

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. In order to respond to these adequately, there have been rapid developments to strengthen the EU in the field of security and defence. With a comprehensive set of defence initiatives that have been 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 be able 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. Demonstrating the immense political will at the highest level, EU heads of state affirmed their commitment to and provided clear guidance on 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, and (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.

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

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 you can read this [MEMO](#).

This memo explains the ongoing process for the formulation of the Strategic Compass.

How is the workflow on the Strategic Compass evolving?

The Threat Analysis presented to Member States in November 2020 showed that the EU needs to strengthen its collective capacity to respond to the threats and challenges it faces.

On that basis, EU Member States discuss their ideas and proposals for each of the four baskets. This strategic dialogue phase kicked off in early 2021 with a first broad overview of key issues and questions provided by the EEAS in February.

Until mid-2021, Member States discuss their concrete ideas to strengthen our operational engagement, reinforce our resilience, develop the necessary capabilities and enhance our work with partners. We need to progress in all four areas in parallel. Groups of Member States present written input on specific issues and organise workshops to stimulate discussions between officials, academics, experts as well as ministers during this stage.

Based on Member States’ input, the EEAS presents 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). They focus on:

- 1) how to improve the effectiveness and flexibility of the EU's operational engagement as well as on how to enhance the readiness of Member States' forces;
- 2) how to ensure that the EU has the necessary capabilities to act and protect itself;
- 3) how to strengthen cooperation with partners, both international organisations and individual partner countries; and
- 4) how the EU can strengthen its resilience by increasing its ability to detect, protect and respond to threats and challenges to the Union more directly.

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 of the EU's operational engagement and 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. For Atalanta, for instance, in addition to the fight against piracy, the operation will now counter drug and arms trafficking. As regards Libya, [Operation Iriini](#) has also been fulfilling a robust mandate since it was launched more than one year ago, inspecting vessels suspected to be in breach of the UN arms embargo.

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.

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.

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 also aims at deepening European cooperation

in the development, planning and use of these civilian and military capabilities, with the aim to reduce fragmentation and increase interoperability.

As the Threat Analysis has highlighted negative trends in the international security situation and rapid technological developments, 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.

It is therefore important for the EU to foster a coherent and long-term approach to address these challenges, 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, both to 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 these 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 to achieve these within the framework of a wide array of different partnerships.

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 capacity-building of partners in order to contribute more effectively to international peace and security.

What was discussed in the Crisis Management basket?

The Compass should look into two main questions to answer:

- (1) how to improve the **effectiveness and flexibility of our operational engagement** (CSDP missions and operations). This includes looking at how to speed up CSDP decision-making; develop more robust/flexible mandates; enhance flexibility including by better linking CSDP to European ad-hoc coalitions; improve force generation; strengthen cooperation between CSDP and Justice and Home Affairs; and reinforce our planning and conduct structures.
- (2) how to enhance the **readiness of Member States' forces** so that the EU is better prepared and able to react swiftly to future crises. 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.

What was discussed in the Capabilities basket?

The Strategic Compass should give clear guidance, provide political/strategic orientations and set clear objectives and goals to:

- (1) **review 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, e.g. what do we need to have forces that can be deployed rapidly in a wide variety of crises and for different tasks, how can we ensure that these forces are resilient enough to deal with the impact of hybrid or cyber threats and what are the requirements for the EU's civilian missions;
- (2) 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;
- (3) **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, taking into consideration opportunities as well as risks new technologies such as Artificial Intelligence or the security of technology supply chains imply for the EU in the context of a changing geopolitical environment.

What will be discussed in the Partnerships basket?

There are four elements for discussion:

- (1) The Strategic Compass should contribute to **strengthen the EU's cooperation with international organisations, particularly the United Nations and NATO**. The partnership

with the UN is a long-standing one that can be further strengthened, including through the agreement of a new set of priorities for cooperation in crisis management and peacebuilding. Cooperation with NATO should also be reinforced, ensuring coherence of activities in both organisations and seeking synergies, especially in light of the respective strategic processes, the work on the Strategic Compass in the EU and on the new Strategic Concept in NATO. A number of concrete proposals have been identified for further advancing EU-NATO cooperation, ranging from increased regular political dialogue, to strengthening cooperation in countering hybrid threats and on emerging disruptive technologies, to improving the way in which we share information and bolster our resilience. In addition, **the EU should seek to further its cooperation with other international and regional organisations**, particularly the OSCE, African Union, and ASEAN.

- (2) **The Strategic Compass should encourage the further development of bilateral partnerships on security and defence in a tailored manner, with deeper and closer relationships** with those sharing a closer convergence of both values and interest. Partnerships would also be developed on a **case-by-case basis** with other third countries where there is common ground and/or a community of interests. This can be done for example through security and defence dialogues; by including security and defence more systematically in political dialogues; by defining specific policy areas for dialogue and cooperation; and through the participation of third countries in CSDP missions and operations.
- (3) **Assisting our bilateral partners with coordinated and tailor-made support.** Proposals focus on providing tailored support to partners in a coordinated way, grouping together in 'packages' different CFSP/CSDP initiatives; increasing the role of Civilian CSDP in line with the Civilian CSDP Compact; and fully implementing the European Peace Facility.
- (4) **An improved set-up for engagement with partners.** Proposals focus on developing overarching and flexible platforms for meetings on issues of common concern with groups of partners, or occasionally with all partners.

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 the second semester of 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.