

Quo Vadis EU-UN Relations in Peace and Security?

Evolution, Challenges and Adaptation

Input Paper for the Informal PSC
Ambassador Meeting 27 February 2026
Convened by the Cyprus Presidency of the
European Council

Joachim Koops



GLOBAL
GOVERNANCE
INSTITUTE

Global Governance Institute
Cours Saint Michel 30A
1040 Brussels, Belgium

info@globalgovernance.eu
www.globalgovernance.eu

About The Global Governance Institute (GGI)

The Global Governance Institute (GGI) is an independent, not-for-profit research and education institute based in Brussels. Since its creation in 2010, GGI's core mission has been to advance comprehensive analysis, education and evidence-based policy-advice on key issues related to regional and global governance and global problem-solving.

Part of this mission also includes raising awareness amongst the general public about major cross-border challenges and comprehensive solutions. Our vision is a more equitable, peaceful and sustainable global order based on effective, accountable and legitimate governance approaches.

GGI places particular emphasis on the United Nations system and its mutual reinforcement with strong regional organisations (particularly the European Union) and forward-looking governance fora.

About the Author

Joachim Koops is Professor of Security Studies at the University of Leiden (The Netherlands) and Chair of the Global Governance Institute (GGI) in Brussels. He has 20 years of experience as a consultant, policy advisor and scholar in the field of peace and security, diplomacy and global governance with a particular focus on inter-organisational relations and the role of the EU, UN and NATO in peace and security.

He has led and implemented multiple projects for the United Nations Department of Peace Operations, the European Parliament, the French and German Ministries of Defence as well as various national and international research funding bodies. Joachim is the Co-Editor of the Oxford Handbook of UN Peacekeeping Operations (Oxford University Press, 2014) and author or co-author of more than 60 publications.

He can be contacted at j.koops@globalgovernance.eu

The Global Governance Institute (GGI) ASBL is a non-profit foundation registered under Belgian law. Registration No. 831.178.152

Background

In October 2025, the Council of the European Union formally adopted and endorsed the new “EU-UN Joint Priorities on Peace and Security for 2025-2028”. Building on more than two decades of a wide-ranging and deeply institutionalized strategic partnership, the latest Joint Priorities document has been concluded between the EU and UN Secretariat at a time of immense upheaval and fundamental challenges for both organisations in the fields of peace and security. Whilst areas of institutionalization and various cooperation domains have been expanded and deepened, a variety of political, strategic and operational questions need addressing in order to chart out a stronger path of cooperation and mutual reinforcement at a time when the very foundations of multilateralism are unravelling at a fast and dangerous pace.

As both the United Nations and European Union are united by similar challenges in an environment of increased geopoliticisation and anti-institutional attacks, there are also distinct challenges that each organization faces, which also makes cooperation on some areas more difficult. This paper proposes areas of cooperation at the operational levels without losing sight of the bigger, more fundamental need for the strongest form of European political and strategic commitment to the fundamental principles and effective workings of the United Nations system. Whilst we are witnessing one of the most comprehensive onslaughts on the multilateral system, there are also key opportunities for filling the political vacuum through adaptation, innovations and joint areas of cooperation – ranging from Climate Security, Women Peace and Security to strategic planning, logistics and close-knit cooperation in major hotspots and transitions (e.g. Lebanon).

This non-paper has been prepared by Joachim Koops of the Global Governance Institute (GGI), to stimulate discussions during an informal breakfast meeting of PSC ambassadors under auspices of the Cypriot European Council Presidency. Interviews were held during February 2026 with representatives from the EU and UN dealing with the partnership in peace and security matters.

The European Union-United Nations Partnership in Peace and Security: Evolution and Core Challenges

It is not an overstatement to claim that the European Union and United Nations have formed during the last two and a half decades one of the most densely institutionalized partnerships between two autonomous international organisations. From the conclusion of the first Joint Declaration on UN-EU Co-operation in Crisis Management in June 2003 to the most recent adoption of the Joint Priorities document, the partnership has seen intensive exchanges of information and staff contacts, joint peace operations on the ground (including parallel and bridging deployments) and close cooperation on joint challenges with a view to reduce transaction costs. At the institutional level, the UN-EU Steering Committee format -which had been serving as the primary body of exchange and coordination- has been replaced by the UN-EU Strategic Committee. Interviewees have stressed the expectations that the new ethos of this body will be to focus even more not simply on exchanges of views, but on the comprehensive tracking and implementation of jointly agreed activities and initiatives. This institutional adaptation has also been accompanied by attempts to streamline coordination channels and create a more 'coherent peace and security partnership architecture'. This includes the creation of two priority clusters (field-based cooperation and thematic and global cooperation) and the regular monitoring of the implementation of joint priorities.

In addition, a variety of coordination and cooperation formats include 'sectoral dialogues' between core stakeholders from both organisations, EU-UN partnership roundtables with perspectives from the field, field visits and HQ visits (e.g. PMG visit to UN HQ), as well as regular high-level political exchanges (such as the HR/VP addressing the UN Security Council, the UN Secretary-General addressing the European Council and the USG for Peace Operations attending Meetings of European Ministers of Defence). In this sense, the institutionalization of the UN-EU partnership has received an additional impetus and continues to deepen. Next to high-level engagements, desk-to-desk exchanges and relations are also crucial components for strengthening joint approaches and mutual understanding.

However, given the significant geopolitical headwinds, changing political priorities (particularly related to Europe's focus on territorial defence and the Russia-Ukraine war) and the reduction of the number and the footprints of both UN peace operations and EU CSDP missions, several challenges require further addressing.

1. The multifaceted attack on Multilateralism, International Law and Norms requires a European ‘doubling-down’ on defending the rules-based and UN system

We are currently witnessing more than just the re-emergence of great power politics, sphere of influence campaigns and raw transactionalism in global politics. In addition, we are witnessing a clear and open attack on the United Nations system and multilateralism itself. The UN’s liquidity crisis (both a result of late payments, deliberate defunding strategies and a general trend of the cutting of state budgets on multilateral institutions and frameworks), the recent political attacks on the legitimacy of UN principal organs (particularly the UNSG, Secretariat and ICJ) and other key UN actors as well as the increasing polarization of the UN Security Council itself have -in their combination, severity and openness- been unprecedented. This has not only hampered the UN’s effectiveness and room of maneuver, but has also made international cooperation more transactional, fragmented and often geared towards explicitly dismantling the peace and security functions the UN has been able to leverage during the last 80 years.¹ This is not merely a problem for the UN as an organization, but more fundamentally for the maintenance of global peace and security.

The European Union and its member states, which has since the 1970s, made the support of the UN and the rules-based system the hallmark of its ‘foreign policy philosophies’, must do more to double-down politically on its support for the United Nations in its entirety. This requires not only political signals in UN fora, but more importantly the clear positioning and actions when core UN Charter principles are being flagrantly broken or alternative arrangements are set up whose actual purpose and impact could run directly against the functioning and effectiveness of the UN system and Charter principles. This also applies to unlawful acts against UN agencies or bodies, where the Europeans are major donors – such as, but not limited to, the case of UNRWA.

2. Filling the Multilateral Leadership Vacuum

Given the openly hostile actions by the current US administration, there is currently a gaping vacuum of leadership on advancing multilateralism and global governance

¹ Despite persistent skepticism -also among Europeans- towards UN Peace operations, the overwhelming majority of independent, scientific research has time and time underlined the effectiveness and efficiency of UN Peace operations compared to all alternative fora (See e.g., Fortna 2004, Di Salvatore and Ruggeri 2017, Koops et al 2014)

solutions. The Joint Declaration's emphasis on climate security, gender/women peace and security and peacebuilding (particularly the Peacebuilding Fund and Peacebuilding Commission) are strong signals and require strong, concerted reinforcement through diplomatic statements in all relevant fora where these objectives are openly challenged. Political vacuums rarely exist for long and European leadership will not only serve the UN in its most difficult political situation, but also the European Union and its general - (albeit increasingly threatened) commitment to climate security and combatting the risks of climate change. Similarly, concrete actions and financing for enhancing the gender, peace and security agenda and peacebuilding tools require additional European commitments – even in a difficult period of financial constraints.

3. Financial Offsetting against all Odds

The United Nations is facing its most fundamental financial crisis since its foundation.² Even current down-sizing efforts and the haphazard (and often unaligned) UN80 reform process will not prevent the severe financial crisis from worsening. As one of the largest -combined- contributors to the UN budget, the EU and its member states have traditionally played a core role. It should also be stressed that all EU members have paid their regular UN budget contribution in full and (almost entirely) on time. This is no longer an obvious or insignificant fact in the current political climate. However, the current and future effects of the liquidity crisis are projected to have disastrous consequences for the footprint and impact of the UN in peace and security. Whilst various EU member states have come forward with voluntary contributions to specific projects and UN agencies or programmes, there is an opportunity and need for Europeans to offset some of the major losses and financial reductions the UN is currently and in the near future facing.

This does not necessarily mean that it is a European responsibility to 'fill the gap' of the financial strain the decisions by the US administration have caused, but it provides opportunities to assume leadership in supporting and enhancing the UN system within the wider framework of UN-EU cooperation and with the help of innovative approaches to financial support. Yet, interviews have confirmed that the willingness and financial room of maneuver is limited in European capitals, in particular as a result of the urgent need to boost defence budgets. A crucial moment will be the final negotiations of the European Union's Multiannual Financial Framework for 2028 – 2035 where strong UN-

² Ronny Patz (2025) Reforming the UN during a financial crisis: a foreseeable failure to align money, mandates, and majorities? GGI Briefing, available online at <https://www.globalgovernance.eu/publications/reforming-the-un-during-a-financial-crisis-a-foreseeable-failure-to-align-money-mandates-and-majorities>

EU coordination will be of key importance and where ‘business as usual’ will come at a price.

4. A dual challenge to UN Peace Operations and CSDP Operations

On the operation level, a major challenge for the UN-EU partnership is that traditionally both organisations have advanced a wide range of cooperation initiatives in the context of UN blue helmet operations and CSDP operations and missions. Yet, in contrast to the period of 2003-2014 which can be considered as a period of intense operational activism and cooperation between both organisations, the last years have seen a steady decline of the footprint and scope of both blue helmet operations and CSDP operations. As a result, opportunities for cooperation and mutual enhancement in the field have also faltered.

More fundamentally, the creation of alternative ad hoc fora that have even been described as direct rivals to the UN system, poses a variety of question marks for the future of comprehensively institutionalized peace or crisis management operations. Yet, as stressed by interviewees, the UN remains the most important partner for ongoing EU CSDP operations and missions (e.g. Kosovo) and transition planning for UNIFIL provide opportunities for stronger and mutually reinforcing cooperation. Yet, it is also clear that the nature, strategic focus and scope of CSDP have been changing, limiting areas of common interest between the UN and EU when compared to the heydays of the partnership. However, lessons from that period of joint activities have demonstrated that both organisations have found ways to increase their impact on the ground when closely coordinating UN peace operations and CSDP missions in a comprehensive manner.

Areas for Future Cooperation

In the light of the challenges outlined above, there are -apart from and in addition to more comprehensive political and financial investments- the following areas of promising future cooperation:

1. UN-EU Cooperation in Lebanon: Transition and the importance of Conflict Prevention Functions

In the light of the UN Security Council’s decision to no longer extend the mandate for UNIFIL beyond December 2026, Europeans have a strong interest in ensuring that an

effective transition leads to some form of European/EU engagement. While it is too early to confirm precisely the shape and size of EU engagement, one possibility could be a civilian-military CSDP mission. Given the strong involvement of European troops in UNIFIL and the wider political, security and protection of civilians (POC) dimensions of the impending UNIFIL withdrawal, it will be of fundamental importance to advance an effective monitoring and preventive presence in Lebanon in a highly volatile environment. Close UN-EU cooperation will be key. A conflict prevention dimension would also reinforce one of the main priorities reiterated in the Joint Declaration: a renewed emphasis of UN-EU approaches to conflict prevention.

2. Strong Cooperation on Climate Security

As outlined in the Joint Priorities, climate security and combatting the effects of climate change are of key importance to both organisations. Interviews have confirmed this as a major priority at the political and operational levels. This ranges from high-level approaches to cooperation on the technical levels (e.g. joint climate advisors). The financial implications of boosted joint actions are not clear, however, and require attention alongside a political 'doubling down' in various fora.

3. Cooperation on Women, Peace and Security / Gender, Peace and Security

Given the push-back against the WPS agenda from various corners of the globe, a strong shared diplomatic, political, financial and operational commitment will be a key area of cooperation. This should go beyond exchanges of best practices, but to joint initiatives in conflict regions and peace negotiations as well as in core diplomatic fora.

4. Enhancing operational synergies: the case of a joint Logistics Hub

Interviews confirmed several ideas for enhancing concrete synergies and cooperation in peace operation and crisis management logistics. Whilst the EU has experimented with a common logistics base before, there is currently no logistics hub comparable to the UN's hub in Brindisi. Opportunities could be explored for closer cooperation between the EU and UN in the financing and use of a joint logistics base, which could enhance both the EU's capabilities, reduce UN financial burdens and increase cooperation. Such synergy projects could help offset some of the financial constraints the UN and EU are facing.

5. Making use of Global Synergy Movements for enhancing (and defending) Multilateralism

The responsibility for supporting, defending, maintaining and enhancing the multilateral system and global problem-solving is of course not just one that UN and European policy-makers must and can address on their own. The current attack on multilateralism and the UN system as well as the multilateral and value-based model of the EU requires a broad alliance of member states and civil society. There have been concrete recent examples of major institutes and grass-root organisations coming together to form alliances for supporting and enhancing UN and EU approaches in peace and security. The Pact for the Future's Action Days, or the formation of the Global Alliance for Peace Operations (including more than 70 of the leading peace and security organisations) in the run-up to the Berlin Peacekeeping Ministerial are good examples of advancing synergies and harnessing the expertise of peace and security specialists and practitioners in close cooperation with EU member states and UN institutions.³ Identifying and utilizing such a 'whole of global society' approach provide additional layers and resource for mitigating the risks of the unravelling of the multilateral system.

6. A long-term vision for the strengthening and financing of UN-EU Cooperation in Peace and Security: beyond business as usual

Amidst the current major global upheavals and challenges to a more rules-based international order, the UN and EU can and should make together a real difference in defending and strengthening multilateralism, shared values and collective problem-solving. This requires not only a strategic, political and financial investment in the tools that have had a strong track-record in delivering results, but also innovative cooperation models. The EU and EU member states have had a strong track-record in supporting the UN system and have in turn benefitted themselves from an approach to global politics that balances pure transactionalism with institutionalized cooperation. The updated Joint Priorities document, the review of peace operations (outcome expected in Spring this year) and the upcoming EU Multiannual Financial Framework planning provide important opportunities for reinforcing the partnership for the strengthening of multilateralism in the long run.

³ See <https://www.peaceoperations.net>