

TOWARDS A STRATEGIC COMPASS

Source: European Union External Action Service, Towards a Strategic Compass, Brussels, 20/11/2020 - 14:10, Factsheets



Source: European Council. Council of the European Union, Newsroom, Video conference of Defence Ministers - November 2020, 20 November 2020

The way through the “Strategic Compass” - are we moving to our “Strategic Autonomy”?

Chrysanthi Anagnostopoulou

(International and European Relations Analyst, Degree in Economics & Postgraduate Diploma in International and European Studies)

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Abstract

The purpose of this article is to underscore the issue of the Strategic Compass and its four baskets - crisis management, resilience, capability development and partnerships- by drawing attention to any other ideas related¹. The challenge, though, would be to figure out which would be the path for the EU, who would carry the Compass and what do we, actually mean when we are referring to the so-called EU's "Strategic autonomy".

Introduction

It goes without saying that we are on the verge of an era in which the EU is facing a set of generalized threats along the internal – external security nexus, which are reinforced by the overall instability at regional and global level. The words used in the Introduction of the European Security Strategy (EUGs) of 2016 are, already, demonstrative that the depiction of the current world status is not very optimistic:

"The purpose, even existence, of our Union is being questioned. Yet, our citizens and the world need a strong European Union like never before. Our wider region has become more unstable and more insecure. The crises within and beyond our borders are affecting directly our citizens' lives.²»

The New Strategy presented by the former High Representative Federica Mogherini in 2018 for the Western Balkans was, also, a challenge for the EU. The European Parliament supports the integration efforts but does not forget to draw attention to the rule of law, fundamental rights and the fight against corruption and radicalization by strengthening its resilience³.

To a brief assessment of the EU's progress so far, overall, we would say that it could be seen as a successful venture that expresses a cluster of states infused with specific (minimal) common ideological "barriers" colored with democratic notes. In practice, this means that despite any differences, there is a commonly accepted

¹ Council of the EU, 'Council Conclusions on Security and Defence', 8910/20 (17 June 2020), <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/44521/st08910-en20.pdf>, p.3, par.4, access 10-12-20

² European Union's Overall Strategy on Foreign and Security Policy, presented by the former High Representative Federica Mogherini in June 2016, (EUGS 2016) https://eeas.europa.eu/sites/eeas/files/eugs_review_web_0.pdf, access 2-12-20

³ European Commission, "Strategy for the Western Balkans: EU sets out new flagship initiatives and support for the reform-driven region", 6 Feb 2018, https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_18_561, access 10-12-20



TOWARDS A STRATEGIC COMPASS

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reduction of individual sovereign claims to an institutionalized framework with the ultimate goal of ensuring longevity and maximizing any "profits" through a "multiplier" mechanism.

The bet to win, though, the main question of this paper, is whether the particular "initiative" is a narrative that can consolidate an "evergreen" course. Firstly, because through the process of "globalization" a dynamic emerges that has the potential to bring about a radical rearrangement of the established power system around the planet and secondly, it puts the whole edifice at the gates as, since new challenges have arisen, perhaps a fundamental reconstruction is needed. Clearly, there is no doubt that until now the EU area has become the safest and most peaceful environment in the world. However, the status quo is now partly "questioned". Koliopoulos typically comments on Mearsheimer:

"International anarchy remains firmly intact, which means that [...] there should have been no significant changes in the behavior of the great powers. (2011, p.716)"⁴

Domestically, there were, of course, some issues such as Brexit, as argued by several "anti-Europeans", that would have shaken the Union, but to their denial, despite any losses (defense, security, funding, etc.) this fact led to EU's strengthening, which suggests that the EU has a solid foundation (in terms of the common aspirations of the Member States).

But, in a rapidly changing and deteriorating security landscape, beyond the "homeland protection", the focus should be given on tackling hybrid threats. In EU's territory there is a significant split between those who think that the EU should act as "one man's show" actor and those who proclaim that the coordination with the UN and the NATO would be a prerequisite in order for all to have a share answer to the rise of authoritarian behaviors and actions that promote the development of technologies that could make a hybrid threat such a reality⁵ than "a scene of science fiction".

But why not do both? We may upgrade the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and invest more in the EU defence sector in order to make it capable enough

⁴ John Mearsheimer (2011), THE TRAGEDY OF THE POLITICS OF THE GREAT POWERS, Translation: K. Koliopoulos, S. Edited by: P. Hephaestus- El. Kouskouvelis, Int. Note: K. Arvanitopoulos, S. Index: P. Hephaestus, ATHENS, QUALITY

⁵ In-depth Analysis, "No way back: Why the transatlantic future needs a stronger EU", Policy Department for External Relations, Directorate General for External Policies of the Union, PE 653.619 – November 2020,

[https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/IDAN/2020/653619/EXPO_IDA\(2020\)653619_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/IDAN/2020/653619/EXPO_IDA(2020)653619_EN.pdf), p.5



TOWARDS A STRATEGIC COMPASS

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to act rapidly and efficiently and, maybe, slightly “autonomously”, meaning that not waiting for the authorized “signal” beyond the transatlantic borders when the circumstances pose “technical” problems to do so. We could, even, say that, above all, the transatlantic future would need a stronger EU.

The EU, therefore, in front of its responsibilities and due to the security challenges it faces, has been led, in recent years and especially after the adoption of the EU Global Strategy for Foreign and Security Policy, of 2016, to initiatives in this direction aiming at increasing cooperation between Member States.

In November 2016, the European Council set the course for the development of EU policy in these areas by presenting the Implementation Plan on Security and Defense (IPSD). Based on the Overall Strategy, the three priorities of the plan were to improve the cost-effectiveness of defense spending, to strengthen defense cooperation and to build a stronger industrial base⁶.

Therefore, the most significant new defense initiatives are the Permanent Structural Cooperation (PESCO), the Coordinated Annual Review on Defense (CARD), the European Defense Fund (EDF), the Military Planning and Conduct Capability (MPCC), the European Peace Facility (EPF), the Military Mobility and the reinforcement of the EU’s Rapid Reaction Facilities including combat units and civilian capabilities⁷.

It is observed, though, that regarding this hyperactivity (at least until 2020) in the defence sector, *“the reality is that this “alphabet soup” of EU security and defence – CSDP, PESCO, EDF, CARD, CDP, MPCC, NIPs, EPF, etc. - has not yet led to any tangible shift in the Union’s capability base or readiness for deployment⁸.”*

⁶ Council of the EU, Implementation Plan on Security and Defence, 14392/16 (14 November 2016), accessed at <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/22460/eugs-implementation-plan-st14392en16.pdf>, access 12-12-20

⁷ European Council, Council of the European Union, EU Security and Defense Cooperation, <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/el/policies/defence-security/>, https://www.martenscentre.eu/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/CES_POLICY-BRIEF_TheStrategicCompass-V1.pdf, p.8, access 19-12-20

⁸ EUISS, European Institute for Security Studies, “The CSDP in 2020, The EU’s legacy and ambition in security and defence”, Edited by Daniel Fiott , https://www.iss.europa.eu/sites/default/files/EUISSFiles/CSDP%20in%202020_0.pdf, p.3



TOWARDS A STRATEGIC COMPASS

Source: European Union External Action Service, Towards a Strategic Compass, Brussels, 20/11/2020 - 14:10, Factsheets

Moreover, there are some who declare that despite the EU's record in crisis management (through CSDP), the already established toolbox *“does not entirely fit the geopolitical pressures Europe faces today”*⁹.

These views, actually, denotes that this “lack of capabilities” is not only a matter of instability in the security sector near the EU's borders but more like a tectonic shift in international politics. That is said because for example, in Trump's Presidency, the outcome regarding the CSDP could be discouraging.

The purpose here is not to make an unfair metric to CSDP's importance but more to invoke the lack of political will¹⁰ to developing a common approach to early warning and risk analysis till now as well as to highlight the time-consuming decision-making process since there is, already, an established CSDP toolbox.

But, tensions and conflicts at the doorstep of Europe made member states, to reconsider what EU needs more and as the High Representative (HR/VP) Josep Borrell have mentioned, it is now the momentum for collective action and *“at the same time, make the EU a better global partner and security provider”*¹¹.

More specifically, the EU Defence Ministers at their meeting in June 2020, with the upper aim at enhancing the EU's ability to act more “autonomously”, laid out an agenda that among others, it stressed the need for more work on a future “Strategic Compass”. That would be a new political strategic document to be adopted by EU member states under the French Presidency of the Council in early 2022¹². As J. Borrell, then, said:

⁹ Ibid, p.9, for more analysis see also *“European Strategic Autonomy and the Use of Force”*, *Fighting for Europe*, Egmont Paper 103, Sven Biscop, Egmont Institute, January 2019, <https://www.egmontinstitute.be/content/uploads/2019/01/EP103.pdf?type=pdf>

¹⁰ Protecting Europe, *“The EU's response to hybrid threats”*, by Daniel Fiott and Roderick Parkers, CHAILLOT PAPER /151, April 2019, European Union Institute for Security Studies (EUISS), *“[...]the main obstacle remains the continued reluctance of EU member states to consistently share quality intelligence with each other through the EU”*, https://www.iss.europa.eu/sites/default/files/EUISSFiles/CP_151.pdf, p.32

¹¹ “Europe security and defence: the way forward”, 21 June 2020, https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/81247/europe-security-and-defence-way-forward_en, access 3-01-21

¹² EDM, European Defence Matters, What the first Coordinated Annual Review on Defence reveals, CARDS on the table, 2020 ISSUE 20, Charles Fries, <https://eda.europa.eu/docs/default-source/eda-magazine/edm20-web>, p.27, access 04-01-21, Wilfried Martens Centre for European Studies, *“The Strategic Compass, Charting a New Course for the EU's Defence and Security Policy”*, Summary December 2020, Niklas Nováky, https://www.martenscentre.eu/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/CES_POLICY-BRIEF_TheStrategicCompass-V1.pdf, p.11, access 19-12-20

TOWARDS A STRATEGIC COMPASS

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“We need primarily a common way of looking at the world of defining threats and challenges as the basis for addressing them together. The Strategic Compass should help us get there¹³.”

This initiative seems to be one of the most confabulated issues of the recent German’s Presidency of the Council. The Strategic Compass’ hidden agenda aims at the first level to make a common threat analysis of the EU with inputs from all member states. Secondly, it intends to agree on *“clear and achievable objectives for the EU”* as a security and defence player and thirdly, to *“offer political guidance for future military planning processes¹⁴.”*

The way through the (Strategic) Compass

The Strategic Compass, which is, a German initiative, aims at enhancing the implementation of the EU’s Level of Ambition (LoA) derived from the well-known EU Global Strategy for Foreign and Security Policy of 2016 and the related Implementation Plan on Security and Defence (IPSD). More precisely, without any profound changes in the existent institutional framework, it seeks ways to set security priorities more clearly and to give concrete policy directions on the means and capabilities that need to be developed in a 5 - 10 years’ timeline horizon.

The Threat Analysis, which was composed by the EEAS Single Intelligence Analysis Capacity (SIAC)¹⁵, based on contributions from EU member states’ national civilian and military intelligence agencies seems to play a crucial role in the whole procedure of defining the EU’s security and defence priorities. It aspires to, holistically (360°), cover the EU’s security threats and challenges as well as to highlight the key trends shaping the world stage for the period 2022- 2030¹⁶.

¹³ “Europe security and defence: the way forward”, 21 June 2020, https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/81247/europe-security-and-defence-way-forward_en, access 3-01-21

¹⁴ German Council on Foreign Relations, “The EU’s Strategic Compass and Its Four Baskets” Recommendations to Make the Most of It”, No.13, November 2020, https://dgap.org/sites/default/files/article_pdfs/dgap-report-2020-13-en.pdf, p.4

¹⁵ The SIAC combines the EU’s civilian intelligence arm (the EU Intelligence and Situation Centre, EU INTCEN) and its military intelligence arm (EU Military Staff Intelligence Directorate).

¹⁶ “From Global Strategy to Strategic Compass: Where Is the EU Heading?”, No.121, December 2019, Sven Biscop, <http://aei.pitt.edu/102317/1/spb121.pdf>, access 12 Dec 20 and Wilfried Martens Centre for European Studies, “The Strategic Compass, Charting a New Course for the EU’s Defence and Security Policy”, Summary December 2020, Niklas Nováky, https://www.martenscentre.eu/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/CES_POLICY-BRIEF_TheStrategicCompass-V1.pdf, p.11, access 19-12-20



TOWARDS A STRATEGIC COMPASS

Source: European Union External Action Service, Towards a Strategic Compass, Brussels, 20/11/2020 - 14:10, Factsheets

Following the Threat Analysis, presented to the member states' defence ministers on 20 November 2020¹⁷, the member states starting from 2021 will engage in a strategic dialogue aiming at reinforcing their share attempt to understand, at least at a minimum common base, all the threats and challenges that the European Union is dealing with since they have different threat perceptions with regard to, for example Russia, Turkey, the Sahel or the Arctic. In other words we may say that for the EU member states this is a step further for a European security and a defence culture.

The main pillars of this rationale are well described in four inseparable baskets – (a) crisis management, (b) protection and resilience, (c) capability development and defence cooperation (d) cooperation with and support to partners¹⁸.

Crisis Management

When we start a discussion on crisis management, we are thinking, straight away, of the CSDP derived from the European Global Strategy (EUGS)¹⁹. Of course, since then, the EU has already made more steps further to elaborate the existent tools and instruments²⁰. However, the most significant weakness of this CSDP endeavor is, the so repeated vagueness detected in the controversial issue of what kind of conflicts and crises, universally and close to its geographical sphere, the EU could respond to (since all the resources are not available to react in that way).

¹⁷ Ibid, p.2

¹⁸ Council of the EU, 'Council Conclusions on Security and Defence', 8910/20 (17 June 2020), accessed at <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/44521/st08910-en20.pdf>, p.3, par.4, 10-12-20. We would say that, among others, the Strategic Compass follows the line of the three key priorities of EU's Global Strategy of 2016, i.e. "1) *Responding to external conflicts and crises – with an aim to enhance the EU's awareness and responsiveness in all phases of the conflict cycle*; 2) *Capacity building of partners – systematic contribution to stabilization in case of conflict or instability; providing expertise and assistance in order to strengthen partners' resilience and counter hybrid threats*; 3) *Protecting the Union and its citizens – measures to efficiently tackle challenges and threats of internal and external security*", <file:///C:/Users/09B8~1/AppData/Local/Temp/EUGS%20Summary%20202.12.2016.pdf>, access 04-01-21,

¹⁹ EU, Shared Vision, Common Action: A Stronger Europe – A Global Strategy for the European Union's Foreign and Security Policy (June 2016), https://eeas.europa.eu/archives/docs/top_stories/pdf/eugs_review_web.pdf,

²⁰ "The Military Planning and Conduct Capability (MPCC) has already been mandated to be able to plan and conduct an executive military operation (approx. 2500 troops) besides their ongoing role limited to training missions.", <https://eda.europa.eu/docs/default-source/eda-magazine/edm20-web>, p.28



TOWARDS A STRATEGIC COMPASS

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²¹ Maybe the Strategic Compass would be a “window of opportunity” for those penholders that search for more precise objectives through the CSDP quiver for the years to come²².

At this point, it is necessary, though, for us to perceive the division of labor between parties that are “authorized” for the EU’s territorial defence task and those that are responsible for handling conflicts and crises within the EU’s landscape²³. Maybe, the current infrastructure should be re-evaluated as long as we want a better coordination in such cases when the mandates overlap. For example, both the NATO and EU, when dealing with hybrid threats, share a common “vision”. They are moving close to the “same lines”²⁴.

The Strategic Compass could be a real tool for guidance in the EU’s internal nexus when dealing with a crisis. What is meant is that, even if there is an already civil-military armory against i.e. terrorism, illegal migration etc. and we see mechanisms like FRONTEX and EUROPOL to be at the front line, however, the lack of political will among EU member states and the bureaucratic procedures poses obstacles for quick, decisive, and effective counteraction.

Another key issue that needs to be featured is based on the minimum compromise between EU member states to provide personnel and assets²⁵ when the EU is calling for a convergence in order to deal with a difficult situation not to mention a crisis. We could ascribe this problem to the dissimilar scale of prioritization of threats among EU member states. Migration, for example, does not actually trigger the same problems for all the Europeans.

²¹ “European Strategic Autonomy and the Use of Force”, *Fighting for Europe*, Egmont Paper 103, Sven Biscop, Egmont Institute, January 2019,

<https://www.egmontinstitute.be/content/uploads/2019/01/EP103.pdf?type=pdf>, p.5-6

²² German Council on Foreign Relations, “The EU’s Strategic Compass and Its Four Baskets” Recommendations to Make the Most of It”, No.13, November 2020,

https://dgap.org/sites/default/files/article_pdfs/dgap-report-2020-13-en.pdf, p.6

²³ NATO, EU and UN areas.

²⁴ Brussels Summit Declaration Issued by the Heads of State and Government participating in the meeting of the North Atlantic Council in Brussels 11-12 July 2018, European Union’s Overall Strategy on Foreign and Security Policy, presented in June 2016,

https://eeas.europa.eu/sites/eeas/files/eugs_review_web_0.pdf, access 2-12-20

https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_156624.htm, access 15-12-20,

²⁵ EDM, European Defence Matters, What the first Coordinated Annual Review on Defence reveals, CARDS on the table, 2020 ISSUE 20, Charles Fries, <https://eda.europa.eu/docs/default-source/eda-magazine/edm20-web>, p.28



TOWARDS A STRATEGIC COMPASS

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The Strategic Compass in this case should bridge the gap between a common “mapping of threats” on the one hand and the “capability perspectives” on the other for all the EU member states.

Resilience

The latest decades, as it has already been mentioned, the European Union has been transformed into a forum that imbalances between states’ policies and conflicts of interest among actors have taken place, originated from multiple and diverse sources. We have confronted threats in a hybrid context and challenges that tested the EU’s capacity to remain decent to its commitments and priorities like the protection of the Union and its citizens.

In this direction, we have already met the buzz term of “resilience” and the need for the member states to act collectively in order to be able to reform, thus, withstand and recover from a situation that acts as a destabilizing factor.

But what do we mean when we have a discussion on EU’s ability to be resilient? We could say that:

“Resilience is the ability of an individual, a household, a community, a country or a region to withstand, cope, adapt, and quickly recover from stresses and shocks such as violence, conflict, drought and other natural disasters without compromising long-term development²⁶.”

To say nothing of the fact that beyond the all known vulnerabilities and challenges (for example a financial and economic crisis), the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the need for the Europeans to take more holistic action when it comes to security of supply and strategic stockpiling in situations that we pay the price with massive losses. Thus, the Union does need more solidarity among its member states.

²⁶ European Commission, Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection, Development and Cooperation – EuropeAid, “Building Resilience: The EU’s approach”, FACTSHEET, https://ec.europa.eu/echo/files/aid/countries/factsheets/thematic/EU_building_resilience_en.pdf, access 05-01-21



TOWARDS A STRATEGIC COMPASS

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The work for the Compass here, that needs to be done, is for it to determine the boundaries in a security and defence infrastructure. “*Resilience is [...] a dynamic concept that needs constant adaptation*”²⁷.

Humanitarian crises, efforts by state and non-state actors to destabilize peace and growth, climate change etc, all these are variables that must be evaluated in a collective context through which different bodies either institutional or NGO’s and/or of the private sector must be involved (holistic approach). The aim for the Strategic Compass would be to interlink these layers of engagement.

Capability Development

Equally important would be the discussion on the development of EU’s defence capabilities. If we may say, the frame on which the two previous baskets will be built on, would give directions to the drafters of the Strategic Compass to address the way and the means that member states should take action.

For example, if member states when trying to overhaul their abilities for operational action when dealing with cyberattacks and ongoing tensions in the Eastern Mediterranean, include planning for Article 42(7) TEU and 222 TFEU, this, unavoidably, would spark debates into paths associated with collective defence among those that would be lined up with more “European and autonomous” perspectives and those that would not²⁸.

Moreover, it is necessary to be highlighted that for the more coherent planning process, the Strategic Compass should be interconnected with the challenge posed by emerging technologies. Such a domain like Artificial Intelligence (AI) has implications that have not yet been clearly mapped but could help the EU enhance its security and defence threat and risk detection, its protection and preparation capabilities as well as its defence production capacities²⁹.

²⁷ German Council on Foreign Relations, “The EU’s Strategic Compass and Its Four Baskets” Recommendations to Make the Most of It”, No.13, November 2020, https://dgap.org/sites/default/files/article_pdfs/dgap-report-2020-13-en.pdf, p.8

²⁸ Wilfried Martens Centre for European Studies, “The Strategic Compass, Charting a New Course for the EU’s Defence and Security Policy”, Summary December 2020, Niklas Nováký, https://www.martenscentre.eu/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/CES_POLICY-BRIEF_TheStrategicCompass-V1.pdf, p.7-8

²⁹ European Union Institute for Security Studies (EUISS), Brief Issue, Artificial Intelligence, ‘What implications for EU security and defence?’. by Daniel Fiott and Gustav Lindstrom, November 2018, [file:///C:/Users/%CE%94%CE%B9%CE%BF%CE%BD%CF%85%CF%83%CE%AF%CE%B1/Dow nloads/Brief10AI\(1\).pdf](file:///C:/Users/%CE%94%CE%B9%CE%BF%CE%BD%CF%85%CF%83%CE%AF%CE%B1/Dow nloads/Brief10AI(1).pdf), access 06-01-21



TOWARDS A STRATEGIC COMPASS

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To this direction, the close coordination among EU Institutions and agencies like the Commission, the European External Action Service (EEAS), the European Defence Agency (EDA) and the European Defence Fund (EDF), are of vital importance.

What is more, there is still room for initiatives such as PESCO that could, create a *“positive dynamic for EU capability development.”*³⁰ CARD and the PESCO Strategic Review (PSR) will guide this effort by informing the forthcoming work on this capabilities and instruments cluster. PESCO projects have the potential to be the “vehicle” on which the EU through a collaborative approach could prioritize its operational ambitions as well as enable an economic convergence on its defence industrial market³¹. In this vein, the latest agreement regarding the participation of third states in PESCO³² will give rise to economies of scale for the European Union. The cash flow would gentrify an economic growth (at least for the participating member states) with more investments in R&T and R&D in the defence sector to be on the table.

Of course, the EU’s existing capabilities mechanisms like the Headline Goal Process (HLGP) should fit their purpose and be synchronized with the next PESCO phase 2021-2025.

The last CARD’s report assessment substantiates the fragmentation and lack of coherence in EU’s defence sector: *“existing capabilities are characterized by a very high diversity of types in major equipment and different events of modernization and of interoperability, including logistic systems and supply chains”*³³.

In such a case, maybe the Strategic Compass should need to establish a more accountable system with “checks and balances” for the member states in order for them to be more trustworthy to their engagement. Thus, with clear political will and a top-down approach balanced by the inputs of all member states a stable structure could be designed by avoiding all mistakes of the previous decades.

³⁰ German Council on Foreign Relations, “The EU’s Strategic Compass and Its Four Baskets” Recommendations to Make the Most of It”, No.13, November 2020, https://dgap.org/sites/default/files/article_pdfs/dgap-report-2020-13-en.pdf, p.11

³¹ Ibid, p.11-12

³² European Council, Council of the European Union, “EU defence cooperation: Council sets conditions for third-state participation in PESCO projects”, 5 November 2020 13:50, <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2020/11/05/eu-defence-cooperation-council-sets-conditions-for-third-state-participation-in-pesco-projects/>, access 5-11- 20

³³ EDM, European Defence Matters, What the first Coordinated Annual Review on Defence reveals, CARDS on the table, 2020 ISSUE 20, <https://eda.europa.eu/docs/default-source/eda-magazine/edm20-web>, p.5



TOWARDS A STRATEGIC COMPASS

Source: European Union External Action Service, Towards a Strategic Compass, Brussels, 20/11/2020 - 14:10, Factsheets

Partnerships

Last, but not least would be the issue on EU's partnership agenda. That is to say a "notion" derived from the Treaties, inside the core of the Union since for example regarding the EU's territorial defence, that is to be developed under the North Atlantic Treaty's umbrella.

Looking back on the matter of partnerships, we could characterize the Union as a "multiplier of cooperation", not only at a bilateral level when dealing with strategic partners like Brazil, US but also when developing a field of cooperation with international organizations like the ASEAN, the AU, the NATO etc.,. That indicates on the one hand its ability to act as a global power of stability and "reciprocity" and on the other its willingness to behave in that way.

To our disappointment, though, the revisionist and authoritarian behaviors against the EU by state and non-state actors, with the upper aim to destabilize the world order, recently, proved us that even the most institutionalized and well-developed partnerships – like the Alliance- are not so "immune" to consistent pressure³⁴.

Additionally, we have to say that since the Trump's Presidency, trust in US administration has been undermined. Although, Biden's election has "*strong foreign policy and transatlantic relations credentials*"³⁵, the Europeans now need to keep the momentum for more autonomous perspectives. Of course, both the US and the EU are tied and torn between them but maybe there are different perceptions for issues such as their approach in relation to China.

As HR/VP J. Borrell has declared at the "UNited for a New, Fair and Inclusive Multilateralism online International Conference":

"There is a second structural source of a retreat from multilateralism [...] The return of the political sovereigntism advocated by a growing number of states – [...] China, Russia and Turkey. They want to revise the multilateral system in one way or

³⁴ German Council on Foreign Relations, "The EU's Strategic Compass and Its Four Baskets" Recommendations to Make the Most of It", No.13, November 2020, https://dgap.org/sites/default/files/article_pdfs/dgap-report-2020-13-en.pdf, p.12

³⁵ In-depth Analysis, "No way back: Why the transatlantic future needs a stronger EU", Policy Department for External Relations, Directorate General for External Policies of the Union, PE 653.619 – November 2020, [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/IDAN/2020/653619/EXPO_IDA\(2020\)653619_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/IDAN/2020/653619/EXPO_IDA(2020)653619_EN.pdf), p.5



TOWARDS A STRATEGIC COMPASS

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another but retreating from the liberal vision of the world as it developed after the Second World War³⁶.

We should admit the “multipolarity” of the world again. For the time being as for China, that is the most stumbling block for America’s predominance³⁷.

In EU’s periphery, the latest US’ China policy triggered some kind of geopolitical ambiguity among the European leaders. We could accord this situation to the fact that the EU’s economy is intricately connected to both China and US in such domains of a great value like the technology sector.

Being in the middle of a war between these superpowers, it is not an amazingly comfortable role for the Union to play. Notwithstanding, the critical 5G technology, China is, definitely the leader but the European Nokia and Ericsson have a comparative advantage on the American ones³⁸.

However, as the European Commission’s President, Ursula von der Leyen firmly believes, there is an “*unbreakable bond*” between the EU and its transatlantic partner, based on common values no matter who is in the “White House” and despite that even all the decisions taken there may not be officially approved by the Europeans³⁹.

At this point, it is worth to be outlined the issue of the EU’s first Strategic Plan for Horizon Europe. With a budget of 100 billion euros for the seven years to come, “*Horizon Europe represents the largest multinational collaborative research and innovation investment in Europe and is open to participants worldwide⁴⁰*”.

Hence, the use of “*diplomacy of science*” would be of a paramount importance for the development of partnerships not only in the defence sector but elsewhere. The Horizon Europe which will be structured in three pillars will engage in thematic

³⁶ The EU in the multilateral system, Brussels, 18/09/2020 20:14, UNIQUE ID:200918_11, Speech by the High Representative/Vice-President Josep Borrell at the UNited for a New, Fair and Inclusive Multilateralism online International Conference, https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage_en/85399/The%20EU%20in%20the%20multilateral%20system, access 05-01-21

³⁷ In such a case, maybe, the NATO should keep watch on that issue as long as a possible contingency episode between our Americano- Asian “fellows” could be a possible scenario.

³⁸ In-depth Analysis, “No way back: Why the transatlantic future needs a stronger EU”, Policy Department for External Relations, Directorate General for External Policies of the Union, PE 653.619 – November 2020,

[https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/IDAN/2020/653619/EXPO_IDA\(2020\)653619_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/IDAN/2020/653619/EXPO_IDA(2020)653619_EN.pdf), p.8-9

³⁹ Ibid, p.9

⁴⁰ European Commission, “Orientations towards the first Strategic Plan for Horizon Europe”

https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/research_and_innovation/strategy_on_research_and_innovation/documents/ec_rtd_orientations-he-strategic-plan_122019.pdf, p.5, access 06-01-21



TOWARDS A STRATEGIC COMPASS

Source: European Union External Action Service, Towards a Strategic Compass, Brussels, 20/11/2020 - 14:10, Factsheets

such as among others are the digital, industry and space cluster and that of climate, energy and mobility⁴¹.

Finally, despite the political and institutional obstacles, the Strategic Compass could successfully be constructed on the net of partners for it to be interlinked with domains that compose the backbone of the EU's strategy to a long and "autonomous" project for providing with security, prosperity, and democracy, primarily, its citizens and, secondly, all those in need.

Concluding Remarks

It can be said that the Union is trying to optimize its already established defence toolbox that it has launched since 2016. As it has been, previously, mentioned, the Strategic Compass follows this logic. It seeks to provide new political guidance for the Union's security and defence policy, to facilitate the development of a shared strategic culture among the EU member states and to clarify the overall image of EU security and defence cooperation that post-2016 initiatives such as PESCO, CARD and the EDF have created.

The Strategic Compass process intends to be the EU's flagship security and defence initiative for the next 5-10 years. It focuses heavily on joint defence research and capability development projects to boost the competitiveness and autonomy of the European Defence Technological and Industrial Base (EDTIB).

At the moment, the Strategic Compass needs additional high-level political direction to identify the types of capabilities that the EU needs to become strategically autonomous and to strengthen the European pillar of NATO. The EU also needs to decide how it should approach major security challenges, including climate change, supply line security, strategic stockpiling and protection of critical infrastructure and the disruptive activities of authoritarian regimes, such as those in Russia, China and Turkey so as for it to be resilient to any ominous circumstances.

Of course, we would notice that it was not so clearly mentioned what is meant when the Europeans call for strategic autonomy. For example, as the HR/VP Josep Borrell has declared when describing his famous "Sinatra Doctrine" on the European strategy towards China:⁴²:

⁴¹ Ibid, p.2

⁴² Institute Montaigne, <https://www.institutmontaigne.org/en/blog/sinatra-doctrine-building-united-european-front>, "The Sinatra Doctrine: Building a United European Front"



TOWARDS A STRATEGIC COMPASS

Source: European Union External Action Service, Towards a Strategic Compass, Brussels, 20/11/2020 - 14:10, Factsheets

“To be able to continue taking political decisions autonomously as Europeans, we need to invest in strategic sovereignty.”

But it is necessary, though, for us in order to interpret this mantra namely the “Strategic Autonomy” that there is no aim for the Strategic Compass at changing either the European Global Strategy (EUGS) of 2016 or the established framework of the Treaties regarding EU’s territorial defence perspectives. Nevertheless, the Strategic Compass would clarify the way as well as the means in order for the EU’s defence “people of the first line” to better implement and operationalize all those aspects of the EUGS for a more united and coherent European defence mechanism.

It should always be kept in mind that the rules based international order has been put under unprecedented strain, by a variety of reasons, including COVID-19 pandemic. The Strategic Compass could add real value by increasing the level of agreement among EU member states “on the big picture” the extent to which new EU security strategies and doctrines should become accustomed to.

It seems that it is now the momentum for the European Union to capitalize its tools, to “keep abreast” with the new challenging environment and be resilient. Otherwise, the European “solidarity perspective” would look more like a “loose – leaf compilation than a concerted effort”.