

## **A Strategic Compass to make Europe a Security Provider**

*Foreword by HR/VP Josep Borrell*

### **Europe's geopolitical awakening**

The war against Ukraine proves that Europe is even more in danger than we thought just a few months ago, when the first draft of this Strategic Compass was presented. At stake are the very principles upon which international relations are built, not least those of the UN Charter and the Helsinki Final Act. History is accelerating once again. This crisis has made it even clearer that we live in a world shaped by raw power politics, where everything is weaponised and where we face a fierce battle of narratives. All these trends were already happening before the Ukraine war; now they are accelerating.

This means that our response must accelerate too – and it has. We have taken rapid actions across the spectrum and broken several taboos along the way: unprecedented sanctions, massive support to Ukraine including, for the first time ever, financing the delivery of military equipment to a country under attack and building a wide international coalition to support Ukraine and restore international legality.

We now need to ensure that we turn the EU's geopolitical awakening into a more permanent strategic posture. For there is so much more to do. The essence of what the EU did in reacting to Russia's invasion was to unite and use the full range of EU policies and levers as instruments of power. We showed that we are ready to pay a severe price to defend our security and that of our partners – the price of freedom. We should build on this approach in the period ahead, in Ukraine but elsewhere too.

Across the EU, there is a clear commitment to learn the right lessons from this crisis and the broader weaponisation of interdependence that we face. This involves us finally getting serious about threats to our strategic interests that we have been aware of but not always acted upon. Take energy. We have known for years that energy plays a disproportionate role in EU-Russia relations and that Russia has used energy as a political weapon. We are now fully mobilised to cut our excessive dependence on Russia energy imports.

The war against Ukraine is making it more urgent to achieve a sea change in EU security and defence. This too we have known for years but not always acted upon. Today, no one denies that we need robust capabilities and the willingness to use them against the full spectrum of threats we face. How to get this done in practice is the purpose of the Strategic Compass.

In other words, the Strategic Compass is not the sole answer to the war on Ukraine as that answer goes well beyond the area of security and defence. Similarly, the Strategic Compass is about much more than the war on Ukraine, as we have to confront the full range of threats we face. Indeed, the purpose of the Strategic Compass is to guide the necessary development of the EU security and defence agenda for the next ten years.

The good news is that every day we are seeing more member states ready to invest more in security and defence. We must ensure that these welcome additional investments are done in a collaborative way and not in a fragmented, national manner. We must use the new momentum to ensure that we, finally, equip ourselves with the mind-set, the means and the mechanisms to defend our Union, our citizens and our partners.

In so doing, the EU will also help to strengthen NATO and become a stronger Transatlantic partner: a partner that is more capable of sharing the burden of maintaining international peace and security. Russia's aggression against Ukraine has shown both how essential NATO is for the collective defence of its members and the important role that the EU plays in today's complex security and defence environment.

### **A new world of threats**

The war on Ukraine is the most serious security crisis in Europe in decades, but threats to European security clearly come from a variety of sources, both within Europe and beyond. Our security interests are at stake also in the Western Balkans, in the Sahel, in the wider Middle East and in the Indo-Pacific.

We should not forget that the world is full of situations where we face hybrid tactics and intermediate dynamics of competition, intimidation and coercion. Indeed, in Ukraine as elsewhere, the tools of power are not only soldiers, tanks and planes but also financial sanctions or import and export bans, as well as energy flows, and disinformation and foreign interference operations.

In addition, we have seen in recent years the instrumentalisation of migrants, the privatisation of armies and the politicisation of the control of sensitive technologies. Add to this the dynamics of state failures, the retreat of democratic freedoms, plus the attacks on the 'global commons' of cyber space, the high seas and outer-space, and the conclusion is clear: the defence of Europe requires a comprehensive concept of security.

There is more awareness and agreement in Europe today on the nature of the threats we face – just as there is a process of strategic convergence on what to do about them. Europeans will continue to favour dialogue over confrontation; diplomacy over force; multilateralism over unilateralism. But it is clear that if you want dialogue, diplomacy and multilateralism to succeed, you need to put power behind it. That is the point of 'learning to speak the language of power', as I have been arguing for more than two years.

### **The case for ambition and results**

The work on this Strategic Compass started well before the invasion of Ukraine. Indeed, for a variety of reasons the debate on European defence had already accelerated throughout 2021. This had led to a common acknowledgement that we needed a step change. Therefore, EU Leaders tasked me to come up with a way to translate that common ambition into actionable proposals.

Throughout the whole exercise, I have been convinced that we must be ambitious, because the fast-worsening strategic environment is forcing us to act. But equally that we should be result-oriented and avoid our usual European tendency to go for conceptual or institutional discussions. It is often easier to talk - and disagree - in abstract terms, than it is to act and agree on how to do things in concrete terms. This attitude we cannot afford.

In all this, it is important to realise that on security and defence, we do not start from zero. Indeed, in recent years the EU has equipped itself with a number of instruments to introduce more coherence into the field of security and defence. The Strategic Compass builds on this process. It is neither a crystal ball for predicting the future, nor a silver bullet that will magically enable Europe to develop a common defence policy overnight. It is, however, a guide for preparation, decision and action.

The Strategic Compass is setting out concrete actions in the following four work strands so that we:

- **Act** more quickly and decisively when facing crises;
- **Secure** our citizens against fast-changing threats;
- **Invest** in the capabilities and technologies we need; and
- **Partner** with others to achieve common goals.

To strengthen our capacity to act, we will work to reinforce our crisis management missions and operation and will develop an EU Rapid Deployment Capacity to allow us to quickly deploy up to 5.000 troops for different types of crises. We will increase the readiness of our forces through regular live exercises (never been done before in the EU), strengthen our command and control arrangements and promote faster and more flexible decision-making. We will expand our capacity to tackle cyber threats, disinformation and foreign interference. And we will deepen investment into the necessary strategic enablers and next-generation capabilities. This will make the EU a more capable security provider for its citizens, but also a stronger global partner working for international peace and security.

More than the papers that we usually produce in Brussels, the Strategic Compass sets out concrete actions – with clear deadlines to measure progress. This a Member States-owned document now adopted by the Council. Throughout the process, Member States have been in the driving seat. By signing off to it, they commit to implementing it. There will be a robust follow-up process to ensure implementation. These are major differences with the 2003 EU Security Strategy and the 2016 Global Strategy.

### **If not now, then when?**

The history of European integration is full of plans and initiatives to strengthen the EU's security and defence policy. Most have come and gone. Therefore, sometimes people ask me why this time should be any different.

For me, the difference this time lies in the speed at which the geopolitical context is changing. This makes the case for action more urgent and indeed compelling. This is

vividly true for the war in Ukraine and the wider implications that a revisionist Russia has for European security.

However, it goes beyond that: all the threats we face around the world are intensifying and the capacity of individual Member States to cope is insufficient and declining. That is why we Europeans must invest in our capacity to think, decide and act in strategic terms – together with our partners and on our own when needed.

I am encouraged by the new sense of seriousness and strategic purpose that has taken hold in Europe. The threats are rising and the costs of inaction - of 'non-Europe' - are clear. I am convinced that we need a quantum leap forward on security and defence, similar to other big jumps we have made in European history.

It is my fervent hope that this Strategic Compass will help us, finally, face our security responsibilities, in front of our citizens and the rest of the world. If not now, then when?