

A Strategic Compass to make Europe a Security Provider

Foreword by HR/VP Josep Borrell

Why do we need a Strategic Compass?

Europe is in danger: we need to operate in an increasingly competitive strategic environment. The purpose of the Strategic Compass is to draw an assessment of the threats and challenges we face and propose operational guidelines to enable the European Union to become a **security provider for its citizens, protecting its values and interests.**

The Strategic Compass is a political proposal to prevent the major risk the EU is facing: that of 'strategic shrinkage', or the risk of being always principled but seldom relevant. That is why it defines a high ambition and presents concrete means to make this ambition a reality.

Recently, the debate about European security and defence has switched gear. In her State of the Union, the President of the European Commission Ursula von der Leyen called for the EU to take its work on defence to the next level, moving from a 'defence eco-system' to a genuine 'European Defence Union'. Shortly afterwards, the President of the European Council, Charles Michel, declared that '2022 will be the year of European defence', adding that a stronger EU role on security and defence would also strengthen the Atlantic Alliance. That same month, President Biden, in a joint statement with President Macron welcomed 'a stronger and more capable European defence, that contributes positively to transatlantic and global security and is complementary to NATO.' Then, in October, EU leaders discussed the impact of major geopolitical events and decisions which had put into question Europe's ability to defend its interests and vision. They agreed that **Europe cannot afford to be a bystander in a hyper-competitive world.**

European citizens are also aware of this new context. According to many opinion polls, they want the EU to contribute in a more active way to their security and that of the world. They want the EU to **protect** them from the dangerous world we live in. They understand that we must **connect** the defence efforts of the Member States, avoiding duplications and gaps in our critical capabilities, to be more efficient in providing this protection. And they know that our security starts away from our borders. So we need to **project** our presence in the world, promoting security in our neighbourhood and with our partners.

So far, so good. However, in practical terms major questions remain: act how exactly? To face which threats and challenges? With which means? And with which implications for the EU? Answering these questions is the rationale for the Strategic Compass that EU leaders tasked me as High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy to prepare.

During the drafting of the Strategic Compass I have become ever more convinced that, because of history and geography, we Europeans don't see the world in the same way. And that is why **we don't yet share a common strategic culture.** We have to realise that there will always come a time when each Member State needs the EU, just as the EU needs each of its Member States to respond collectively to threats of a changing nature. **So, a necessary**

first step was to come up with a shared threat assessment, which we did in November 2020 and we used as the basis for this Strategic Compass.

A new world of threats

The starting point of the Strategic Compass is to recognise that **Europe is in danger. It faces new threats that are not just military or territorial**. We are seeing the return of power politics and zero sum conflicts with competition between states intensifying. At the same time, interdependence is becoming increasingly conflictual and soft power is weaponised.

In recent years, the classic distinction between war and peace has been diminishing. The world is full of hybrid situations where we face intermediate dynamics of competition, intimidation and coercion. Indeed, the tools of power are not only soldiers, tanks and planes but also disinformation, cyber-attacks, the instrumentalisation of migrants, the privatisation of armies and the political control of sensitive technologies or rare earths. **We have to be aware that the defence of Europe will require a new, comprehensive concept of security** and that emerging technologies will have a profound impact on future warfare and European defence.

The geopolitical stage is also becoming more complex. More and more states are behaving as partners on certain issues and competitors or rivals on others. International relations are increasingly organised on a transactional basis. For the EU, which remains the world's most open space and which borders many areas of conflict, this is a real challenge. Even more so because there are also worrying dynamics such as the collapse of states, the retreat of democratic freedoms, violations of international and humanitarian law, plus the attacks on the 'global commons': cyber space, the high seas and outer-space.

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's the point of 'learning the language of power'.

The case for ambition and results

In drafting this Strategic Compass, I have been guided by the conviction that we must be ambitious, because the fast-worsening strategic environment is compelling us to act. But equally, we should be result-oriented and avoid our usual European tendency to go for conceptual or institutional discussions, thus side-stepping the harder task of enhancing our capacity to act. 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. To prevent the risk of 'strategic shrinking', the Strategic Compass proposes ways and means for the EU to handle the challenges it faces. This will require **political will**, without which nothing is possible and **operational efficiency**, without which everything is pointless. Taken together, these two ingredients will enhance our **credibility**, without which our ambitions will come up against reality.

The EU must use the full range of policies and instruments, looking at the same time for legitimacy, flexibility and willingness to participate, in line with the Treaty provisions. The EU needs to be able to conduct operations in all circumstances, including those involving the use of force, as foreseen by the Treaties. To secure European interests, we need to do this in a pragmatic and flexible way, depending on the context of the crisis, the urgency, the willingness and the capacity of Member States to act.

In all this we have to understand that in today's world, as in tomorrow's, purely military responses will remain insufficient or inadequate. Recent events, in Afghanistan and elsewhere, have shown the clear limits to the utility of force and the absolute requirement of locally owned political settlements.

The policy answer

We don't start from zero. Let me recall that in recent years, the EU has equipped itself with a number of instruments to introduce more coherence into the field of security and defence. In 2017, it launched the Coordinated Annual Review on Defence (CARD) to rationalise military spending across the EU and Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) to increase the capabilities and interoperability of European armed forces. Building on earlier efforts, it established the European Defence Fund (EDF) in January 2021, to promote defence industrial collaboration. These efforts strengthen our operational capacity. The EU currently has 18 civilian and military missions and operations deployed around the world. With the Civilian CSDP Compact agreed in 2018, we committed to strengthen our civilian missions - and we are well on our way.

The Strategic Compass exercise builds on this wider 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**. Based on the guidance of EU leaders, the Strategic Compass is proposing concrete ideas 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.

Why now?

This is, of course, not the first time that the EU describes its strategic environment and how it intends to respond. Indeed, the history of European integration is full of plans and initiatives to strengthen security and defence ties among us and our ability to act together. Most have come and gone. And while we have made progress in recent years, we should acknowledge that not all our stated intentions have been realised.

The difference this time lies in the speed at which the geo-political context is changing. This makes the case for action more urgent and indeed compelling. **All the threats we face are intensifying and the capacity of individual Member States to cope is insufficient and declining.**

Already in 2017 Angela Merkel said that ‘we Europeans should take our fate into our own hands’. In my opinion, everything that has happened since has only strengthened that conclusion: 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.

In drafting this Strategic Compass, my job has been to sketch out a path, to specify the why, the what and the how. This is what the Strategic Compass does, offering a range of proposals, small and large, covering the full spectrum.

As ever, results depend not on strategy papers but on actions. These belong to the Member States: they hold the competences, the prerogatives and the assets. Although the EU is not a military alliance, it should work towards a common defence, as set out in the Treaty of Lisbon.

The decisions of Member States will determine whether the geo-political shifts of recent months and the renewed debate on European defence that has erupted, are yet another wake-up call that goes unheeded. Or whether 2022 is a new start, when we, finally, decide to face our security responsibilities, in front of our citizens and the rest of the world. **I am convinced that we cannot afford to treat our security as ‘business as usual’, repeating the same slogans and sticking to the same mind-set. The cost of passivity and inaction are real and the moment for decisive steps is now.**