

AFTER THE COMPASS

EU action in security and defence in a new age of global powerplay

A seminar co-organised by the EU Institute for Security Studies (EUISS) and the Direction Générale des relations internationales et de la stratégie (DGRIS), French Ministry of the Armed Forces.

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INTRODUCTION

Adopting the Strategic Compass was only the beginning of the journey. **Timely and effective delivery of the Compass is now the heart of the matter** if Europe is to thrive in an ever more challenging geopolitical environment. Thus, action and reflection must now turn to its implementation. It is fair to say that, without sustained commitment by EU Member States and Institutions, the Union will be unable to achieve its stated level of ambition and nor will Europe be prepared for an era of strategic competition.

In this regard, it is necessary to discuss the most effective way forward in sustaining the Union's need to **act more decisively, robustly and speedily**. How to best ensure that the EU has the necessary capabilities and operational capacities to act militarily? How best to ensure that the Union's military actions can help support its broader efforts to secure its international position and project its interests? In what ways should the EU-NATO partnership evolve to ensure that Europeans can more autonomously defend Europe and project its presence globally?

To reflect on such questions, the **EUISS and DGRIS organised a seminar on 13 June 2022 in Paris** which brought together EU Member State officials with representatives from the think tank community for an in-depth discussion on EU security and defence. Held at the close of the French Presidency of the Council of the EU and in partnership with the Czech, Swedish and Spanish Ministries of Defence, the seminar was designed to **feed into the preparation of the upcoming presidencies**.

More specifically, the seminar began with a panel discussion with representatives from the Council of the EU Presidency "Trio" of France, the Czech Republic and Sweden and, with a view to the next Trio format, senior representatives from Spain joined the discussion too. The panel debate was followed by two parallel working groups: the first focusing on the recently announced **EU Rapid Deployment Capacity** and the second on **EU-NATO cooperation**. This report summarises the main conclusions of the seminar.

READYING THE EUROPEAN UNION FOR GLOBAL COMPETITION

The publication of the EU Strategic Compass comes at a time of geopolitical uncertainty for the European Union. Events such as speedy evacuation of Afghanistan, the withdrawal from Mali, Russia's invasion of Ukraine and ongoing tensions between the United States and China conspire to raise serious questions for the EU and its Member States. **Ukraine's armed forces are showing Europe what it means to have the political will to fight for the defence of territory and interests**. In many respects, Europe's response to the war on Ukraine has been remarkable. Not only have European governments reinforced

NATO's eastern flank, but the EU has agreed to hard-hitting sanctions packages, taken in millions of refugees and the European Peace Facility (EPF) has been massively mobilized to provide military equipment to Ukrainian forces. At the outset of the Compass drafting process, the thought that the EU would be financing lethal equipment for Ukraine's armed forces would have been unthinkable.

The Strategic Compass takes fully into account this new geostrategic context. It provides a coherent and credible roadmap for the next decade. Although the EU may before the end of 2022 conduct another Threat Analysis, **the Compass document itself stands the test against the tense geopolitical era in which Europe exists.** In addition to addressing the war on Ukraine, the EU cannot afford to neglect wider security concerns such as terrorism, proliferation or growing global strategic competition. In this sense, the Compass rightly focuses on strategic spaces such as the maritime, space, air and cyber domains.

Sound implementation of the Strategic Compass will require political will and investment in defence. **The war has given fresh meaning to "Europe" and there is today a greater sense of solidarity between European governments.** For example, the unity and practical cooperation between the EU and NATO has been remarkable, even if there is a need to enhance the work on military mobility. The Compass is very useful in this regard because it charts, at the highest political level, a course towards tangible actions. Europe must be honest with itself, however, as it has spent decades free riding on American power and this invites Europe to boost its defence spending and capabilities, as well as support its defence industry and lower harmful dependencies.

DEVELOPING THE UNION'S ABILITY TO ACT

The EU Rapid Deployment Capacity (RDC) was seen as a flagship deliverable under the EU Strategic Compass. However, there remain questions about how it will function and what real difference it can make to more robust EU action in security and defence. One major challenge will be to revise profoundly the EU Battlegroups (EUBGs) so they can serve as a basis for the RDC, in a complementary way with modular force packages. It was agreed on that a lack of political will is one of the main reasons why EUBG's never have been deployed. This will be a crucial element of success with regard to the RDC. Another issue will be to ensure complementarity between the RDC's more modular force approach detailed in the Strategic Compass and future NATO plans that could include the deployment of permanent multinational battlegroups along the Alliance's eastern flank. There is also the reality that **national armed forces in Europe urgently need to be bolstered and modernised** considering Russia's war on Ukraine.

Additionally, the RDC gives rise to questions related to the interoperability of forces across operational domains. Military deployments under the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) are mainly land-centric endeavours, despite EU operations like Atalanta or Sophia, the coordinated maritime presence in the Gulf of Guinea and the intention to become more involved in the Indo-Pacific region. The Strategic Compass underlines the necessity to ensure complementarity such as amphibious, cyber, air and intelligence assets. This implies a need for a substantially enhanced command and control (C2) structure at the EU-level, but to date, EU Member States have failed to meet the basic staffing requirements of the Union's Military Planning and Conduct Capability (MPCC). It was suggested – similar to the hybrid toolbox – to refer to the RDC as a military toolbox with modular force packages that could be adjusted to the operational need.

The discussion also focused on the importance of scenario and advance planning. Following the adoption of the Strategic Compass, the EU started the work of revision of the illustrative scenarios for potential military deployments. One important issue will be to include scenarios of intervention in non-

permissive environments, which are a growing reality. The Compass also underlined the need for advance planning, which would allow the EU Military Staff and Member States to prepare for more robust military action. In this sense, one of the important developments to arise out of the Strategic Compass is the future conduct of live exercises. Such exercises will not only provide the possibility for enhanced interoperability, but they can serve as a political message to partners and rivals. Accordingly, the first live exercises as part of the RDC should send a credible and robust message.

Finally, there was a reflection on how best to adapt the EU's decision-making procedures for more rapid military engagement. The Strategic Compass stressed the importance of Article 44 of the Treaty on the European Union, and in theory this allows for coalitions of the willing to deploy under the EU flag. In this regard, questions centred on how the Article 44 would make a tangible difference to EU force deployment. The principle of unanimity will be preserved for the launch of a new operation, however, in the conduct of the operation, participating Member States will have more autonomy. Questions such as financial solidarity will also play into the debate. It was also suggested that **advance planning could help prepare EU Member States for the type of military action potentially required**, which might assist in overcoming last-minute political disagreements over deployments.

TAKING EU-NATO COOPERATION FURTHER

Following the June 2022 NATO Summit and the release of the new NATO Strategic Concept, the signing of a **third EU-NATO Joint Declaration would be a positive signal** and underline both organisations' commitment to securing Europe and supporting Ukraine. Fully recognising the traditional strains in EU-NATO cooperation, it is nevertheless worth investing in a new joint declaration, focusing on a few concrete areas where cooperation could be enhanced (such as military mobility). Thus, the traditional lack of EU-NATO cooperation in intelligence and Turkey's recent concerns regarding Finland and Sweden's accession bids to NATO should not stand in the way of a united front. This is especially the case in the current climate with Russia looking for ways to sow discord in Europe.

It is necessary to think about the relationship between the EU's Mutual Assistance Clause (Article 42.7 of the Treaty on European Union) and NATO's Article 5. Finland and Sweden's possible accession to NATO could potentially enhance such a relationship, although both the EU and NATO would need to discuss how to practically develop the two treaty-based defence provisions. The intention to join NATO seems to be an indicator that Article 5 has particular reassuring meaning for European countries with regard to collective defence. In one sense, it might be difficult to coordinate EU and NATO responses because any serious focus on Article 42.7 TEU could be interpreted as a watering down of Article 5. However, closer cooperation between the EU and NATO **could increase the level of 'strategic ambiguity' faced by actual and potential rivals**, who would not be able to clearly gauge how the EU or NATO would act in times of acute crises.

Questions related to military capabilities and the defence industry should also be taken more seriously in an EU-NATO context. Often the political narrative has overly focused on potential duplication, but the **reality is that European countries need to substantially increase their investments in defence capabilities**. Nevertheless, it would be naïve to overlook questions related to industrial competition between Europe and the United States and, indeed, intra-EU competition in the defence sector. In this regard, it will be necessary to address how the EU and NATO **can achieve a common front on defence capability development and defence innovation**. For example, coordination will be necessary between NATO initiatives such as the Innovation Fund or Defence Innovation Accelerator for the North Atlantic (DIANA) and the EDA's Defence Innovation Hub (HEDI).

In the context of Russia's war on Ukraine, it is necessary to think about how EU-NATO cooperation can be taken forward in new areas. Any future EU-NATO Joint Declaration could **address sensitive but**

critical geographical areas of cooperation such as the Black Sea Region. Both the EU and NATO could develop a mutual strategy to address issues such as naval blockages, de-mining, cyber defence and ensure that freedom of navigation is upheld – a crucial topic given that the Black Sea is a major transit route for food supplies to the global market. Such action would also assume that the EU and NATO devise joint planning or even live exercises, but this is not really the case today.

