

MEMO

Questions and answers: a background for the Strategic Compass

As the global security environment is deteriorating, the European Union and its Member States face an increasing number of complex threats and challenges. To respond to these adequately, the EU has taken action to strengthen its work in the field of security and defence. With a comprehensive set of defence initiatives, being implemented since 2017, the EU has taken defence cooperation to a new level. As a credible actor and reliable partner, the EU now also needs to provide more clarity about its strategic goals.

With the Strategic Compass, Member States have embarked on a journey to define what they want to do to strengthen the EU, namely when it comes to responding to external crises, building the capacity of partners and protecting the Union and its citizens. EU Heads of State affirmed the EU's commitment to developing the Strategic Compass in their Statement in February 2021.

As indicated by the Council in June 2020, the Strategic Compass will define policy orientations and specific goals and objectives in four clusters:

- (1) crisis management,
- (2) resilience,
- (3) capability development,
- (4) partnerships

These four dimensions are interconnected. It is crucial to set clear and ambitious goals across them, if we want the EU to become a more effective security provider and a more responsible and reliable partner. As the Strategic Compass aims to provide political guidance for civilian and military planning processes, it should contain concrete proposals for action as well as timelines for implementation.

How is the Strategic Compass developed?

Member States have entrusted the High Representative with the task of acting as the penholder for this strategic process. The role of the European External Action Service is to structure and facilitate the debate amongst EU Member States and support the High Representative in drafting the final document.

How is the workflow on the Strategic Compass evolving?

The first step in the process of developing the Strategic Compass was the presentation of an intelligence-based "comprehensive, 360 degrees" independent analysis of the full range of threats and challenges the EU currently faces or might face in the near future. For more information, about the Threat Analysis, see this [MEMO](#).

A strategic dialogue phase kicked off in early 2021, with the aim to gather ideas and proposals for each of the four baskets. Groups of Member States presented written input on specific issues and organised workshops to stimulate discussions between officials, academics, experts as well as ministers during this stage. This phase will run until October 2021.

Based on Member States' input, the EEAS presented an overview of all the ideas put forward for each of the four baskets. These are internal papers prepared to facilitate the more in-depth discussions amongst Member States and drafted in close cooperation and consultation with the European Union Military Staff (EUMS), the European Commission and the European Defence Agency (EDA).

What does this mean in practice?

Crisis Management

The EU's operational engagement through its Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) missions and operations contributes to build peace and security in different countries and regions affected by conflict and instability. They also enhance the security of the European Union and its citizens.

The Strategic Compass aims to further strengthen the EU's role in crisis management, using the different instruments at its disposal, including the recently established [European Peace Facility](#). It should set clear goals and objectives to enhance the effectiveness and flexibility of the EU's operational engagement as well as strengthen the collective readiness to react to future crises.

To improve the **effectiveness of our operational engagement**, for example, we need to think about possible incentives for the force generation as well as more flexible and robust mandates for our CSDP missions and operations. We have made progress in that direction with [EUTM Mali](#) and [Operation Atalanta](#) by expanding their mandates. Operation Atalanta, for instance, in addition to the fight against piracy, will now also counter drugs- and arms-trafficking. As regards Libya, [Operation Irini](#) has also been fulfilling a robust mandate, inspecting vessels suspected to be in breach of the UN arms embargo.

At the same time, we need to become more flexible in our actions and decision-making. We should strengthen cooperation with European-led ad hoc coalitions. The speed of our decision-making needs to be improved if we want to respond swiftly to crises.

We also need to improve the **readiness of our military**. The EU and its Member States should be ready to deploy rapidly to respond quickly to future crises through combat or stabilisation operations, as well as maritime or even an air operation, in line with the Level of Ambition that derives from the [EU Global Strategy](#) of 2016. This can be done by further developing scenarios and putting them into practice. We need to give further guidance to our military on what kind of future crisis scenarios they need to be prepared for. We also need serious scenarios for operational contingency planning: for example an initial entry operation, a stabilisation mission, a maritime or possibly an air interdiction operation. The armed forces can then use these scenarios for training and exercising together.

On the side of the **civilian CSDP**, it is equally important to intensify the implementation of the Compact adopted in 2018, for example by implementing the commitment undertaken by Member States to be able to deploy 200 personnel within 30 days, as well as by strengthening cooperation between CSDP and Justice and Home Affairs actors.

Resilience

In a rapidly evolving security environment, the Compass should help to enhance our ability to **detect and anticipate** threats and challenges. The first-ever conducted Threat Analysis allowed for a good picture of the threats and challenges the EU faces. It should be regularly reviewed to keep it up to date. Risk surveys to be conducted amongst Member States should also help us to get a clearer picture about our vulnerabilities.

We equally need to develop an overarching policy that could help tackle the comprehensive threats that are directed against us with a clear political objective in mind. This could encompass measures against cyberattacks, disinformation but also other forms of interference such as the use of migration flows as tools of hybrid attacks against the EU. This obviously has to be complementary to ongoing work strands such as the [EU Cybersecurity Strategy](#) and the [Cyber Diplomacy Toolbox](#).

We also need to better **prevent** threats and challenges from materialising. For instance, strengthening the resilience of our partners can only benefit our own security. To help them, we can make use of our financial instruments, including the European Peace Facility. We need to secure European access

to the strategic domains (space, cyber, maritime), which are more and more contested by our strategic competitors. Looking at the increase in cyberattacks, we should strengthen our cyber security and defence capabilities. We need to invest more in the naval domain. The EU has already naval presences in the Mediterranean, the Indian Ocean and the Gulf of Guinea. We should further develop the [Coordinated Maritime Presences](#) concept and look at other maritime areas of interest, including in the Indo-Pacific. Lastly, space is becoming more and more contested. The EU should develop a space strategy for security and defence, which would complement the EU space programme and other relevant initiatives developed by the European Commission.

In case of need, we also need to be able to **respond** to threats and attacks. This goes hand in hand with the need to increase solidarity and mutual assistance. To counter foreign information manipulation and interference more effectively, for example, we need additional means to deter perpetrators and impose costs on them.

Capabilities

Conflicts and crises unfold in highly complex and usually unpredictable ways. If the EU wants to make a credible contribution, it needs the necessary civilian and military capabilities to act quickly and decisively.

EU Member States have a single set of forces, which they can use in different frameworks. Both civilian and military capability planning requires clear political guidance. The Strategic Compass seeks to provide more specific goals and objectives for the planning and development of the required capabilities to implement the EU Level of Ambition. It should help reviewing the **Union's civilian and military capability needs** in light of the evolving security situation and provide a coherent vision on the future military forces and civilian capacities.

The Strategic Compass should also aim at further deepen **European cooperation** in planning, developing, delivering and using these capabilities through the EU framework, looking at all the initiatives and tools we have already put in place to increase cooperation and to see how they can be connected in a more coherent and efficient manner in order to ensure that we have the right capabilities for the tasks at hand at the right time.

Lastly, the EU needs to be much more ambitious and coordinated in maintaining its competitive edge and promoting technological sovereignty, especially in the area of autonomous systems and digital technologies. Examples include machine learning in order to facilitate better image analysis used for missions and operations, Artificial Intelligence (AI)-supported decision-making based on sensors or hypersonic weapons. The level of cooperation and integration of the most advanced military technologies will determine whether Europeans will possess the means to independently pursue common security objectives. We need to strengthen **the European Technological and Industrial Base** including in particular an enhanced **common EU approach to emerging and disruptive technologies** in the security and defence domain. The EU should foster a coherent and long-term approach to these issues, for instance by scaling up investments in these technologies, ensuring synergies between civil, military and space industries and exploring the possibilities for cooperation with NATO.

Partnerships

Part of the EU's DNA as an actor on the international stage is to act with partners whenever possible, to both strengthen effective **multilateralism** and contribute to a global rules-based order, as well as to increase the impact of its own actions. This holds true both for international organisations as well as for cooperation with individual countries. The EU has an interest to work with partners sharing common values but also common interests, to advance its political agenda and contribute to peace and security.

While the question of the EU's partnerships runs through all the different baskets, there is also a need to reflect on the approach to strengthen and develop them in a more strategic manner. In order to make the most of the possibilities of cooperation, the EU needs to be clear on its own interests and priorities and subsequently develop specific tailor-made approaches.

The EU will aim to deepen cooperation with **international and regional organisations**, particularly the United Nations, with which we have a long-standing framework for cooperation on crisis management and peace building, and with NATO, ensuring close complementarity and synergies between EU and NATO activities. The EU will also aim to develop further its relationships with the OSCE, African Union and ASEAN in support of its values and interests.

With individual **partner countries**, the EU will seek to deepen cooperation on security and defence issues, including through dedicated dialogues and consultations. Potential areas for further engagement could include CSDP missions and operations, capability development; countering hybrid and cyber threats; maritime security; disarmament and non-proliferation; counter-terrorism; security and defence aspects of climate change; strategic communications and disinformation; emerging and disruptive technologies; security and defence aspects of space; and security sector governance and reform.

The **contribution by partners of assets and personnel to the EU's CSDP missions and operations**, based on the prior conclusion of a Framework Participation Agreement, will continue to be a key area of cooperation and an important indicator of the strength of the partnership in security and defence. At the same time, we will seek to identify additional areas for practical cooperation, such as exercises and training activities and cooperation in-theatre between CSDP missions and operations and activities carried out by partners. The EU will also seek to further enhance its **support to capacity building of partners** in order to contribute more effectively to international peace and security.

What are the next steps in the Strategic Compass?

Building on these discussions and the input provided by Member States, the High Representative will prepare a draft of the Strategic Compass to be presented to Ministers in November 2021 for discussion and guidance. The goal is for the Council to adopt the Strategic Compass in March 2022, in line with the Statement of the Members of the European Council of February 2021.