

SECURING THE AIR

How to enhance the EU's resilience and security in the air domain?

An event co-organised by the Permanent Representation of France to the EU and the EU Institute for Security Studies. The event takes place in the context of the French Presidency of the Council of the EU.

18 February 2022, 09:00-13:00 CET, Zoom/Online

CONCEPT NOTE

The freedom of access and safety of the air domain are critical for the prosperity and the security of the European Union and its citizens, as shown by the tragic events of recent years. The global exchange of people and goods relies on the free movement of civil flights in all airspaces, in particular over Europe, where air traffic accounts for roughly 4% of GDP and 12 million direct and indirect jobs. The COVID-19 epidemic demonstrated the importance of that principle, especially when it involved essential supplies such as face masks. Adding to this, we should recall that: 1) by its nature, the air domain provides for speed and range, and, ultimately, responsiveness; 2) that many international flight paths traverse conflict zones and crisis hotspots (cf. the case of MH17 or the hijacking of the Ryan Air aircraft by Belarus); and 3) there is no secured access to outer space without freedom of access to airspace. Airpower is thus critical for the EU's relevancy in tomorrow's world in terms of security, economy, industry and society.

However, the competition among powers, new technologies and the emergence of new threats represent a significant challenge for the EU and its Member States' freedom of access and action in increasingly congested and contested airspaces. Over our own territories, the increasing and diversified nature of air traffic (e.g. UAVs), the emergence of low-cost threats (e.g. spy or explosive drones), the future evolution of traffic management (e.g. the Single European Sky) and the taxonomy of regulations are among the already visible trends that need to be strategically addressed by the EU if it is to ensure its capacity to operate through air policing, cyber-resilience and more.

Furthermore, increasingly aggressive aerial postures in non-European airspaces threaten the Union's aerial access and undermine European forces' freedom of action in non-permissive theatres. The continuing rise of Anti-Access/Area Denial (A2/AD) postures in the European neighbourhood and beyond hinders: 1) the Member States' capacity for autonomous situational assessment through air assets; 2) the EU's critical role in ensuring compliance with international law (e.g. monitoring a ceasefire or disarmament measures) and 3) the ability to project air power in case of crisis (cf. Afghanistan - air bridge for humanitarian support, EU citizens evacuation, etc.). Ultimately, the increasing "barriers to entry" in the air domain allow Russia, China and regional powers to dissuade military action, thereby serving as a strategy of intimidation.

In this context, the EU and its Member States must now address the full spectrum of the air dimension by encouraging investment in air technology innovations, fostering information exchange between Member States, enhancing interoperability between European air forces, civilian actors and European partners and envisioning EU air operations. This would allow the EU to complement the purely military response by NATO and support the Rapid Deployment Capacity envisaged by the EU Strategic Compass.

By offering a transversal approach, this workshop aims to foster a comprehensive reflection on the rapidly evolving strategic environment in the air domain, discuss the EU's current assets and vulnerabilities and put forward concrete policy orientations for a strengthened and resilient EU position in the air domain.

PROGRAMME

09:00-09:30

INTRODUCTION

Gustav LINDSTROM

Director, EU Institute for Security Studies

Luc DE RANCOURT

General and Deputy Director, Direction Générale des Relations Internationales et de la Stratégie, Ministère des Armées, France

Joanneke BALFOORT

Director, Security and Defence Policy, European External Action Service

09:30-11:00

PANEL I – THE STATE OF PLAY

Moderator

Daniel FIOTT

Security and Defence Editor, EU Institute for Security Studies

Speakers

Franck DESIT

Deputy Director, Capability Armament Planning and Head, Air Domain Unit, European Defence Agency

Joseph HENROTIN

Researcher, Centre d'Analyse et de Prévision des Risques Internationaux (CAPRI)

Vicky KARYOTI

Researcher, Centre for War Studies, University of Southern Denmark

Torben SCHUETZ

Research Associate, University of the Federal Armed Forces in Hamburg

11:00-11:15

BREAK

11:15-12:45

PANEL II – THE WAY FORWARD

Moderator

Daniel FIOTT

Security and Defence Editor, EU Institute for Security Studies

Speakers

Sylvia KAINZ-HUBER

Deputy Director, DG DEFIS, European Commission

Frans OSINGA

Professor, War Studies, Universiteit Leiden

Olivier SCHMITT

Director of Research and Studies, Institut des Hautes Études de Défense Nationale

Océane ZUBELDIA

Researcher, Institut de Recherche Stratégique de l'École Militaire

12:45-13:00

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Gustav LINDSTROM

Director, EU Institute for Security Studies