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## Effective? Locally owned? Beyond the technocratic perspective on the European Union Police Mission for the Palestinian Territories

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### ABSTRACT

The European Union Police Mission for the Palestinian Territories (EUPOL COPPS) was established in 2006 to contribute to the establishment of effective policing in support of an independent and democratic Palestinian state. EUPOL COPPS is often commended for its contribution to the professionalization of the Palestinian security sector under local ownership. Drawing on 40 interviews, we argue that the mission can be considered effective and locally owned only from a narrow technocratic perspective, which denies the political reality of continued occupation and absence of democracy. A broader analysis, which includes the voices of ordinary Palestinians, reveals that EUPOL COPPS contributed to the professionalization of authoritarian policing under continued Israeli occupation. Our findings show the limits of technocratic approaches to peacebuilding interventions and call for a stronger engagement with the ultimate beneficiaries of peacebuilding missions.

**KEYWORDS** Ownership; effectiveness; security sector reform; Israeli-Palestinian conflict; European Union; Palestinian Authority

The European Union (EU) Police Mission for the Palestinian Territories (EUPOL COPPS) is the longest ongoing civilian crisis management mission of the EU. It was launched in the aftermath of the Second Intifada in January 2006 upon an invitation of the Palestinian Authority (PA) as a part of the EU's Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) and in support of the roadmap for peace proposed by the Quartet on the Middle East.<sup>1</sup> Ever since, the aim of the mission has been to support the emergence of an independent, democratic, and viable Palestinian state through the establishment of a sustainable and effective policing under Palestinian ownership in accordance with the best international standards. To that end, the mission

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was mandated to assist and advise the Palestinian Civil Police (PCP), coordinate and facilitate EU, member state, and other international assistance to PCP, and advise on police-related criminal justice elements (European Union, 2005).

Over the years, the mission has provided extensive local and international training and support for capacity building to the PCP. Moreover, it equipped the PA with more and better vehicles and equipment, and hard and soft policing infrastructure, such as traffic cameras, and drug-control programs, and police stations development. The mission also provided advice and technical support to the PCP's Family Protection Unit (FPU) and the Palestine College of Police Sciences in Jericho, which is responsible for training the PCP. In 2008, the mission's activities expanded to also cover the rule of law, although without a proper planning, clear mandate, and budget (Bouris, 2014, p. 122). To that end, based on its Assessment Report on the Palestinian Criminal Justice System, the mission supported courts, the penitentiary system, the ministry of justice, the High Judicial Council, the Attorney General, and the Palestinian bar association. The mission particularly helped with drafting of legislation, promoted police-prosecution cooperation, and internal accountability within the local police (El-Din, 2017; Interviews 2 and 3).

The EU today considers this mission, a "good success story" (EU representative to the Palestinian territory in Jerusalem quoted in Bouris, 2014, p. 121) and "one of the best 12 civilian (CSDP) missions" (EU Civilian Operations Commander quoted in Hatzigeorgopoulos, 2013). To begin with, the mere fact that the EU managed to convince the United States, Israel, and the PA to agree with its intention to deploy a CSDP mission, is hailed as an achievement in and of itself. The mere deployment of the mission, or so the argument goes, allowed the bloc "to break away from the stigma of being a 'payer not a player'" (El-Din, 2017, p. 131) and thus increase its visibility and role in the Middle East Peace Process. Furthermore, the EU takes pride in its provision of technical support to the PCP and other stakeholders in the Palestinian security and justice sector under local ownership (European Union, 2015). Together with other donors, most importantly the United States, the EU and EUPOL COPPS have helped the PA to re-establish civil and security control in parts of the West Bank. Not only the PA, but also the government of Israel currently seems to be satisfied with the performance of EUPOL COPPS (Bouris, 2012, p. 266, 2014, p. 112).

Political reality, however, could not be further away from an independent, democratic, and viable Palestinian state, in support of which the EU deployed the mission in the first place. Since 2007, and despite the multiple agreements including the recent reconciliation agreement signed in Cairo in October 2017, the relations between Palestinians have been fragmented and deeply divided between the Gaza Strip controlled by Hamas and the West Bank governed by the PA (even though both parties and parts remain under the

ultimate control of the Israeli military occupation). The West Bank has no functioning legislature as the last parliamentary elections were held in 2006 and the PA governs through decrees of the President whose mandate expired in 2009. Moreover, political rights keep deteriorating due to repression of political opponents while crackdowns on media and civil society organizations continue unabated (Freedom House, 2017). International support helped the PA to restore law and order but it has also “reinforced militarised control and authoritarian tendencies within the regime” (Milton-Edwards, 2016, pp. 32–33). Finally, the diplomatic process toward the two-state solution has been permanently stuck while the Israeli occupation and its illegal settlements in the West Bank and Jerusalem and the blockage and assaults on Gaza Strip continue.

Accordingly, it is little surprising that the Palestinians are losing enthusiasm not only for the two-state solution (57% think it is not no longer viable) (Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research, 2017a). Also, while the Palestinians have been traditionally supportive of EU support, there are signs that this might be changing. A recent poll has shown that 66% of the Palestinians in the West Bank think that most European countries do not stand with their cause (Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research, 2017b). How can it be that the EU construes its mission as an “effective” support to “locally owned” Palestinian Security Sector Reform (SSR), when after more than a decade of its presence the political rationale behind its deployment has been entirely unfulfilled while increasing number of Palestinians have become disillusioned with the effects of its support?

Due to their focus on the technical issues, and their narrow conceptualization of both ownership and effectiveness, most extant studies of CSDP in general, and of EU support to Palestinian SSR in particular, are ill-equipped to provide an answer to this puzzle. Recent critical work in peacebuilding studies and especially “the local turn,” which broaden and deepen the concepts of ownership and effectiveness, provide a useful theoretical entry point that allow us to interrogate the politics of technocratic discourses that are underpinning EU missions and operations (Ejdus & Juncos, 2017; Mac Ginty, 2017). By drawing on the local turn in peacebuilding and our extensive fieldwork in Brussels, Israel, and Palestine, we argue that EUPOL COPPS can be considered “effective” and “locally owned” only from a narrow technocratic perspective that ignores the voices of its end beneficiaries and turns a blind eye to the political reality of the continued occupation and consolidation of the PA’s authoritarian rule. However, when the voices of the ordinary Palestinians are brought into the equation, EUPOL COPPS looks less than impressive.

In this article, we aim to bring “the local back in” by going beyond the technocratic perspective of domestic and international elites. To that end, we broaden the analysis to also include a wider societal perspective on the EU

police mission. The “local,” whose views we bring into the picture and contrast with the technocratic perspective, are the ordinary people. These “voices from below” are regularly and systematically marginalized and silenced in debates about the role of the EU in the support of SSR. From their viewpoint, the EU mission has been neither effective nor locally owned, but has actually contributed to improved authoritarian policing. From the perspective of its end beneficiaries, the EU police mission added an additional layer of everyday insecurity while an independent and democratic Palestinian state seems further than ever from reality.

The article proceeds in the following order. We first briefly situate our argument in the overall theoretical and conceptual discussion presented in this special issue to ask the following questions: Who are the locals in the context of EUPOL COPPS? Whose ownership is privileged and who is marginalized in the process? How effective has EUPOL COPPS been from the point of view of the ordinary Palestinian people? In the second section, we outline the context of the Palestinian SSR as a backdrop of our analysis of EUPOL COPPS’ record on ownership and effectiveness. The third section uses in-depth interviews to depict shared understandings among the representatives of the EU and the PA, about EUPOL COPPS and its record on ownership and effectiveness. Finally, we rely on our fieldwork in the occupied Palestinian Territories to give voice to those who are silenced in the debate. This aims to reveal realities of insecurity that have been rendered invisible by the dominant discourse that privileges narrow technocratic dimensions of state-building over everyday experiences. In the conclusion, we reflect on the implications of our main insights and offer some ideas for further research.

### **Who is the local? Ownership of what? Effectiveness for whom?**

It has become a truism of peacebuilding that to be effective international support to SSR need to be locally owned. However central to the peacebuilding discourse they might be, the concepts of local ownership and effectiveness are highly contested and context dependent (see Ejodus & Juncos, 2017). The first challenge, as Schierenbeck (2015) points out, is to identify “the object of analysis and engage with the questions of what/who is ‘the local’ and who is included or excluded from ‘the local’”? (p. 1023). Can the local be narrowed down to the most immediate beneficiaries of the international support, such as local police, coast guard, or military force, or should we expand our notion of the local to include a wider group of stakeholders? If the latter is the case, as the growing consensus among the peacebuilding scholars seems to suggest, how wide should we cast our net? Should “the local” only encompass wider governance structures such as the ministries, parliaments, independent bodies, and civil society organizations, or should one also include opposition

groups or even the population at large? In this article, we take the broadest view and expand the notion of “the local” to also include ordinary people, who should ultimately be the end beneficiaries of peacebuilding interventions such as EUPOL COPPS.

Closely related to the question of “who is the local” is the question “ownership of what.” So far, at least three distinct approaches to this question have emerged in the literature: top-down, bottom-up, and middle ground (Donais, 2009, 2012). The first approach is top-down as it construes local ownership as a degree of local buy-in of externally designed processes and institutions. This approach, often associated with the liberal peace paradigm, is the dominant view among peacebuilding policy-makers (Paris, 2010, p. 357). This approach has been heavily criticized by critical peacebuilding scholarship for treating ownership as an elite-focused (Thiessen, 2013), legitimizing concept (Wilén, 2009) and a rhetorical cover (Chandler, 2011) for what is an external imposition of liberal institutions.

From the bottom-up perspective, peace should be fully designed and developed by the locals, through resources of their own. Local ownership, therefore, should not be reduced to a mere buy-in, but ought to be seen as a veritable authorship of the peace project (Mac Ginty, 2008; Pouligny, 2006). According to the middle ground approach, the full local authorship of reforms might be unrealistic as the lack of resources, knowledge, and often determination is the very reason why international interventions, such as EUPOL COPPS, in support of peace are needed in the first place (Donais, 2012). That is why in the occupied Palestinian Territories, like in so many other conflict-affected places, there is a pragmatic need for striking a balance between European and local resources and for negotiating a compromise between international and local norms. Although the EU seems to have increasingly adopted the middle ground approach to ownership in its policy rhetoric, CSDP interventions still operationalize this principle in practice as an elite-centered local buy-in of objectives that are, for the most part, externally designed (Ejdus, 2017).

Finally, any critical discussion about effectiveness cannot avoid to ask “effectiveness for whom”? We aim to go beyond the narrow idea that effectiveness should only be measured against the internal, technical criteria for success set by the elites themselves. Instead, our starting point is that peacebuilding interventions in general and EUPOL COPPS, in particular, can be treated as effective not only if international and local elites involved in its design or implementation perceive it as such, but also if its intended end beneficiaries including ordinary citizens are satisfied with it (Autesserre, 2017, p. 4). In other words, we draw on the dictum spelled out in the introduction to this special issue according to which the ultimate criterion to determine whether an intervention in support of SSR has been effective or not is “the verdict of those affected by it” (Ejdus & Juncos, 2017, p. 7). Surely, such an analytical standpoint has its challenges that should not be ignored. Most

importantly, international interventions are often technical in nature, they target expert communities, and local populations do not always possess sufficient knowledge to properly assess their effectiveness. However, this does not mean that the effect of the intervention on their end beneficiaries cannot or should not be analyzed.

We build on these normative considerations to ask two interrelated questions. The first one is about the vantage point from which we discuss the effectiveness of EUPOL COPPS. Precisely, we ask “whose police” is being professionalized and “whose justice” is served by the reforms supported by EUPOL COPPS? The second question is related to ownership in EU-supported reforms. In other words, we ask who is “the local” with whom the EU is working and which local actors are excluded from the interaction? To do that, we investigate who is privileged and who is silenced, marginalized, or even oppressed in the process of the EU-supported SSR in Palestine.

By asking these questions, we aim to accomplish two interconnected goals. First, we respond to the call of the local turn in peacebuilding to bring the local back into the analysis of EU interventions (Donais, 2012; Ejodus & Juncos, 2017; Mac Ginty, 2015). Second, we critically interrogate the existing problem-solving accounts of EUPOL COPPS as an effective mission that works in full respect of the local ownership. By exposing its narrow technical focus on institution building and its *de facto* contribution to the maintenance of the status quo, we aim to question the entire set-up of the EU’s support to the so-called Israeli-Palestinian peace process (cf. Turner, 2015).

To answer these questions, this article relies on two sources of information. First, we draw on secondary literature and official documents related to the CSDP missions, EUPOL COPPS, and Palestinian SSR to outline the empirical context of our analysis. Second, in order to grasp the views of the EU officials and their local counterparts, we conducted 20 semi-structured interviews with policy-makers from the EU, PA, and Israel in Brussels, Ramallah, Jerusalem, and Tel Aviv (September–October 2015). Then, to gauge the views of ordinary Palestinians on EUPOL COPPS, we conducted interviews with 20 civil society representatives in the West Bank, with a special focus on Balata and Jenin refugee camps where we talked to local camp leaders, political faction cadres, armed group members, former fighters, men, women, and youth, as well as individuals who had been detained by the PA as a result of the rule of law and security campaigns (August and December 2012; May and June 2015; January 2017).<sup>2</sup>

The Balata and Jenin refugee camps were selected because both camps are celebrated by the PA and the international donor community as indicators of the success of the PA’s state-building and SSR projects. Both camps had been transformed from places that “export terror” to “stable camps” operating under the rule of law on account of the European and U.S.-funded PA’s security forces). They are presented as showcases to testify the ability of the PA to



govern its people and provide security to Israel, and as signs of its readiness for statehood thanks to the donors' support and intervention. Voices from the camp certainly cannot speak for all the Palestinians. What they can provide, however, is a thick insight into how an important section of the local community views the EU mission and how it starkly contrasts with the technocratic optimism construed by policy elites.

Finally, it is worth highlighting that ordinary people usually do not distinguish between the different forces of the PA's security establishment, let alone the international actors and the impact of their operations and interventions. Therefore, occasionally, the "voices from below" might appear generic in nature and not particularly specific enough to the EUPOL COPPS, but this is part of the complexity, ambiguity, and the absence of ordinary citizens from the design, implementation of the plans, and strategies that affect their security.

### SSR in Palestine

The literature on the impact of the donor-driven SSR processes in Palestine is divided into two major strands (Tartir, 2015). One strand, which is more technical in nature, argues that these aid-dependent reform processes serve as a cornerstone in the PA's state-building project and the two-state solution and therefore calls for more of the same aid (Department for International Development, 2011; International Monetary Fund, 2011; Office of the Quartet, 2011; World Bank, 2011). The other strand in the literature, usually associated with critical scholarship, argues that these processes have had destructive implications on the Palestinian polity, the national liberation project, and on the society and its ability to resist Israeli occupation, and therefore calls for different and better aid (Amrov & Tartir, 2014a, 2014b; Brown, 2010a, 2010b, 2011; Leech, 2016; Sayigh, 2011; Tartir, 2015). Due to inherent methodological and conceptual limitations of the apolitical, largely decontextualized, and narrow approaches adopted by the technical literature, this article will build on the latter strand of scholarship. This allows us to analyze the role of EUPOL COPPS against a more holistic backdrop and thus grasp complex dynamics at stake from a critical perspective.

Since the establishment of the PA, the security elites have played a critical role in setting its priorities and political choices. The security sector has also consumed a substantial portion of the PA's budget and of the international donor support, and absorbed almost half of the public servants, despite offering little protection to the Palestinian people living under the Israeli occupation (Wildeman & Tartir, 2016). The EU and its member states, the largest donors to the PA (Knudsen & Tartir, 2017), have played a key role in the evolution and reform of the PA security sector over the last two



decades. This reform process evolved through three phases: the Oslo Accords (1993–1999), the Second Intifada (2000–2006), and the post-2007 PA state-building project (Tartir, 2015).

The first phase was characterized by the tension between two parallel, yet conflicting, projects: state-building and national liberation. The eventual dominance of the state-building project implied constructing a bureaucracy that is largely controlled by the security establishment to protect and solidify the nascent Oslo Peace Accords. This resulted in the proliferation of the security forces which paved the way for future Palestinian fragmentation. The second phase witnessed a large-scale Israeli destruction of the PA's security infrastructure in the aftermath of the Second Intifada, from 2000 onward. This created a security vacuum into which non-PA actors inserted themselves, with mixed results for the Palestinians. To restore the PA authority and control, the international donor community led the process of power consolidation and started the SSR process with the objective of addressing the security gaps and rebuilding and empowering the PA institutions and its security establishment. The third phase aimed to reinvent the PA security forces technically and politically, and the Palestinian leadership has been subcontracted to repress the Palestinian uprising. Consequently, the post-2007 security reform agenda "has thwarted Palestinians' national struggle, their resistance movement and their everyday security" (Tartir, 2017a, p. 3).

The deployment of EUPOL COPPS was driven by the trajectories of the second phase, while implementation took place during the third phase. It started in 2005 as a UK-funded project to coordinate aid to the Palestinian SSR (EU COPPS) which was at the time part of the office of the EU Special Representative (EUSR).<sup>3</sup> At this juncture, the EU turned the security, technical, and political vacuums in the aftermath of the Second Intifada, as well as the desperation of the PA, into political opportunities that resulted in a deployment of a CSDP mission in January 2006 (see El-Din, 2017). The security vacuum created in parts of the West Bank by the Second Intifada required a highly securitized agenda, the technical vacuum gave rise to the technical mandate of the EU intervention, and the political vacuum ensured a more involved role of the EU in the peace process.

Despite its initial reluctance, Israel endorsed EUPOL COPPS as far as it effectively controlled the intervention and remained involved in the planning and coordination processes. Israel perceived EUPOL COPPS as an integral component of the security coordination paradigm that is mainly designed and structured to ensure Israelis' security. It also realized that the mission can make the PA more effective in policing the West Bank and a more reliable partner in quashing dissent and countering insurgency (Ejdus & Tartir, 2017). The EU became a *de facto* player in financing the governance of the occupied Palestinian Territories under the overall control of the Israeli occupation.

For the PA, any attempt to rebuild its security institutions and ensure its dominance in terms of internal Palestinian security vacuum was welcomed. Therefore, the EU intervention sustained the existing asymmetry of power between the Israelis and the Palestinians and presented their intervention as purely technical in nature without addressing its political ramifications. That said, the EU took political decisions in other domains such as boycotting and putting sanctions on the elected Hamas movement following the Palestinian parliamentary elections in 2006. In addition, and despite its condemnation of the illegal Israeli settlements, the EU continues to cultivate its relationships with Israel instead of holding it accountable to its violations of international law (Tartir, 2014; Youngs & Michou, 2011).

These political ramifications became clearer in the post-2007 PA state-building project phase as they transformed into authoritarian trends, denial of democracy, and human rights violations under the banner of rule of law. The intended and unintended consequences of the donor-driven SSR solidified the presidential undemocratic system, empowered the security establishment and nourished their dominance, and bypassed and marginalized any meaningful oversight mechanisms and democracy-guarding institutions (Ahmad, Ezbi, Rabbani, & Dana, 2016; Brown, 2010b).

Despite the proclaimed technical successes of EUPOL COPPS, including training and equipping thousands of security personnel and creating a better functioning legal system and more professional police forces, the criticism remains stark. EUPOL COPPS is under criticism for failing to improve civil oversight and accountability. Its focus on a conventional train-and-equip approach created more skillful security forces, but failed to generate an institutional capacity to design, plan, and conduct training locally (Bouris, 2012; Bouris & Reigeluth, 2012; Kristoff, 2012). And fundamentally, the work of EUPOL COPPS, and the overall SSR support, paved the way for moving toward authoritarianism (Rose, 2008; Sayigh, 2011; Tartir, 2015; Youngs & Michou, 2011). Yet, this critical literature remains largely driven by a top-down “institutional ethnography” approach, where the institutions and their evolution are analyzed, but not the consequences of the institutional evolution on the everyday experiences of ordinary people, who are their intended end beneficiaries. A broader setting implies putting the voices from below into the core of the research inquiry, and this engagement is what is missing in the existing accounts in the literature.

In addition, previous studies have pointed out that the pure technical focus of the mission occludes important political aspects of the EU intervention. İşleyen (2017), for instance, shows how seemingly benign demand-driven technical support actually conceals power asymmetry in which the EU problematizes, disciplines, and normalizes the Palestinian capacities for policing its populations. Others point out that through the prioritization of the technical assistance, the EU neglects important political aspects of SSR such as effective

democratic governance (Bouris, 2012, 2014; Mustafa, 2015; Sayigh, 2011; Tartir, 2017a, 2017b). Mustafa (2015) for instance argues that “EUPOL COPPS mission has failed, as the separation of the teaching of technical skills from the political reality and the overall security system has created a police force that is highly skilled yet easily co-opted by political leaders” (p. 225).

In sum, three tensions have characterized the context in which EUPOL COPPS operates in. First, it is a tension between the imperatives of rule of law and authoritarian tendencies. Second, it is a tension between the need to protect the Palestinian people and the goal of sustaining the skewed security coordination with Israel. Finally, it is a tension between state-building in Palestine and criminalization of Palestinian resistance against the Israeli occupation.

In the remainder of this article, we present the results of our empirical investigation. To that end, in the next section we first use interviews with EU policy-makers and representatives of the PA to draw contours of the technocratic discourse on EUPOL COPPS. In the subsequent section, we go beyond the technocratic discourse to include the voices of the ordinary Palestinians for whom the EU police mission has become inextricably linked to the entrenchment of Palestinian authoritarianism and continued Israeli military occupation.

### **The technocratic perspective**

In this section, we outline the technocratic perspective on how effective and locally owned SSR reforms are. Within this perspective, the local is narrowed to domestic governmental and policy elites, while ownership is reduced to their buy-in of externally designed objectives. Also, from the technocratic point of view, effectiveness is assessed against internal criteria set by the EU elites who designed and implement the mission. As we show below, although the technocratic discourse is not monolithic, it usually portrays EUPOL COPPS as an apolitical intervention, which has nothing or little to do either with the Israeli occupation or with the authoritarian rule of the PA.<sup>4</sup> Due to space constraints, we cannot do justice here to all the details related to the mission’s achievements and ownership during its ten-year long mandate. Our goal, instead, is only to draw contours of a technocratic discourse which emphasizes non-political aspects of the EU mission.

Virtually, all EU interlocutors stress how effective the mission has been in the past 10 years, not only in making the EU visible on the ground and creating a niche for the EU in the Palestinian SSR (Interview #1) but also on the operational level. According to a member state CivCom delegate in the Political Security Committee (PSC), EUPOL COPPS has achieved as much as

possible for the PCP “to the extent that they are probably as professional as any police service in the region, for example the Jordanians or the Lebanese, they are possibly better than quite a few of them” (Interview #6).

One of the key achievements of the mission, mentioned in many conversations, was the professionalization of the PCP. As one member of the mission (Interview #2) put it: “the Palestinian Civil Police is now better than it was 10 years ago ... more professional, more specialized and it is providing better service to local Palestinian people.” This has been achieved through the provision of extensive training but also by the way of advocacy for structural changes, such as for example the creation of several specialized units including the FPU, and the Juvenile Unit in the PCP (Interview # 2). Moreover, thanks to the support of the mission, the Palestinian police increasingly complies with European and international standards of policing. As another mission member (Interview #3) put it: “within the past ten years we have been able to integrate best practices. In each and every training we are delivering human rights and gender aspects.”

A similar view is shared by the EU’s Palestinian counterparts. As one senior PA/Fatah official (Interview #35) argued,

We are very thankful for all the support we are receiving from the Europeans. Now, we have professional police that is well trained, well dressed and well equipped. When I think of where we were in 2002 and where we are now, I can recognize the massive improvement and the success we have achieved.

Similarly, another high-ranking PA security official (Interview #36) told us, “now, we have one of the best police and security forces in the region, and this is reorganized by the international actors and partners. Some of our forces even won regional and international prizes for their outstanding performance.” When asked about the political implications of the internationally driven SSR process, and in harmony with the responses received from the European officials and using a similar technical narrative, a senior PA security official (Interview #37) argued:

I am not a political leader, I do not talk politics. It is not my job; go to *Al-Muqata’* [Abbas presidential complex] if you want to discuss politics. Here I am a technical technocrat tasked to enhance the professionalism of the security establishment, and I am proud of what we, in collaboration with our international, European and American partners, have done and achieved. And I assure you more to come.

Enthusiasm about the effectiveness of the mission is slightly lower when the field of rule of law is concerned. Many mission members indeed proudly mention their contribution to the improved police-prosecution cooperation in the West Bank (Interview #3). The EU has also supported the PA by drafting many laws. Some of them, like the Law on Retirement for example, have been passed by a presidential decree, although not by the parliament as it

remains dysfunctional due to the ongoing intra-Palestinian divide (Interview #4). Other, arguably more fundamental laws, however, such as the Police Law and the Judicial Authority Law, have yet to be adopted. Talking about the latter, one EU diplomat (Interview #5) in Ramallah complains that: “for two years they have promised me that this law will come and it is still not there and they keep naming all these technical reasons why it is not there ...” A Fatah senior official and lawmaker (Interview #38) explained,

We agree with the Europeans on security training matters, but it is more complex and difficult when it comes to drafting laws. We have political considerations that the European do not care about. But this is not a deal-breaker as negotiation is part of the process.

When ownership is concerned, virtually all our interlocutors who are directly involved with the mission agree that there is a high degree of Palestinian ownership in the reforms supported by the EU. As one member of the PSC (Interview #6) says categorically, “EUPOL COPPS is probably one of our better missions. It’s been around for 10 years. And interestingly enough there is ownership from both sides.” EU representatives argue that ownership was there from the very outset (cf. Bouris, 2014; Schroeder, Chappuis, & Kocak, 2013). As one EU official (Interview #7) from the Civilian Planning and Conduct Capability (CPCC), a standing command structure responsible for the conduct of all civilian missions of the EU, put it: “Every step of the process is done together with Palestinian partners ... That is why COPPS was so successful. We worked hand in hand with the PCP from the very beginning.”

In the narrative provided by mission members, ownership has been respected from the early days of EU COPPS when the EU facilitated the creation of a “fully demand-driven” Palestinian Civil Police Development Plan in 2005 (Interview #8). The mission takes special pride in the opening of the Mission Implementation Plan in 2013 for the input of local partners, a practice copied from the EU rule of law mission in Kosovo (Interview #9). In the words of one EUPOL COPPS member (Interview #2), “this Mission Implementation Plan is really our operational Bible and it is submitted to the counterparts, then discussed, then elaborated on together and then presented to the twenty-eight member states ... before the renewal of the mandate ...” The narrative of ownership is tightly connected to the narrative about the technical nature of the mission. As the same mission member explains: “This is basically our role and this is why we call ourselves technical, because at the end of the day we are not negotiating with the counterparts about what to choose and what not to choose.”

The Palestinian counterparts seem to agree with the assertion that there is a high degree of Palestinian ownership in reforms supported by EUPOL COPPS. The PA has been enthusiastic about the mission from the very

outset. “We own the process, we set the agenda, and we asked for the security mission in the first place as it will make us close to statehood,” one PA security official told us (Interview #39). As one senior figure from the PA’s ministry of interior explains, the EU is rarely imposing anything, and when it does so, it is usually in relation to operational matters. In his view (Interview #4), it should be the other way around:

they have to impose some things, while they should not impose other things ... they have to impose their way of organizing and structuring the services and they have to impose on them what they have to do. The thing that they should not impose is the way how the services do their things.

Among those directly involved with the mission, there seems to be a common understanding why EUPOL COPPS has succeeded in ensuring the Palestinian ownership. To begin with, it is argued that there was a strong Palestinian buy-in from the outset. One EU delegate at the PSC (Interview #7), for example, says that “Palestinians wanted the mission. 2006 was a good moment to send the mission.” Nevertheless, there are some indications that the top echelons within the ministry of interior did not initially believe in the mission, but still considered EU involvement important to balance the dominance of the United States, traditionally seen as pro-Israel (Interview #33). Second, the local ownership is thought to reflect a practice deeply ingrained in how the EU sees and practices crisis management interventions. According to one mission member (Interview #2):

Local ownership is a part of our *modus operandi*. We are an advisory mission, which means that for us there is no other choice than actually letting the local institutions choose what they want to do. So, it is really a part of our mandate and a part of our style of working.

Another mission member (Interview #10) confirms that this was a widely shared view:

There is a very clear understanding, I think, from the head of mission and then down that it is all ultimately up to the Palestinians to decide and choose what it is that they ultimately want to do. It is not our country and we do not have to live with the long-term consequences, but they do.

While mission members and their Palestinian counterparts mostly commended the mission for its effectiveness and high degree of ownership, other interlocutors who are not directly involved with the mission (or not any longer), were more critical. A former mission member, for example, points out that the locals are indeed included in the Mission Implementation Plan but at a rather late stage of the planning process. In his view (Interview #9), “the process itself was done in such a way that it should have been done differently and made more inclusive from the very beginning and not to include the locals once the mission did most of its planning ...” Moreover,

the mission has very limited contact with non-PA actors (Interview #13). The reason for this, however, is probably not to be sought in the disposition of the EU but rather in the efforts of the PA who invested efforts from the very outset to exclude other actors (Negotiation Support Unit, 2005, p. 3).

Finally, it should be noted that diplomats and experts who are not part of the EU mission sometimes express their reservations about the degree of Palestinian ownership. One senior expert (Interview #14) working for key international representative body argues that there is actually little buy-in, especially at the higher political level: "I think there is no ownership ... because these security forces want to be independent. I do not think that they are interested to have legal framework because they want to avoid it." Another representative of an EU member state (Interview #5) laments cynically: "I mentioned the hierarchical and sometimes very undemocratic things that they have, there is ownership over those kinds of things." According to one representative of the EU Delegation (Interview #1), EUPOL COPPS is actually structurally impeded to respect the ownership principle due to its "short-termism" stemming from its focus on crisis management. In contrast to the long-term development approach preferred by the European Commission, CSDP "is very much a 'come in and just do it' sort of mechanism, which glosses over some of these questions related to ownership."

While many EU officials do not seem to understand the limits of the technical approach (Bouris, 2014, p. 121), some interlocutors in the EU and among its Palestinian counterparts have started to acknowledge the limits of capacity building efforts that are purely technical. As one member state representative in PSC (Interview #5) said, "it is damn difficult to keep going ... if there is no expectation of a future state in the near future." As Müller and Zahda (2017) show, among the PA, there is also a widely shared concern that short of political achievements, both within Palestine and between Palestine and Israel, the EU-supported reforms are "shallow and precarious." To cope with this problem, the EU changed the mandate of the mission in 2013 to encompass strategic and structural reforms. This, in the words of one mission member (Interview #2),

was done because capacity building can come up to a point and then if you really want to do SSR there is a huge need for strategic reforms. This is actually what we are working on at the moment and this is actually the situation that we are facing at the moment.

While it remains to be seen whether these mandate adjustments will make a difference in the future, thus far they have proven to be of little consequence for the wider political stalemate.

In this section, we have illustrated the technocratic point of view on ownership and effectiveness in EUPOL COPPS shared by policy elites. While their discourse is not monolithic, they all focus on technical issues and share the



sense that the mission has been rather effective in carving out a niche for the EU's role in the Middle East Peace Process and the Palestinian state-building through the professionalization of the Palestinian police and justice sector. In the next section, we go beyond the technocratic narrative and argue that from a wider socio-political perspective, which is shared by ordinary Palestinians, the mission is not only struggling to be a part of the solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, but it has increasingly become a part of the problem.

### The “voices from below”

Our fieldwork in the occupied West Bank revealed a wide gap between the views of international or domestic governmental technocratic elites on the effectiveness and ownership of reforms supported by EUPOL COPPS and the perceptions of those who should be their end beneficiaries, that is, ordinary Palestinians. Like the technocratic discourse, the views of the ordinary Palestinians vis-à-vis the EU and its mission are far from homogenous, but they all share a number of peculiar features.

To begin with, there is a widely shared skepticism toward an internationally sponsored SSR in general. Hearing about, but not seeing or feeling, the “endless successes” of the SSR projects, one respondent from Balata refugee camp (Interview #15) told us, “I keep hearing in the news about their successes; but whenever I hear that, I ask myself: who is living on Mars, me or them?” Another respondent (Interview #16) described the impact of the SSR and security campaigns as “giving someone paracetamol to cure cancer.” Others voiced their concerns about the emergence of a police state as a result of the reinvention of the PA security sector. One respondent (Interview #17) stated, “I feel that I live in a police state full of informants.”

From the point of view of ordinary Palestinians, the EU investment in the PA security infrastructure did not necessarily reflect positively on their everyday lives. As one respondent (Interview #19) put it,

I do not care if the PA's ministry of interior premise in Ramallah is rented for \$100,000 annually. I care about why I am not feeling secure ... If the security forces are there to suppress us, but not protect us, why should I care or be happy if their ministry has a new building?

A youth from Balata refugee camp (Interview #29) expressed a similar view and argued passionately:

In the security domain [*alfada' alamni*], more actors are present to supposedly offer us more security. But actually, it is the other way around. I thought that having two occupations [Israel and the PA] is enough, but clearly that is not enough. Now we have a third one serving as an additional level of oppression thanks to all these external security missions, officers, complexes, academies, and vehicles.

Interestingly, the voices from below often do not make a substantially different assessment of the EU and the U.S. support to the Palestinian SSR. While the EU indeed generally refrains from supporting security services with a reputation for human rights abuse, such as the U.S.-sponsored Preventive Security Agency and the General Intelligence Service, the EU-supported PCP has also been implicated in the excessive use of force against peaceful demonstrations (Amnesty International, 2013; Ejodus & Tartir, 2017; Human Rights Watch, 2014).

As a result, although the overall public perception about the U.S. security mission (USSC) is certainly more negative in comparison with EUPOL COPPS, they are perceived by many as two entities that are practicing roles to complementary to each other. "It is just a division of labor between the EU and the US. They are two sides of the same coin. They are on duty shifts, when one is on full speed, the other takes a backstage role," one respondent argued (Interview #22). Another respondent from Jenin refugee camp (Interview #23) who has been detained by Israel and the PA for the same charges stated, "The U.S. security mission is the big and aggressive devil; the European security mission is the small and gentle devil. Both of them are devils, but packaged differently." Other voices from Balata refugee camp hold a similar view, as one respondent (Interview #24) put it, "For me all of them are the same; they are here to sponsor and facilitate the sell-out of Palestine. They will not be here in the first place otherwise."

Many interlocutors expressed their skepticism regarding the effectiveness of the EU to fulfill even its politically problematic narrow technical mandate. One respondent from Balata refugee camp (Interview #28) stated that:

the shields offered by the European Police [*Alshortha Alorobeya*] to the PA were so fragile that one rotten tomato would break them [laughter]. The sticks were so fake that they would break instead of breaking someone's bones. The vehicles were suitable for Sweden and its streets, not to Jenin.

Another respondent from Balata refugee camp (Interview #29) who was fired from the PA security establishment due to intra-Fatah internal politics stated:

Listen, I spent years in the police force and I went to number of these training by the European police. They are just waste of time and they are completely useless. They wanted to train us on trafficking systems that are suitable for Britain and Denmark not here. They brought us trainers who have no clue about the occupation or checkpoints or even what is Palestine or who are the Palestinians. They dealt with us as objects without any consideration to the context. They have money and they need to spend it and create jobs for themselves.

For many Palestinians, the EU support to the Fatah-controlled PA only amplifies fragmentation within the Palestinian society and undermines democratic potential for the resolution of the ongoing political stalemate. It is worth

keeping in mind that the EU keeps Hamas on its list of terror organizations, despite the fact that the organization won the last parliamentary elections in 2006 and still enjoys a sizable support among the Palestinians (29% in 2017; Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research, 2017a, p. 3). “There is no parliament, no election, and no democracy. I don’t know who represents me,” one respondent complained (Interview #18). In a political environment that is increasingly authoritarian and repressive, internationally supported SSR is seen by many as part of the problem. In the words of one local leader from Jenin refugee camp (Interview #20), and a member of the PLC, told us:

The security operations/campaigns [as one of the defining features of the PA SSR project] resulted in distrust between the PA forces and the people, and created a hostile atmosphere in the camp against the PA. What [Salam] Fayyad [PA Prime Minister 2007–2013] was not aware of is that I, as a citizen, need to be convinced that this police officer or soldier is there to protect me and that therefore I will respect him and not be afraid of him. If today I am afraid of him, tomorrow I will threaten him.

Ordinary Palestinians remember how the EU-funded premises, equipment, and PA infrastructure have been flattened by the Israeli incursion of the West Bank during and after the Second Intifada. They are hence well aware of the political fragility of the EU technical support to the Palestinian security sector within the overall framework of the Israeli occupation. However, they are not always certain about the political rationality behind it. According to one NGO representative (Interview #34), the EU:

has failed seriously in the political management of the crises. They have the power, they have the money and they invest in this process. They invest in not having the Palestinian state while they are stuck in the political trap. So why do they continue with that? They have to review their policy. They have invested millions of euros in reforming the security sector and all of that investment was destroyed in one day by the occupation.

Many ordinary Palestinians believe that the ultimate aim of the EU-funded security reform project is to silence and criminalize resistance against the Israeli occupation through subcontracting repression to the PA. A respondent (Interview #21) summarized this by stating, “in the security sphere, the PA forces are helping the Israeli occupying forces in their tasks; they are subsidizing the occupation.” Another respondent from the Balata camp (Interview #28) complains that:

this process of pleasing Israel is a miserable arrangement that puts us and our security at the end of the list and maybe we, as people, are not even on the agenda. *Elna Allah* [we will just trust and depend on God].

These negative perceptions, driven by high levels of frustration, need to be understood within the broader dynamics of the international actors’ fatigue and failure to realize rights, peace, and justice in Palestine–Israel over the decades.

While domestic opposition to international support to the PA more frequently focuses on the controversial role of the USSC, the above-depicted narratives about EUPOL COPPS sometimes also translate into direct forms of contestation. In September 2012, for example, youth group “Palestinians for Dignity” issued a statement on the eve of a sit-in and one-day closure of the EUPOL COPPS offices in Ramallah stating that:

all forms of financial support to the Palestinian Authority is meaningless, as simultaneously, the EU offers unconditional political support to the apartheid state. If anything, this indicates that the European Union is participating in supporting and prolonging the Israeli occupation, and thus is a tacit partner in flagrant violations of international humanitarian law. (Palestinians for Dignity, 2012)

This sample of “voices from below” aimed to take the analysis of EUPOL COPPS beyond the dominant technocratic discourses according to which the mission has been both effective and locally owned. This perspective, strategically silenced within the technocratic discourse, exposes the entrenchment of the EU police mission in the Palestinian governance structures. Moreover, it foregrounds the EU’s complicit role in sustaining the status quo by propping up the authoritarian rule of the PA and by extension, maintaining the Israeli occupation by proxy. The failure of the EU to alter that status of fragility and its contribution to it through the professionalization of PA’s authoritarian policing rendered its police mission highly problematic from the perspective of many of its intended end beneficiaries.

## Conclusion

The EU launched EUPOL COPPS in 2006 to support the emergence of an independent and democratic Palestinian state. More than a decade later, the EU considers EUPOL COPPS as one of its better missions which effectively professionalized the Palestinian police and justice sector while fully respecting the local ownership principle. In this article, we critically examined this claim by juxtaposing technocratic perspective, shared by domestic and international policy elites, with the voices from below and their everyday experience. Our article has shown that from the technocratic standpoint, which denies political reality of continued occupation and everyday insecurity of ordinary Palestinian people, the EU mission can be considered effective and locally owned.

However, our fieldwork revealed a wide and striking gap between the perceptions and narratives of the international actors and local authorities on the one side and the narratives of the ordinary Palestinians on the other. From the perspective of ordinary Palestinians, the EU-supported reforms have led to the professionalization of authoritarian policing and added a new layer of human insecurity without bringing about either an independent or a

democratic Palestinian state. The voices from below challenged the proclaimed successes of the local authorities and international organizations, including the EU, and questioned the building blocks and effectiveness of security reform processes and their consequences on their lives.

The EU and its mission are increasingly becoming complicit in the maintenance of the status quo in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. If the current authoritarian backslide of the PA continues, the EU and its mission will be increasingly criticized for financing, professionalizing, and legitimizing a highly politicized and democratically unaccountable police force. This is a polar opposite of the EU's foreign policy values and far from its own envisioned approach to SSRs. If the EU wants to make a discernible impact on the so-called Israeli-Palestinian peace process, it should stop turning a blind eye to the obvious political realization that its technical approach to Palestinian SSR solved few problems, and only created new ones. If the EU does not have the will or capacities to engage with the political challenges of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, then it is maybe time to withdraw and at least not be a part of the problem from the perspective of the local population.

Our insights raise several new avenues for further research. First, researchers could build on our approach to critically interrogate the overall EU foreign policy to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. By speaking truth to power, these analyses would hopefully push the EU, an indispensable actor in the Middle East with a great potential to act as an honest broker, to rethink its overall approach to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Also, further research in critical peacebuilding studies could investigate to what extent and with what practical consequences technocracy characterizes other CSDP interventions. It would be interesting to know how technocratic discourse operates in different geographic and policy contexts and what is the rationality behind this depolitization of interventions. Researchers could also expand their analyses of EU interventions beyond the technocratic policy discourse propelled by domestic and international governmental elites and to include the perception of their intended end beneficiaries. Including the marginalized voices and everyday experiences of ordinary people in conflict-affected areas will not always be pleasant to hear in the European capitals, but they will at least help the EU come closer to its own ideal to "contribute to a peaceful and sustainable world" (European Union, 2017, p. 8).

## Notes

1. For a comprehensive contextual, chronological, and thematic analysis of the evolution of phases and trajectories since the establishment of the Palestinian Authority, including the second Intifada, see Tartir and Challand (2016).

2. All interviews were anonymized and coded with a number to protect the identity of the interviewees.
3. At this stage, the United States in turn created the United States Security Coordinator (USSC). From that moment onward, the EU and the United States became the key donors of the Palestinian SSR. While the EU has been focusing on the civilian part of the security sector, most importantly PCP, and justice system, the United States (with a substantially bigger budget) has been supporting the military part of the Palestinian security sector such as the Palestinian National Security Forces and the Presidential Guard.
4. As Müller and Zahda (2017) show in their contribution to this special issue, there is a growing sense also among some PA officials and activists of Ramallah-based civil society organizations, that the EU-sponsored SSR in the West Bank have failed to address the political challenges.

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