Where will the EU's Strategic Compass point?

SUMMARY

As Member States encounter increasingly complex security threats, momentum to push for EU initiatives to deliver on the Union's level of ambition in defence has emerged. A process aimed at bringing clarity, guidance and incentives to completing the common security and defence policy, the Strategic Compass is a first for the European Union. Announced by Commission President Ursula von der Leyen in her 2021 State of the European Union speech, a European Defence Summit is expected to take place in February 2022. It is envisaged that, following its much-anticipated presentation, EU leaders will endorse the Compass in March 2022. European Council President Charles Michel branded 2022 'the year of European defence'.

Launched in 2020, developing the Strategic Compass entails a complex strategic reflection, threat analysis and strategic dialogue among Member States. It is structured around four interlinked thematic baskets: crisis management, defence capabilities, resilience, and partnerships. Unlike the 2016 EU Global Strategy, which saw the EU institutions take the lead, this process is Member State-led, with the institutions playing a supporting and coordinating role.

The main challenge of the Strategic Compass appears to be, on the one hand, providing clarity in the EU's objectives (defining the ends, the ways and the means), and on the other, ensuring Member State 'buy-in'. The latter is essential for the follow-up to the process, the findings from which should ideally be reflected in national defence planning processes.

The process provides opportunities to improve links between the operational and capability dimensions of EU defence initiatives and external crisis management, to consolidate existing strategic partnerships and rethink the configuration of new ones, and to provide a concrete vision for the commitments made since 2016 to boost the EU as a defence actor. However, experts caution that the Compass risks remaining a paper exercise, should the political will to follow up not materialise.

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From concept to compass

It is almost commonplace today to say that the past few years have been marked by unprecedented progress in EU defence initiatives. Particularly since the presentation of the EU Global Strategy (EUGS) in 2016, a multitude of initiatives have been proposed and set into motion to enhance military, industrial and civilian dimensions of EU cooperation in security and defence. The intention is ultimately to realise the ambition of the Lisbon Treaty for the progressive framing of a European Defence Union, a term used openly today by the supranational institutions of the EU – the European Parliament and the Commission. In her 2021 State of the European Union (SOTEU) address, European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen emphasised the need for such a union.

In recent years, initiatives and ideas including defence industrial programmes and military cooperation frameworks (elaborated in the next sections) have been complemented by debate about the possibilities for further implementation of Treaty articles on defence and security. These include considering a move to qualified majority voting in areas of the common foreign and security policy (CFSP) and the common security and defence policy (CSDP) and exploring the scope of articles that enhance the EU's solidarity and mutual assistance in the face of crises. Moreover, the EU has set out to rethink its contribution to peacekeeping, through a revision of its financing for military operations – embodied in the European Peace Facility – and of its partnerships with regional and global actors.

These developments have not taken place in a vacuum. The current risks landscape is evolving, it is multidimensional and characterised by both conventional and novel threats: from transnational terrorism to the corrosion of arms control regimes, cyber-attacks, and hybrid warfare to civil wars, revivals of frozen conflicts and violations of territorial sovereignty and of international law by assertive, often aggressive, powers. A rising China, with growing technological power and an expanding sphere of influence has caused global geopolitics to stir and global insecurity to rise. Their scale and complexity attests to the fact that, in the words of former High Representative/Vice-President of the European Commission (HR/VP) Federica Mogherini, no single EU Member State has the strength nor the resources to address these threats alone. The move to more 'common action' in EU security and defence has brought with it inevitable questions about the development of a common strategic culture, referring to a common understanding of the strategic environment, to provide guidance, purpose and vision, alongside the practical efforts to coordinate capabilities and further develop the EU's joint operations under its CSDP. For HR/VP Josep Borrell, a common strategic culture entails a common way of looking at the world, of defining threats and challenges as the basis for addressing them together.

The foundations for a common strategic culture are to be sought in the Strategic Compass, a process resulting from an exercise initiated during Germany's Presidency of the Council of the EU in the second-half of 2020, on the basis of discussions held earlier in the year in the College of Commissioners and in the Council. The document resulting from this process will be submitted for endorsement to the European Council in March 2022 and aims to provide an actionable framework for the development of a shared vision for EU security and defence policy. The first half of 2022 will also mark a summit on European defence hosted by the French Presidency of the Council in February 2022, signalling the prioritisation of the defence agenda and the determination to move ahead on the key questions opened by the Strategic Compass process, as laid out in the SOTEU. European Council President Charles Michel branded 2022 'the year of European defence'.

One of the process' objectives is to operationalise the EU's strategic autonomy – still a contested and debated term – and to provide political guidance to refine the level of ambition determined in the EUGS in light of shifting geopolitics and other emerging trends on the threat spectrum. It seeks to better link strategic, operational and capability needs through concrete and actionable proposals. Most importantly, the Compass should be based on a broad political consensus among EU Members and a strong political will to act, referred to as Member State 'buy-in', to ensure its operationalisation. While the HR/VP and the European External Action Service (EEAS) have been entrusted as pen-holders for the process, the Compass remains 'Member State-led', with the EU institutions providing support.
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Process

The Strategic Compass process entails three distinct steps: a threat analysis, a structured strategic dialogue, and the phase of development leading to its adoption. It is organised across four thematic ‘baskets’: defence capabilities; crisis management; resilience; and partnerships.

Diverging threat perceptions among EU Member States have been cited as one of the key roadblocks to common EU defence and to the expansion of a common strategic culture. Geography, history and traditional alliances are some of the many factors that lead to varying threat perceptions among EU countries.

The first step in the Strategic Compass process was carried out in the autumn of 2020, under the German Presidency of the Council, and consisted of a threat analysis to identify the nature and severity of threats facing the EU over the short to medium term (i.e. 2025 to 2030). This is the first time EU Members have undertaken a 'comprehensive, 360 degree' analysis based on assessments and inputs from the 27 intelligence services, coordinated by the Intelligence and Situation Centre. The analysis was presented to EU Member States in November 2020, who provided input to the document, but it was not submitted to a vote in order to avoid politicising it.

Accordin to the EEAS, the threat analysis is a classified report identifying key trends in the global and regional environment, as well as to the EU itself, based on the four baskets of the Compass. These include, among other things, slowing globalisation, growing economic rivalry between global powers, climate change and competition for resources, migratory pressures, and threats to the multilateral system, as well as regional instability, conflict, state fragility, inter-state tensions, external influences and the destabilising impact of non-state actors. Emphasis is placed on 'new threats' emanating from technological developments fuelling hybrid warfare, including disruptive technologies, disinformation, and other non-military sources of influence, as well as the terrorist threat. According to a report by the EU Institute for Security Studies (EUISS), the threat analysis made for a sobering account of European security over the next five to ten years. However, a Jacques Delors Centre report cautions that a 'real ranking of threats' had probably been avoided, given the political sensitivity, raising a risk of ending up with a 'Christmas tree approach' to the list of threats.

The 2021 Portuguese Presidency of the Council launched the second phase of the process, the structured strategic dialogue, which entails informal discussions among Member States to set concrete strategic objectives and timelines. They were initially framed around a scoping paper sent to the Member States by the EEAS, later complemented by four papers, one per basket, which together form the 'skeleton' of the Compass. While the papers remains confidential, reports suggest that they recommend clear objectives on what the EU and its Member States should do in the field of security and defence, defining 'political orientations, goals and specific objectives'.

The Compass should ideally reflect the results of the threat analysis and operationalise what the EU could do to confront those threats and challenges, envisioning concrete ways to achieve the ability to act autonomously if, when and where necessary. EU Defence Policy Directors held a first meeting in February 2021, and several workshops were held in the first half of 2021 as part of the strategic
dialogue. A development phase is planned for the second half of 2021. According to EEAS Deputy Secretary-General Charles Fries, the HR/VP will present a first draft of the Compass to Member States on 15-16 November 2021, while endorsement by the European Council is planned for 24-25 March 2022. The Compass was discussed in the informal meeting of the European Council in early October 2021; leaders are due to return to the discussion in December 2021.

Content

As Figure 2 illustrates, the Strategic Compass is structured along four distinct but closely interconnected ‘baskets’ (areas) of actions, running through the three phases of the process.

Figure 2 – Strategic Compass process and its baskets

Crisis management

Crisis management lies at the heart of the EU’s CSDP and is manifested particularly through its 18 military and civilian missions and operations (including the July 2021 launch of a training mission in Mozambique). A key take-away from the 2020 threat analysis was the need to strengthen the EU’s ability to react quickly to crises and to enhance its overall preparedness.

The EEAS explains that the Compass ‘aims to further strengthen the EU’s role in crisis management’ by using its toolbox of instruments more coherently, following clear goals and objectives. For example, the matter of force generation is a long-standing deficiency in the EU’s operational engagement, since Member States ‘commit only a small fraction of their forces to CSDP missions and operations’. The EEAS thus notes that the need to envision ‘possible incentives’ and ‘more flexible and robust mandates for our CDS missions and operations’. Another issue is the need to improve the readiness of EU armed forces to ‘be able to respond quickly to future crises through
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combat or stabilisation operations, as well as maritime or even an air operation’. Finally, as the CSDP has an important civilian component, the EEAS highlights the implementation of the Civilian CSDP Compact, adopted in 2018.

A meeting of the Foreign Affairs Council (defence ministers format), on 6 May 2021, focused specifically on the crisis management basket. According to HR/VP Josep Borrell, a number of ‘concrete ideas and proposals’ were discussed. Member States agree on several principles for EU crisis management: more effectiveness and speedier decision-making; more flexibility in adapting missions to the situation on the ground; better coordination and cooperation in the field with forces present; more capacity in terms of capabilities and equipment; and raising the overall level of ambition.

One specific proposal, which was ‘widely discussed’ by defence ministers, envisions an ‘initial entry force’ – a 5 000-strong force that could be deployed as a first responder in facing a crisis. The two existing EU battlegroups, multinational military units of around 1 500 personnel each, created in 2007 and operational since 2017, are potential candidates for implementing this proposal by adapting them. This idea has gained traction in the wake of the withdrawal from Afghanistan. Borrell argued that Europeans ‘have to use this crisis to learn to work more together’ and that their inability to secure Kabul airport in the same way as the United States had proven the necessity to create ‘a permanent European ‘initial entry force’ that could act quickly in an emergency’. For Thierry Breton, Commissioner for the Internal Market, Afghanistan has highlighted that ‘European defence will only be credible if [we] have the possibility of intervening militarily outside [our] borders to carry out complex missions’. However, Member States are not aligned on the matter.

The HR/VP argues that to enhance readiness, EU Members ‘need to plan and exercise together’, train and improve planning and conduct structures; this will enable the EU to undertake missions and operations ‘more rapidly to different parts of the world’. He considers the Compass as the guidance necessary to stand ready for potential crises, be they the ‘hostile take-over of a legitimate government’ or the ‘safety of maritime shipping lanes’. The results of the process may hold implications for the future organisation, planning, resources, and capabilities of the EU’s operational engagement abroad.

The findings of an expert workshop organised by the EUISS and Clingendael highlight the challenge of articulating concrete operational and capability requirements to meet the EU’s military level of ambition. They contend that the EU ‘should plan for deployments in high-intensity environments, including autonomously if needed’. Quite bluntly, the report points out the EU’s tendency to ‘over-promise and under-deliver on crisis management’. To avoid perpetuating this, a more precise and realistic military level of ambition is advised, as is the need to ‘rethink incentives for EU action’, to showcase the benefits of its defence toolbox ‘including the legitimacy of operating under an EU flag’, and to develop a genuinely integrated approach to crisis management.

Given that the EU has two naval CSDP military operations – EUNAVFOR Somalia Atalanta in the western part of the Indian Ocean, and EUNAVFOR MED Irini in the

Article 44: Enabling the willing and able

Article 44 of the Treaty on European Union (TEU) stipulates that the Council of the EU ‘may entrust the implementation of a task [under the CSDP] to a group of Member States which are willing and have the necessary capabilities’. This provision has never been used, but its potential for providing more flexibility to EU crisis management has resurfaced in the political and academic debate.

The main difference between a CSDP mission or operation and one undertaken under Article 44 relates to planning and conduct. The latter would entrust the group of Member States undertaking the task with planning and force generation, while in the case of the former the EU institutions have a more prominent role. Nevertheless, the decision-making process to establish such a task is similar to that of establishing CSDP operations, i.e. a unanimous Council decision and compliance with international law. Experts consider the Article 44 mechanism allows for a more timely and rapid response to crises. The Strategic Compass process has resurfaced in the debates over the value of Article 44. Experts have also argued that this provision could also enhance existing mandates ‘by assigning specific tasks to a grouping’ of Member States, while others discuss the option of using it ‘in case of an emergency when the EU has to act quickly in areas where it is already present’.
central part of the Mediterranean Sea, the Compass's crisis management basket has a strong maritime dimension. Experts therefore argue that the Compass should assist the EU in prioritising its maritime capabilities while also 'specifying how the Union can maintain and extend its operational and technological edge at sea'. The EU ISS and Clingendael report also notes that the EU's 2021 coordinated maritime presences concept 'could serve as a model for closer EU cooperation in other domain such as air and space'.

A report by the German Council on Foreign Relations (DGAP) recommends that the Compass clarify the aims of the CSDP in terms of crisis management, protection and territorial defence tasks, and in terms of geographical reach. Facilitating a convergence among Member States on a 'narrower set of key priorities' is considered necessary for a faster, more united and effective crisis response. The authors advise a 'close link between the crisis management and capability baskets', given that different capabilities are needed for different missions, and these should inform future projects developed through EU defence industrial frameworks (see next section).

An expert from the Center for International Peace Operations argues that the Compass's bias towards defence runs the 'danger of further weakening the EU's external crisis management'. He therefore advises against 'neglecting civilian CSDP' and to reflect about civil-military cooperation. The author also recommends a 'modular approach' for the EU's cooperation with United Nations (UN) peacekeeping operations for efficiency and cost-effectiveness. Finally, Clingendael experts suggest the geographical focus of the EU's external crisis management should be the southern neighbourhood and the Indian Ocean, 'with the possibility of demonstrating a maritime presence in the Pacific'. They also advise the upgrade of the military planning and conduct capability (MPCC) to match the EU's level of ambition, enabling it to plan and conduct all CSDP operations.

### European Parliament position

In its January 2021 resolution assessing the implementation of the CSDP, Parliament encourages cooperation between CSDP missions and operations and those of other partners such as NATO, the UN, and regional organisations. Nevertheless, it notes the 'lack of political willingness' of Member States to participate in CSDP missions and operations and underlines the importance of making them more robust, including through an increase in 'contributions of forces and assets'.

### Defence capabilities

The years following the publication of the EUGS in June 2016 have seen an enriched EU toolbox of defence cooperation and frameworks for joint research and defence capability development. Particularly relevant for this basket are initiatives including the European Defence Fund (EDF) and its precursor programmes, permanent structured cooperation (PESCO), the Coordinated Annual Review on Defence (CARD), and military mobility, which have become defining instruments in the EU's defence industrial and military integration. The capabilities basket aims to refine longstanding questions regarding EU capability planning, development and procurement, including strategic objectives, levels of investment, and the link between capability requirements and the CSDP in its operational dimension. Discussions on this basket also focus on the connections between the security, industrial, economic, and resilience aspects of defence.

Experts argue that the goal of this basket should be 'the full exploitation of the existing tools', outlined above, so that the EU 'can execute a high military level of ambition'. One of the key obstacles to this ambition is the persisting fragmentation of the European defence industry, which remains nationally focused and results in shortages and expensive off-the-shelf purchases. Moreover, in light of the geopolitical competition over technological ownership and edge, there is increasing recognition that the EU has to take action not to fall behind on innovation.

The first CARD report, presented in November 2020, unveiled persisting underlying weaknesses in EU collaborative capability development. It confirms a fragmented European defence landscape and prevailing 'national defence interest', which render the EU's current military level of ambition
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The report recognises the potential of EU defence initiatives in advancing towards a collaborative approach, but notes that these are ‘too recent to deliver a significant and positive effect on guiding the trends on defence, on de-fragmentation and on increased operational commitment’. The report makes several recommendations to feed into the Compass process, including: implementing the agreed ‘capability development priorities’, delivering the pool of capabilities declared to the EU to fulfil the level of ambition, focusing capability development efforts on next generation capabilities, and systematically considering and incorporating EU defence initiatives in national planning processes.

Launched in 2017, the PESCO framework underwent a strategic review in 2019-2020, resulting in an assessment of progress and recommendations by the Council in November 2020. In tandem with the CARD report, the Council recommends bringing the defence apparatus of each participating Member State ‘further in line with each other by systematically considering and making best use of the EU defence tools and initiatives’ in their national defence planning processes. It also suggests that capability development projects initiated by Member States should be geared towards making ‘European defence industry more competitive’ and with a positive impact on the European defence technological and industrial base (EDTIB). The review makes several other recommendations regarding coherence and incentives that could be taken forward in the Compass. Indeed, according to the EEAS, the Compass does seek to provide more specific goals and objectives for the planning and development of the required capabilities to implement the EU level of ambition and to ‘reduce fragmentation and increase interoperability’.

The crown jewel of the EU’s collaborative capability development initiatives is the EDF. Although the EDF was engineered within the EU’s seven-year budget, the multiannual financial framework (MFF), two precursor programmes already funded projects in the two corresponding EDF windows: defence research and capability development. Its 2021 work programme will provide €1.2 billion of EU co-funding for collaborative projects, with the objective of reducing fragmentation and enhancing the competitiveness of the industry. The Istituto Affari Internazionale (IAI) notes that ‘the more synergies and alignments are created between the EDF and the Strategic Compass the better’ for defence industrial integration in the EU and to avoid that disruptive technologies ‘become the Achilles’ heel in the EU’s quest for greater strategic autonomy’.

Emerging and disruptive technologies

The threat analysis undertaken under the Compass process highlighted rapid technological developments as a trend with an impact on international security. Consequently, the EU would need to display more ambition and action if it is to maintain its competitive edge and promote ‘technological sovereignty’. Indeed, the technological dimension touches upon each of the four baskets.

Among the technologies identified are autonomous systems and digital technologies, such as machine learning and artificial intelligence. The EEAS argues that the ‘cooperation and integration of the most advanced technologies’ will determine the fate of European strategic autonomy. A ‘coherent and long-term approach’ is advised, by increasing investment in strategic technologies and by exploring synergies between civil, military, and space industries. The latter is key, since disruptive technologies tend to be of a dual-use nature, as is ‘increased cross-border defence technological and industrial cooperation’.

One criticism of the EU approach to technological innovation is its risk-aversion, thereby ‘losing opportunities to invest in game-changing technologies’. Several initiatives by the European Commission mentioned in this context are the action plan on synergies between civil, defence and space industries, the European Innovation Council, the critical raw materials resilience communication, and a forthcoming roadmap on security and defence technologies. According to the EUISS, the Compass could ‘bring greater coherence to the multiplication of such technology-scanning initiatives’.

An EUISS report however notes that coherence in this context should be more about a streamlined defence capability planning system than about protecting ‘institutional mandates’. The experts that fed into the report suggest that the Strategic Compass could help with ‘aligning and synchronising the timelines associated with each EU defence initiative’: annually for the CARD; annually and five-yearly for PESCO; seven-yearly for the EDF, and with the Compass, should it become a regular process. In addition, national procurement and budgetary timelines could be further aligned for this planning
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They also argue that the Compass could facilitate discussions on capability priorities in advance of the annual EDF work programmes developed by the European Commission.

Defence spending is an overarching challenge that could be addressed as part of this basket, particularly in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic and the ensuing impact on global and national economies. By most accounts, defence budgets will be negatively impacted by Covid-19, in spite of evidence of the added value of the military in pandemics. In that context, the link between EU defence initiatives and national defence planning cycles is essential for their success in generating relevant capability through efficient spending. Absent this link, the initiatives will be unable to deliver on their ambitions.

The Compass could facilitate this by providing a political push, streamlining EU initiatives, setting clear operational tasks and scenarios and improving strategic communication, argue several policymakers and experts. Closely connecting the Compass with defence planning processes is key for delivering tangible outcomes. This would require closer cooperation between the relevant EU institutional actors, such as the European Commission, the EEAS, and the European Defence Agency, argue experts for the DGAP. These reports consider it necessary to identify incentives for Member States to invest more in EU defence frameworks. Such incentives could include, for example, publicising PESCO members' national implementation plans, as suggested by Clingendael, or envisioning a peer-review mechanism within PESCO, as argued in an Egmont Institute briefing.

European Parliament position

In its January 2021 resolution on the implementation of the CSDP, Parliament welcomed EU capability development initiatives and called on Member States to increase defence spending and aim for the 2% of GDP target. It recognised that further deepening such EU initiatives through meaningful participation of more Member States in major European defence projects is of critical importance for European integration in the defence field. It shared the European Court of Auditors' assessment that ‘the EU Member States are far from having the military capabilities they need to match the EU military level of ambition’.

Resilience

The EUGS prominently featured the concept of resilience – broadly defined as ‘the ability of states and societies to reform, thus withstanding and recovering from internal and external crises’. The EU views such resilience as important not only at home but also abroad, for its partners. In its 2020 foresight report, the European Commission refers to resilience in the broader context of ‘preparedness and prevention, early warning systems and coordination structures’, needed not only to prevent shocks and crises but also to ensure the ability to withstand them. In the Strategic Compass context, the resilience basket focuses on the protection of the EU’s key functions and interests and on reducing vulnerabilities on the continent and abroad. It explores aspects such as critical infrastructure protection, access to the global commons, particularly in the maritime, cyber and space domains, the applicability of mutual defence and solidarity clauses (see box on Articles 42(7) and 222), critical dependencies and supply chains in strategic sectors, climate change, and the impact of new technologies. It is arguably the most complex and comprehensive of the four baskets since its logic is to ensure synergy between the Union’s internal security tools ... and its external ones.

The Covid-19 pandemic has perhaps served as the most obvious test case of how non-military vulnerabilities could have national and international security repercussions and how the military can contribute to what would usually be considered a civilian, humanitarian or police task. This has also brought the concept of resilience to the fore, emphasising its comprehensive whole-of-government nature, which requires better links between key domains ranging from agriculture and environmental protection to trade and technology to national security. The European Commission has put forward a wide range of initiatives and strategies in each of these fields, all of which fit under the wider umbrella of resilience. Some notable initiatives include the 2017 communication on a strategic approach to resilience in the EU’s external action, the EU foreign investment screening...
Defence and solidarity articles: 42(7) and 222
As the EU's post-2016 period of proactivity in defence unfolded, two articles of the Lisbon Treaty received renewed attention. Article 42(7) TEU is the EU's mutual defence clause, providing for Member States 'obligation of aid and assistance by all means in their power' should another Member invoke it. It has been invoked once, in 2015, by France in the wake of the terrorist attacks. Article 222 TFEU is the EU's solidarity clause, committing EU countries to act in this spirit if a Member State is the 'object of a terrorist attack or the victim of a natural or man-made disaster', prompting the EU to mobilise all resources at its disposal. In explaining France's invocation, the ECFR points out the difference between Article 42(7) and NATO's collective defence clause, Article 5. First, the former calls for individual action by Member States, while the latter would react as a whole. Second, Article 42(7) also includes the provision of civilian forms of support, going beyond military aid. The EU is conducting 'table top exercises and scenario-based policy discussions' to generate a common understanding of the scope of these articles. One expert suggests that the EU should use Article 42(7) 'against all non-military forms of subversion and coercion', thereby distinguishing it from the remit of NATO's Article 5.

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mechanism, and a new cybersecurity strategy and package (see also the box on emerging technologies). Each of these have a distinct relevance for the defence sector, given the 'increasing technological interconnection and digitalisation of defence systems and platforms'. As regards frameworks such as PESCO and the EDF, they include several projects that could enhance resilience. The Compass will therefore attempt to find answers to the matters of both promoting resilience-relevant projects and ensuring the resilience of defence capabilities resulting from EU initiatives. Additionally, in spring 2021, Romania created a Euro-Atlantic Centre for Resilience to provide expertise for the EU and NATO.

A DGAP report argues that, given how broad and comprehensive the concept of resilience has become, 'the challenge in writing the Strategic Compass is to define clearly what is meant by the term in a security and defense framework'. The goal of resilience must be 'to deal with those threats that are not yet known to exist' with a minimal disruptive impact on the 'normal functioning of the EU, its member states, and European societies'. It recommends that the Compass develops an 'intersectoral and interagency whole of the EU approach', which links all the instruments considered relevant to ensuring resilience. Similarly, Clingendael notes that a state 'can be classified as resilient when it possesses the ability to minimise the potential disruptive impact that shocks and events may have'. Its report argues that the main short-term focus of the EU's work on resilience should be internal, while continuing support for resilience abroad. Sven Biscop notes that resilience 'demands a state-wide approach at the grand strategic level, involving all departments of the government'. The aim of resilience as an overarching policy is to 'prevent any foreign entity from gaining leverage to undermine state sovereignty', and to enable a state to 'provide its citizens with all of the public goods that they legitimately expect, without interruption'.

The concept of 'total defence', the preparation of a country's society, systems and institutions for war, has become relevant in the resilience debate. In this context, it has become commonplace to highlight Scandinavian and Baltic countries as models for embedding resilience in the functioning and organisation of their governments. For example, Sweden has developed a strategy for resilience and total defence, taking a comprehensive approach to security crises, which include responses of both a civil and a military nature. Clingendael argues that in this context, the Compass process should clarify the cases in which Article 42(7) TEU is applicable (i.e. cyber- and hybrid attacks, terrorism, and/or armed attacks) and explore how EU countries can adopt a 'whole-of-society approach', connecting national and EU-level civilian and military actors. It should also discuss the role of armed forces inside the European Union', while respecting NATO's role in collective defence, and explore how other EU tools such as sanctions could be triggered as a package of response.

A report from the EUISS highlights the issue of security of supply as an 'essential pillar of the EU's resilience' in the context of accelerating geopolitical competition. This aspect is relevant for security and defence given that defence capabilities, equipment, and technologies often rely on certain critical materials, which are procured from a handful of countries, therefore risking 'harmful dependences'. The critical infrastructure that ensures a society and government's day to day functioning, such as water management, transportation, energy or health services, relies on safe,
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Stable and predictable supply chains. The fragility of supply chains was widely exposed during the Covid-19 pandemic, hence a new policy focus on diversification and expanded partnerships. The Strategic Compass can therefore raise awareness about their importance and ‘emphasise the importance of cross-border security of supply resilience’, while proposing concrete solutions.

**European Parliament position**

In its January 2021 resolution on the implementation of the CSDP, Parliament welcomed capability development initiatives as, among other things, means towards consolidating the strategic autonomy of the Union; in the same resolution, Parliament highlighted the need to strengthen EU and Member States' resilience in the maritime area. In addition, it welcomed the priorities and guidelines adopted for EU cooperation to enhance resilience to hybrid threats.

**Partnerships**

Nurturing and developing relations with like-minded partners has been a constant goal for the EU. The partnerships basket of the Strategic Compass is focused on ways to enhance the EU’s work with partners (international organisations and individual countries), while making the EU itself a more ‘effective security provider and a more responsible and reliable partner’. In a conference held by the Portuguese Presidency and the EUISS in February 2021, Portugal’s Defence Minister, Joao Cravinho, emphasised that partnerships should become more strategic, including regularised strategic dialogue. He highlighted the importance of ensuring consistency with the revision of NATO’s Strategic Concept between 2021 and 2022, aiming to further explore synergies.

The relationship between the EU and NATO has a long history and has witnessed significant progress since the signing of the first joint declaration in 2016. A second followed in 2018, and on the basis of the 2021 SOTEU address, a third is expected by the end of 2021. The HR/VP has emphasised that he takes the EU’s partnership with NATO ‘for granted’, noting that it will touch upon all four baskets, particularly the partnership one. To this end, NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg attended a lunch with EU Foreign Affairs Ministers on 6 May 2021, to discuss areas of common interest (see box).

Relations with individual third countries in CSDP take place through framework participation agreements (FPA). The EU has such agreements with 20 countries. Multiple Council conclusions call for a more ‘strategic approach’ to cooperation in the CSDP framework, such as those from May 2017 and June 2018. The EU’s defence industrial initiatives are however governed by other mechanisms and conditions, which third parties need to fulfil in order to be able to participate. This basket will explore how to expand partnerships, how to make EU frameworks more attractive to partners, how to better train and exercise with partners, and how to adapt institutional relations, such as with the UN or NATO, to the current security environment.

**Compasses and concepts: Linking EU and NATO strategic reflections**

Both the EU and NATO launched strategic reflection processes in 2020: the Strategic Compass and the NATO 2030 initiative, intended to inform the revision of NATO’s strategic concept, its guiding policy document. ‘NATO 2030 is about how we adapt to this new normal’, declared the Secretary General, Jens Stoltenberg, when launching the initiative in June 2020. It has three broad ambitions: to make NATO stronger militarily, stronger politically, and to equip it with a more global perspective. The processes overlap in terms of launch, development and completion, both due in the first half of 2022. With both processes being forward-looking and aimed at better responding to ascendant threats, experts have pointed to the added value of ensuring positive overlap. A paper by Clingendael points out the ‘unique opportunity to ensure complementarity and to end the useless discussion on ‘either the EU or NATO’ – mainly fuelled by political agendas instead of practical arguments’. It suggests that the Compass should state ‘what Europe is able and willing to do’, while contributing to burden-sharing in NATO, and to work on further aligning their defence planning and capability development processes. The EUISS also highlights the need to ensure coherence among their initiatives and to seize the opportunity for enhanced consultations and increased shared understanding. An expert writing for the Polish Institute for International Affairs (PISM) argues that the ‘imminent challenge is to make the Strategic Compass a topic of EU-NATO consultations’ to ensure they do not result in ‘contradictory goals and assessments’.
A commentary for the European Council on Foreign Relations (ECFR) notes that the Compass should consider how to make it ‘more appealing for non-EU European countries to participate in EU missions through existing mechanisms’. It suggests providing better and earlier access to planning documents and allowing increased involvement in strategic review processes. A report providing a Polish perspective on the Compass argues for ‘European cooperation with as many partners as needed to effectively tackle both the very roots and effects of crises’. There should be more focus, it notes, on ‘redesigning how the EU wants to work with (various) partners on early identification of unfolding crises’, on prevention, stabilisation, and on reconstruction efforts, thereby placing the integrated approach at the ‘centre of the reflection on strategic autonomy’. The author distinguishes the relations with the United States and NATO as remaining special, particularly as regards the military and operational dimensions. The Compass ‘should function as a political guidepost for CSDP’, reads an opinion piece in EURACTIV. It could be seen as an opportunity to evaluate ‘different forms of partnerships and how they can be optimally developed in the future’, including by looking at countries such as the United Kingdom (UK) and Norway.

The EU has distinct relations with distinct partners. For example, although it has both shared concerns and shared interests with the UK, political tensions stand in the way of negotiations on a security and defence partnership (most recently a controversial submarine deal in the framework of the Australia-UK-US alliance, launched on 15 September 2021). Another example is the relationship with Norway, which has been proactive in expressing its willingness to take part in EU initiatives, demonstrated by its participation in the military mobility project in PESCO. The transatlantic relationship, Europe’s longest partnership, is high on the agenda. Following the election of President Joe Biden, the renewed impetus to increase cooperation and identify transatlantic solutions to global problems was confirmed by the statement following a bilateral EU-US Summit in June 2021, which included a commitment to launch a security and defence dialogue. At the same time, the rapid US withdrawal from Afghanistan has prompted debates across the political spectrum about America’s future role in the world and about its consequences for Europe, notably for its identity as a security and defence actor.

Additionally, the EU has developed close and complex partnerships with countries, regions and international organisations in Asia, Africa, and Latin America. They range from organisations including the African Union and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), to countries such as Japan, South Korea, Colombia, and South Africa. The new European Peace Facility is considered to strengthen the EU’s security provider role in partner countries, while a renewed focus on global supply chains is argued by the EUISS to require ‘closer strategic coordination between suppliers, manufacturers and end-users’, thus providing a new dimension of EU international partnerships. Finally, the EU-UN partnership is deep and overarching, including a solid crisis management and peacekeeping component, which is a focus of the Compass discussions. For instance, UN representatives have expressed openness to the idea of an EU ‘initial entry force’ and pointed out that more work is needed in terms of aligning rapid response systems and strategic exchanges.

European Parliament position
In its January 2021 resolution on the implementation of the CSDP, Parliament supports a strengthening of the EU’s strategic partnerships through the Compass process, including with NATO, the UN, the African Union, ASEAN, and individual countries such as the UK. In its July 2021 resolution on EU-NATO relations, Parliament calls for both organisations to identify synergies between their respective strategic reflection processes and to use them as opportunities ‘to link these processes at both political and technical levels and to strengthen the transatlantic bond’, including through EU-NATO cooperation. Parliament envisions the Compass as laying ‘the foundations for an EU contribution to NATO’s next Strategic Concept’.

Opportunities and challenges
As highlighted by numerous experts, beyond the completion of the process, the success of the Strategic Compass will hinge on national political ‘buy in’. A report from the Centre for Security
Diplomacy and Strategy (CSDS) argues that the Compass ‘will mean little without sustained political engagement by Member States’, while authors from Clingendael also see the ultimate factor of success being ‘high-level political pressure’. Although the latter highlight the opportunity the Compass represents for closing ‘the gap between too much rhetoric and too little action’, they also find it unlikely that the process will ‘result in the emergence of one, shared, European strategic culture in security and defence’. What should be avoided is ‘another vague, strategic document’. Echoing this latter view, an ECFR piece warns that ‘nothing would be worse for the bloc’s credibility than widening the already-huge gap between rhetorical ambition and the reality of EU defence’. The CSDS report also points at uncertainty regarding the implementation of the Compass after its adoption and about the communication of its findings to European citizens and parliaments. Concerns about the Compass remaining a ‘paper tiger’ were reportedly voiced by some Member States during the informal meeting of leaders in Slovenia on 5 October 2021.

At the same time, experts perceive the Compass as an opportunity to provide a vision of what the Union needs to achieve and how to get there’ by picking up where the EUGS left off and defining goals more specifically. The IAI notes that the stakes are higher than before. While the four baskets are intended to help with the operationalisation of the process, their interlinkages could risk inefficiencies. A paper by the Jacques Delors Centre points to the risk that the Compass ‘could lead to duplication and turf wars’ if it has an overly broad focus, as was the case of the EUGS. Instead, it recommends focusing on developing a ‘concise security and defence sub-strategy’ of the EUGS and leading to a ‘clearer definition of the EU military level of ambition’, including revising the EU headline goal. Looking forward to the forthcoming French Presidency of the EU, a report by the French Senate recommends promoting a mechanism to monitor implementation and political commitment and to propose regularising the Compass process to take place every five years, with the close involvement of national parliaments. The presentation of the Strategic Compass and the planned summit on defence will offer opportunities to develop these ideas further.

MAIN REFERENCES

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