Implementation of the common security and defence policy

The main avenue through which the European Union (EU) contributes to strengthening international peace and security is its common security and defence policy (CSDP). Enshrined in the Lisbon Treaty, this policy is the main framework through which EU Member States take joint action on security and defence matters. The European Parliament is set to vote on the annual CSDP report covering 2020 during the January 2021 plenary session.

Background

The CSDP is an integral part of the common foreign and security policy (CFSP), the EU’s joint foreign and security policy. As a policy area, security and defence remains predominantly intergovernmental. Nevertheless, the Lisbon Treaty strengthened the CSDP through provisions such as mutual assistance and a solidarity clause, and the creation of the European External Action Service under the authority of the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy / Vice-President of the European Commission (HR/VP). Under Article 36 of the Treaty on European Union, the European Parliament has scrutiny prerogatives over the CSDP. It can address questions to the HR/VP and the Council, it scrutinises the CSDP budget (except for military operations), and holds twice yearly debates on its implementation, complemented by an annual report drafted by the Subcommittee on Security and Defence. The 2021-2027 Multiannual Financial Framework includes €13.2 billion under the security and defence heading.

The CSDP is both an instrument for the EU to engage in crisis-management activities outside its territory and for defence cooperation among Member States. The former takes place through civilian and military operations that deal with issues such as conflict prevention, stabilisation, peace-keeping, and training. Currently, the EU has 11 civilian operations and 6 military operations on three continents under the CSDP.

Post-2016 CSDP achievements

Since the 2016 EU Global Strategy in particular, the CSDP has gained in prominence through a myriad of EU-level initiatives to strengthen cooperation among Member States and the EU’s global role. Giving headway to a passionate European debate, the strategy noted the EU’s ambitions for strategic autonomy. Since 2016, the CSDP has made a number of achievements: permanent structured cooperation (PESCO); a permanent command and control structure for planning and conducting non-executive military missions; a mechanism for mapping defence capabilities; a European Defence Fund and its two precursor programmes; improved military mobility; a civilian CSDP Compact; an off-budget European Peace Facility; a more robust cyber policy; and stronger cooperation with the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO).

European Parliament position

Parliament has traditionally supported EU defence integration and cooperation. On 3 December 2020, Parliament’s Committee on Foreign Affairs (AFET) adopted its report on the implementation of the CSDP in 2020. It notes progress, welcoming the EU’s commitment to increase ‘its global presence and ability to act’ while calling on the HR/VP and the Council to ‘provide a common formal definition of strategic autonomy’. It calls for more effective CSDP missions by, among other things, increasing Member States’ force contribution and through gender mainstreming. It welcomes the capability development initiatives listed above, noting the need to ensure their coherence. Democratic oversight over the CSDP is emphasised, calling for increased consultation with Parliament. It also addresses issues related to new technologies, hybrid threats, arms control, disarmament, and non-proliferation regimes, as well as cooperation with strategic partners such as NATO and the United Nations, and also the United Kingdom.

Own-initiative report: 2020/2207(INI); Committee responsible: AFET; Rapporteur: Sven Mikser (S&D, Estonia).