Annual report on the common security and defence policy (CSDP)

The EU’s common security and defence policy (CSDP) is the main framework through which the Member States work together to address conflicts and crises and strengthen international peace. During the February 2022 plenary session, the European Parliament will vote on its 2021 annual report on implementation of the CSDP. The report, adopted by the Committee on Foreign Affairs (AFET), focuses on the development of the EU's security and defence doctrine through the Strategic Compass, CSDP missions and operations, crisis management, resilience, capabilities, partnerships and parliamentary oversight of CSDP.

Background: Developments in the CSDP

The Treaty on European Union (TEU) asserts that the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy/Vice-President of the Commission must consult Parliament regularly on the main elements of the CSDP and take its views 'duly into consideration', and that the European Parliament should hold a debate twice a year on CSDP progress. The Subcommittee on Security and Defence (SEDE) prepares an annual report on implementation of the CSDP and scrutinises all areas, from operations to capabilities. While the CSDP is primarily intergovernmental, the TEU introduced a number of legal bases, including options for the 'progressive framing of a European Defence Union', solidarity (Article 222) and mutual assistance (Article 42(7)) clauses to strengthen and complement the EU's crisis-management capacity and permanent structured cooperation (PESCO) (Articles 42(6) and 46). Under the 2021-2027 multiannual financial framework, the EU has allocated €13.2 billion to the security and defence heading. An off-budget European Peace Facility (EPF) – totalling €5 billion – has also been set up for the same period, to finance action in the military and defence areas. The EU currently has 7 military and 11 civilian missions under the CSDP. Of the former, two are in the maritime domain. The notion of European defence has gained considerable traction recently. During her September 2021 State of the Union address, Commission President Ursula von der Leyen called for a European defence union with improved interoperability and situational awareness; she also announced plans for a European defence summit. In March 2022, under the French Presidency, the European Council is set to endorse the Strategic Compass, which aims to increase the EU's capacity in four key areas: (1) crisis management; (2) resilience; (3) capabilities; and (4) partnerships.

The 2021 annual report on implementation of the CSDP

The AFET committee adopted its 2021 annual report on implementation of the CSDP on 10 December 2021. Among its main calls, rapporteur Nathalie Loiseau (Renew, France), Chair of the SEDE subcommittee, highlighted that European defence needs to be more action-oriented and requires a strong defence sector. The report stresses the need for Parliament to be regularly informed and consulted on the planning, modification and evaluation of CSDP missions and operations, and also on PESCO. The report emphasises that Parliament is ‘determined to play its full role in scrutinising the Global Europe instrument, in particular its peace and security dimension, and in the implementation of the European Defence Fund’ (EDF).

The report notes that a response to security challenges hinges on affirmation and practical implementation of capacities. In this vein, the Strategic Compass forms an ‘unprecedented strategic reflection exercise’ – a step towards a European defence union; one with both civilian and military elements, and financing and capabilities for the whole conflict cycle. The report reiterates that the Compass should incorporate a security dimension of the Eastern Partnership (EaP) countries, including ways to foster EaP resilience. It further underlines the need to take an integrated approach to conflicts, providing the means to anticipate threats and take rapid and coordinated action in response. The report expresses the expectation that Parliament and SEDE be regularly updated on progress with Compass implementation. The threat analysis, included in the Compass, should also be linked to parliamentary consultations.
The report points out that CSDP missions are experiencing limited support and face low force generation. It thus calls on EU Member States to reinforce missions with assets, training and capabilities especially in the face of volatility in Somalia, Central African Republic, Mozambique, and Bosnia and Herzegovina. The report also recommends delegating more operational responsibility for missions and operations to their military command. The number of women working in missions meanwhile remains low, calling the missions’ credibility into question. While PESCO’s Crisis Response Operation Core could contribute to force generation, it enjoys limited Member State participation. Still on PESCO, the report regrets delays in revising the decision on PESCO governance. With regard to civilian CSDP, the report calls for revitalisation through implementation of the 22 commitments in the Civilian CSDP Compact, which also include gender mainstreaming. More generally, the report calls for ‘regular and transparent evaluation’ of all CSDP missions. In the threat domain, concern is expressed at hybrid threats originating in Russia and China that affect missions’ mandates. The report also regrets Turkey’s destabilising role in its neighbourhoods, including acts carried out by Turkish military vessels against operation EUNAVFOR MED IRINI.

On crisis management, the report invites Member States ‘to consider the joint development of [this] strategic defence equipment’. It also urges them to utilise Article 44 TEU to foster flexibility and efficiency in responding to crises, utilising the EPF. The report backs the proposed ‘rapid entry force’ consisting of 5,000 troops and equipped with air, maritime and land components. The ‘instrumentalisation of migration’ at the EU’s eastern border should be met with relevant legislation facilitating an effective response. Whereas the November 2020 climate change and defence roadmap outlines practical measures to be followed up with resources to address new security challenges induced by climate change, the report stresses that ‘addressing these new security challenges should not divert resources from traditional’ capabilities.

Sea, cyber, space and air are domains listed where the EU’s capabilities need strengthening. To face ‘significant gaps’ in maritime capabilities and the need for naval operations, the EU should update its maritime security strategy by 2022 and establish regular naval exercises. To enhance cyber-resilience, Member States should improve their cyber-defence capabilities, and the EU should make more use of the EU cyber-diplomacy toolbox. Cyber-defence training and civilian cyber missions are also options. The report supports the development of a space defence strategy (which, according to Commissioner Thierry Breton, will be adopted by 2023) to preserve the EU’s uninterrupted access to this domain, supported by a European strategic culture of security and defence in space and enhanced operational governance of European space programmes. The report also calls on the EU to consider collective countermeasures as part of a wider EU hybrid toolbox, to prevent critical infrastructure from becoming a target of hybrid threats.

The report calls for reflection on lessons learned from the Taliban takeover in Afghanistan, including in the domains of strategy and capabilities. In a time of ‘unpeace’, a sustained pace of defence investment must be maintained, and resources provided so that Member States can meet their commitments (e.g. PESCO projects). The Commission is called on to consider ways to strengthen the European defence technological and industrial base, to facilitate participation in the EDF and to counter the fragmentation of the EU defence market. The report expresses disappointment at the reduced sums allotted to the EDF and military mobility.

Underlining the importance of multilateralism for the EU’s arms control and disarmament objectives, the report emphasises the need for partnerships and dialogues, particularly with NATO, the UN, the OSCE, and the US. It regrets limited transatlantic consultation on Afghanistan and on the AUKUS pact. The need to enhance cooperation with Indo-Pacific partners in numerous areas, as well as to deepen support for Africa (including in existing CSDP missions) is highlighted. Still on partnerships, the report calls on the UK government to open negotiations with the EU for cooperation in foreign, security and defence policy.

Finally, the rapporteur would like to see the input of the wider public on the CSDP within the framework of the Conference on the Future of Europe, and the translation of citizen input into ‘proposals and actions’. To enhance the parliamentary aspect of European defence, the report supports the establishment of a defence committee in Parliament and an EU Council of defence ministers. It also urges Member States to consider extending qualified majority voting in CSDP, and to explore ways to use the Treaty’s ‘passerelle clauses’. Own-initiative report: 2021/2183(INI), Committee responsible: AFET; Rapporteur: Nathalie Loiseau (Renew, France).