarching policy objectives. In addition, all organisations who can make useful contributions (in the first instance the federal government, but also federated, public or private, where appropriate) are invited.

The approach will be characterised **by various levels of cooperation, which may incrementally take on a more integrated character.**

In the work of a TF, activities may vary between:

1. Maximum **information exchange**⁵, assessing the various planning and programming cycles compared to the overarching objectives, and examining coherence and/or synergies between the participating partners.
2. Exploring **possible synergies with the EU and at the international level** - in particular the UN and other regional and multilateral organisations. These organisations have instruments at their disposal

⁵ Information on existing or planned activities; 'deconflicting' these activities; exploring cooperation opportunities; exploring opportunities for integrated programmes or projects.

that can play an important role in achieving the objectives of our foreign policy and strengthening the capacity of our action.

3. **Developing common risk and context analyses.**
4. Exploring **common, overarching CA opportunities** for Belgian foreign policy vis-à-vis given countries, regions and issues. This will enable us to **enter into partner dialogues both bilaterally and multilaterally with a uniform - and therefore stronger - agenda**. The TF can ensure that the various departments translate the overarching objectives into their own operational plans in a coherent manner, without compromising their own objectives.
5. These objectives can form the basis for operational decisions
 - a. Determining the **specific strategies (resources, actions, projects)** for each organisation/department.
 - b. Moving towards a **coherent, mutually reinforcing division of tasks/coordination** between the instruments of our common foreign policy that are already present or need to be deployed in the field.
 - c. Investigating the extent to which **it is possible to cooperate in specific, joint projects and programmes, whether integrated or not.**

Depending on the intensity of the cooperation, the TF should also work on agreements in the area of joint planning, financing, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the possible joint projects and programmes.

4. Coordination and control

1. Political embedding

The CA is **consolidated at policy level by approval by the Council of Ministers of the present CA strategy**. Eventually, the approach can also be linked to any further developments in terms of e.g. the elaboration of a **National Security Strategy**, and the resulting **priorities for Belgian foreign policy**. At the inter-departmental level, the quality and relevance of the CA is regularly reviewed within the *Comprehensive Approach Steering Group*.

4.2 Triangular CA steering and monitoring: Diplomatic mission - Steering Group - Task Force

The assumption is that there is a light, pragmatic and flexible structure, with significant input from the diplomatic missions, and a Steering Group and Task Forces in Brussels (FPS Foreign Affairs). In addition, each federal department will take the necessary measures internally to ensure that the expected contribution to the CA can be implemented effectively.

- **Diplomatic missions have a dual role: CA declarant and monitoring**

The application of a CA in specific country/region contexts will largely stem from the opportunities offered in the first instance by the missions. Under the leadership of the head of mission, the Belgian diplomatic representation abroad will set up a consultation platform with the (representatives of) Belgian authorities present in the country, with a view to maximising the flow of information *upstream* (prior to the identification of the field of action) and *downstream* (implementation and monitoring).

- **Steering group: in charge of political steering and planning**

A **Steering Group (SG)** at the FPS Foreign Affairs is charged with the **political-strategic orientation of the CA** activities and the **prioritisation of the themes and countries, taking into account the common strategic objectives of foreign policy in the broad sense and the specificity of the various policy areas**. It will be guided by input from the various participating departments, including in particular the information from the network of missions.

In addition, the Steering Group will **provide a forum for regular consultation** with, inter alia, feedback on TF activities. It will adjust the CA, as laid down in this note, where necessary, depending on the lessons learned.

The SG is chaired by a representative of the Direction Committee FPS Foreign Affairs and is attended by representatives (administration and policy cell) from the various federal departments concerned.

- **Taskforces responsible for the specific elaboration, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of CA cases.**

As soon as the Steering Group has prioritised countries, regions or issues for CA application, a specific **Task Force** is set up on a case-by-case basis, led by the geographical service at the FPS Foreign Affairs (Directorate-General for Bilateral Affairs (DGB) or another DG if it is a thematic TF). However, if the country is a partner country of International Development, the leadership of the *Task Force* comes under joint chairmanship of the geographical services of Foreign Affairs (DGB)/DGD. If it concerns a country/issue in which another department (e.g. Ministry of Defence) plays a decisive and proportional role, the co-chairmanship will be assumed by a representative from this department.

The *Task Force* is responsible for the concrete implementation of the CA and submits progress reports to the Steering Committee. The *Task Force* determines the activities it wishes to undertake in order to achieve its objectives, and decides itself which institutions and organisations it will also involve.

- **Monitoring within individual federal departments**

Each department must always take *broad* foreign policy as an explicit starting point and articulate its own role and contribution within it. In the diplomatic representations, the head of mission watches over this *modus operandi*.

In the federal departments, a guide to the internal embedding of the approach can be developed according to their own specific needs.

5. Budgetary provisions

In the first instance, the CA does not foresee projects and programmes which presuppose an integrated budget. To the extent that the participating departments decide on operational cooperation, they will be responsible for financing themselves, whether or not jointly organised.

Depending on the experience with a CA, it could eventually be envisaged to provide a common budget to guide and implement a specific CA, for which the operating modalities would need to be agreed on.

6. Strategic communication

In order to generate sufficient consensus for the CA and achieve the level of ambition, it is necessary to implement efficient strategic communication, both internally towards the departments concerned, and externally. The press and communication services of the various participating departments have an important role to fulfil in this regard. They must coordinate among themselves and convey a coherent picture.

This is also important for maintaining a minimum level of coherence between the various TFs. To ensure that this is workable, coherent and consistent, the Steering Committee, in cooperation with the Press and Communication Department of the FPS Foreign Affairs, will develop a mechanism which will work under the auspices of the SG as a *clearing house* for the supply of press material (including social media) from the TF to the participating departments and organisations.

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The national and international framework within which the CA is developing.

The Belgian CA policy, as described in the strategy note, is based on what has already been initiated at the national, European and international levels. It is vital to follow these developments closely, and link them to our own CA where appropriate, or even subscribe fully to them. The latter is particularly the case for several international commitments co-signed by Belgium, including the European Global Strategy and the SDG Agenda 2030. A brief, **non-exhaustive** overview of the developments that need to be taken into account, which may be influenced by Belgium (CA), or where opportunities for synergies or other opportunities may arise:

National framework

At the **national** level, the so-called 3D(LO) concept has been repeatedly referenced in our national policy documents⁶, as well as in the *Central Africa Strategy Note*. Consultation structures have already been in place within the **Foreign Affairs department** for many years, and these could be described as CA forerunners. These are forums intended for **information exchange and coordination** (e.g. inter-departmental assembly for the Great Lakes region, the Sahel Group, PolMil and PolCiv assemblies), sometimes accompanied by a more operational dimension (e.g. PolCiv, with agreements regarding the deployment of civil crisis management). In addition, a **Task Force 3D(LO)** was set up within the Africa Directorate in 2015.

The **Interdepartmental Commission on Policy Coherence for Development (ICPCD)** can also be mentioned in this regard. This commission seeks to involve four priority policy areas (security, migration, climate and trade) in the development agenda. The **reformed International Development policy** is fully focused on integrating Belgian International Development into broader foreign policy, and works on the principle that the most appropriate instrument and actor is mobilised to achieve the desired objectives. Non-International Development partners can therefore also contribute to a multidisciplinary and coherent partner country policy, based on their specific expertise. The focus of Belgian International Development on fragile contexts also gives rise to a better alignment (coordination, coherence and complementarity) of the instruments deployed, as well as more robust risk management⁷. The reform of the BTC (Note to the Council of Ministers of 23.03.16) refers to the 'introduction of a *whole of government* (WoG) approach', which aims to achieve coherence between the various policy areas and departments. Finally, reference should also be made in this context to the opinion issued by the

⁶ See 2014 government statement, Foreign Affairs and International development policy notes

⁷ In this context, see the Acropolis initiative: from an academic perspective, a methodology was developed to arrive at an instrument for risk analysis and management. This *tool* is part of an overarching 'Integrated Country Policy' (ICP), which seeks to improve coherence between the activities of all International Development actors present in a given context, in order to foster synergy and complementarity between these actions (including through the prism of the so called 'fit for purpose' filter), thereby increasing the impact and effectiveness of Belgian International Development.

Advisory Council on Policy Coherence for Development (ACPCD) on '**Peace and Security**', at the request of the Minister for Development Cooperation.

The work in the area of **Civil Crisis Management** forms a bridge between a national CA and the international context. The **Civil Crisis Management Strategy**⁸ provides for an integrated, multi-dimensional approach when Belgian expertise is mobilised in international civil crisis management missions. Given the specific scope of the work, the Strategy should be fully taken on board in the CA, in particular when CA Task Forces focus on conflict-prone countries, and synergies can be explored. The decision-making process for mobilising expertise in the framework of EU, UN and OSCE missions is already organised in an interdepartmental framework. It is guided by considerations of the international commitments made by Belgium, or the added value that Belgium's participation could bring to its own interests on the one hand and the relevant mission on the other.

International framework

A number of international developments have marked the contours within which national CA programmes can develop. This fits within both a multilateral and bilateral context, whereby the Belgian CA has an interest in maximising complementarity (with individual states as well as organisations). Not only are (cost-saving) synergies possible, but it is also ruled out that concrete initiatives overlap. The question should also be asked as regards the specific added value of any Belgian CA intervention:

- At the **EU level**, intense efforts are made to adapt the instruments and their funding. For example, the **EU Comprehensive Approach to External Conflicts and Crisis** and the new **EU Global Strategy on Foreign and Security Policy** are working towards mobilising and coordinating all (EU) instruments in the light of the new security challenges. The **Joint Communication on Capacity building in support of Security and Development (CBSD)** from April 2015 identified gaps in EU support for capacity building within the security sector. In order to remedy this, an amended version of the **Instrument contributing to Stability and Peace (IcSP)** was put on the table, which extends the possibilities of EU support. The **Joint Communication on Security Sector Reform (SSR)** (July 2016) also offers new (CA) perspectives. A concrete example of a broader framework to which the Belgian CA can subscribe is the **EU Emergency Trust fund Valetta**, which provides for the funding of *whole-of-government* (WoG) projects to enhance stability, security and resilience in the Sahel region.

Within the EU, the development of **common context analyses** by the various actors (3D) and instruments (CFSP, DCI/EDF, FPI/IcSP, trust funds, etc.) is being fostered. Both within the EU itself, and between the EU and Member States, effective links between **Joint Programming** and the (EU) **CA/WoG** approach must be ensured, both in Brussels and on the ground. As such, the

⁸ The one from the Council of Ministers of 16/05/17 was approved

Belgian CA coordination in Brussels and on the ground will need to adapt to developments in this area within the EU.

The **EEAS**⁹ has a new directorate (**PRISM**¹⁰) which aims at an **Integrated Approach**, from *early warning* and prevention to crisis management and reconstruction¹¹. The EU has various instruments for carrying out its missions in the sphere of European foreign policy. For example, various European strategies have been developed for given countries or regions, and the EEAS can rely on various Special Envoys. A Belgian CA will need to connect with this (EU) diplomatic infrastructure, and be inspired by/absorbed into EU positions and strategies, with a view to policy coherence.

- **UN: The Agenda 2030 objectives for sustainable development** (and in particular SDG 16: Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions) are already a comprehensive framework at the strategic-political level, within which any national or regional CA should evolve. More generally, the United Nations, driven by a dynamic UNSG, emphasises preventive diplomacy, crisis management and the defence of human rights, which can only be addressed in a coordinated CA.

- **NATO/OSCE:** the deployment of NATO forces (with or without a Belgian contingent) is generally at the conflict stage. By definition, the military deployment is part of a larger strategic and diplomatic framework in which other (civil) CA components have an essential place, in a post-military phase (e.g. Iraq, Afghanistan); the OSCE is also an excellent multi-dimensional organisation, which requires an equally transversal and pluralistic effort on the part of Belgium.

- At the **OECD-DAC (Development Assistance Committee)** there has been a significant evolution, also under Belgian initiative, in favour of clarifying and extending the ODA¹² criteria as regards passing on the costs of certain military expenditure (including certain forms of training (combat forces and the police), the deployment of military personnel or military equipment in certain International Development contexts, and in the provision of humanitarian aid, certain activities to prevent violent extremism, and disarmament under certain conditions). **As regards the CA, it is vital that each CA Task Force initiated at the country or regional level assesses the opportunities offered by the new OECD guidelines in this area.**

⁹ European External Action Service

¹⁰ Prevention of conflicts, Rule of Law/SSR, Integrated approach, Stabilisation and Mediation

¹¹ The new integrated approach was presented to the COPS (Political and Security Committee) on 6/06

¹² Official Development Assistance

- Our **bilateral partners** are also developing CA (whether or not under a different name) which must be taken into account when formulating our own policy, a fortiori towards countries and regions where partners can demonstrate *added value* (e.g. France and the Sahel).
