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THE STRATEGIC COMPASS FOR SECURITY AND DEFENSE IN LIGHT OF THE PROSPECTS FOR THE EU COMMON SECURITY AND DEFENSE POLICY**

Abstract: The defence policy of the EU has from the very outset remained in the shadow of NATO, as the primary and dominant defence forum for EEC/EC/EU member states. The challenges of the multipolar world, however, may make it in the interest of NATO itself that the military capabilities of the EU be finally developed. The Strategic Compass for Security and Defence is at the same time a common security assessment and a plan of action for strengthening the EU's security and defence capabilities by 2030. It is not a strategy, since CSDP is still not able to generate a proactive vision of, and a requisite will how to promote EU security interests. The ongoing shift of US security focus to the Pacific makes the development of such capacity on the part of the EU a bare necessity.

Keywords: EU Common Security and Defence Policy, Strategic Compass for Security and Defence, NATO, constitutionalization, EU army.

1. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

The Strategic Compass for Security and Defence is an ambitious plan of action for strengthening the EU's security and defence policy by 2030. Although it was adopted in March 2022, almost a month after the beginning of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, it had been in the making for more than a year before that event.

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The Common Security and Defence Policy (the CSDP) is both an integral and crucial segment of the EU Common Foreign and Security Policy (the CFSP).

There is a long line of failures to form a European army after the World War II. Jean Monnet's proposal for a European Defence Community, inspired by the Korean War, was rejected by the French National Assembly in 1954. Following this event, the Treaty of Brussels was modified at the 1954 Paris Conference, so that the Western Union was transformed into the Western European Union (the WEU). Mutual assistance in case of aggression was one of the principle goals of the WEU. The inclusion of Western Germany in the WEU served as formal grounds for ending its occupation. Due to its responsibilities having been transferred to other international fora, the WEU remained dormant until its 30-year anniversary, when it was reactivated by the Rome Declaration, which called for increased cooperation among its members in the field of security policy.

The two steps that the WEU took towards forming a common EU-wide defence capacity were both instigated by the wars in former Yugoslavia. First, in June 1992, in response to the outbreak of the wars in Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, the WEU adopted the Petersberg Declaration, outlining certain military tasks, referred to thereafter as the "Petersberg tasks", of humanitarian, peacekeeping and peace-making (including crisis-management) nature, which the WEU should be empowered to do. The Petersberg tasks are the direct precursor of the present-day CSDP. The enactment of the Petersberg Declaration coincided with the 59th Franco-German summit in La Rochelle, heads of state of the two countries signed a document whereby Eurocorps was formed as a Franco-German joint headquarters and army unit (having itself been transformed from the joint Franco-German brigade, which had become operational in 1991) and other WEU members were invited to join it. Presently, the Eurocorps comprises multinational standing army headquarters (with six "framework" and five associate member countries), disposing of a command support brigade, which is manned as needed, a 500-strong command support battalion, and a 5,000-strong Franco-German joint brigade. The Petersberg Tasks were thereafter incorporated in the Amsterdam Treaty of 1997, having thus beens taken over by the EU from the WEU. According to the treaty regulating the Eurocorps, which was signed in 2004 and entered into force in 2009, the scope of Eurocorps' tasks comprise "evacuation missions, humanitarian missions, peacekeeping or crisis management." The Eurocorps thus represents a standing commanding infrastructure for other common EU military capabilities, the development of which ensued, such as the European Rapid Reaction Force (the ERRF).

Second, in December 1998, a Franco-British Joint Declaration was adopted at St. Malo in response to the quickly developing hostilities in Kosovo province, Serbia. In the declaration it was asserted that the EU "needs to be in a position to play its full role on the international stage… To this end, the Union must have the capacity for autonomous action, backed up by credible military forces, the means to decide to use them, and a readiness to do so, in order to respond to international

crises."[1] In line with this new initiative, during the December 1999 Cologne European Council meeting a military capability target, referred to as the "Helsinki Headline Goal", was set for 2003, with the aim of developing a European Rapid Reaction Force (the ERRF). According to the Helsinki Headline Goal, the EU pledged itself to be able to deploy rapidly and sustain forces capable of the full range of the Petersberg tasks, numbering up to 15 brigades or 50,000-60,000 soldiers, to be capable of intervening in any crisis in which European interests would be affected. The forces would need to be self-reliant, ready for deployment within 60 days and at distance of 4,000 km, and sustainable in the field for a year, which meant that in order to secure sufficient rotation capacity, the force would need to number 180,000 soldiers. These numbers mimicked the size of the implementation force in Bosnia and Herzegovina, led by NATO (IFOR).[2] In quantitative terms, the headline goal had been mostly met by 2003, in terms of declared commitments, at least in form declared commitments by Member States. These commitments and the resulting capacity have never been tested. However, even on a theoretical or purely declaratory level, a number of capability shortfalls were perceived, particularly in the areas of strategic transport, strategic reconnaissance and command and control capabilities. The European Capability Action Plan (ECAP) constituted a first step towards addressing those deficiencies.

On 12 December 2003, the European Council adopted the European Security Strategy (the ESS) "A Secure Europe in a Better World". The ESS outlined the European Union's strategic position following the paradigm shifts incurred by the events of1989, 1990 and 11 September 2001. It was supposed to serve as a basis both for strategic dialogue with the most important partners of the EU, namely the United States, and for defining the European Union's common security interests.

The Helsinki Headline Goal was expanded, both in terms of quality and quantity of required military capacity, at the 2004 June Council meeting in Brussels, by way adoption of the Headline Goal 2010. The update comprised commitment of the Member States "to be able by 2010 to respond with rapid and decisive action applying a fully coherent approach to the whole spectrum of crisis management operations covered by the Treaty on the European Union. …As indicated by the European Security Strategy this might also include joint disarmament operations, the support for third countries in combating terrorism and security sector reform. The EU must be able to act before a crisis occurs and preventive engagement can avoid that a situation deteriorates. The EU must retain the ability to conduct concurrent operations thus sustaining several operations simultaneously at different levels of engagement." The Headline Goal 2010 thus did not elaborate or develop the Petersberg Tasks further, apart from introducing rather vague concepts of preventive engagement and disarmament operations.

1 Joint declaration, British–French Summit, St Malo, 3–4 Dec. 1998.

2 Christoph O Meyer, Ton Van Osch, Yf Reykers, "From EU battlegroups to Rapid Deployment Capacity: learning the right lessons?", *International Affairs*, Volume 100, Issue 1, 2024, 181–201, 190.

In the new document, the focus shifted from the ERRF to the new Battlegroup Concept. Said concept had been first proposed at bi-lateral Franco-British summits in Le Touquet in February 2003 and in London in November of the same year. References were made to the need for "credible Battlegroup sized forces" – of about 1,500 soldiers each with appropriate transport and sustainability…"[3] A battlegroup was conceived as a highly trained, battalion-sized formation (numbering 1,500 men), including all combat and service support personnel and resources for deploying it, within 15-days notice, and sustaining it for at least 30 days. According to the Headline Goal 2010, there were supposed to be maximum two battlegroups on stand-bay, each for a 6-month period.

The Franco-German Declaration after the London meeting, of November 2003, specifically referred to the successful example of the first rapid deployment of EU military force, which happened earlier that year within the framework of Eurocorps. It was the Operation Artemis, which comprised deployment of 1,800 troops to Democratic Republic of Congo, which intervened over the course of three months until a larger UN-organized mission was assembled and deployed. The troops for Operation Artemis were provided by 12 nations, with France acting as the framework nation. While the military insights into the experience gained by Operation Artemis suggested that 1,500 – 1,800 troops were a bare minimum for any force, one which could remain on the ground only for a limited amount of time before more powerful force, presumably under the NATO command, would take over, the political process within the EU in the course of which the Headline Goal 2010 was articulated used the 1,500-troop force as a strict limitation for the size of the rapid intervention force.[4]

In line with programme adopted as follow up to the Headline Goal 2010, the European Defence Agency was established by a Joint Action of the EU in July 2004,[5] with the following key roles: (a) identifying future defence capability requirements, in both quantitative and qualitative terms (forces, equipment, interoperability and training); (b) continuing to work with NATO through the Capability Development Mechanism; (c) encouraging member states to meet their capability commitments in the ECAP process; (d) promoting the harmonization of military requirements; and (e) pursuing collaborative activities to make up shortfalls, and defining financial priorities for capability development and acquisition. The aim was to progress from simply determining EU-level capability targets to putting in place institutional capacity for strengthening

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3 European Parliament, Directorate General for the External Policies of the Union, "The European Security and Defence Policy: from the Helsinki Headline Goal to the EU Battlegroups", Note, 12 December 2006, 17.

4 Christoph O Meyer, Ton Van Osch, Yf Reykers, "From EU battlegroups to Rapid Deployment Capacity: learning the right lessons?", *International Affairs*, Volume 100, Issue 1, January 2024, pp. 181–201, 191.

5 Council of the European Union, "Council Joint Action 2004/551/CFSP of 12 July 2004 on the establishment of the European Defence Agency", *Official Journal of the European Union*, Vol. L245 (17 July 2004), 17–28.

liaisons with national defence establishments and ensuring that the resources and commitments to achieve the defence capacity targets be built into national resource planning systems.

A marked transformation of the EU defence posture may be dated to the period 2014-2016. According to certain authors, the change should be attributed to the Russian annexation of Crimea of 2014, the appointment of Federica Mogherini as High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and Vice-President of the European Commission in the same year, as well as the Brexit of 2016.[6] We believe other major factors were the election of Donald Trump as US President in 2016, in view of Trump's vocal insistence that the US should not be paying for Europe's security, the collapse of post-Gaddafi Libya, the Syrian civil war and the migration crisis. The change was articulated in the form of the Global Strategy for the European Union's Foreign and Security Policy (the EUGS), which the European Council adopted on 28 June 2016, coincidentally but rather symbolically, only five days after Brexit. The document, which CFSP High Representative Federica Mogherini spent a year preparing, formulated the strategy around the concept of resilience of the EU vis-à-vis internal and external threats. Having a political and not a legally binding nature, it replaced the European Security Strategy of 2003.

In December 2017, a Permanent Structured Cooperation programme (PESCO) was established by the Council of the EU, raising cooperation in respect of defence among EU Member States to a qualitatively new level. The 26 states participating in PESCO do so by way of legally binding commitments, which differentiates PESCO from all other similar programmes.

As a significant milestone, the establishment of the European Peace Facility (the EPF), an off-budget fund with the weight of 5 billion Euro was set up in 2021 for funding all external actions with defence and military implications during the course of the period from 2021 until 2027. As an example of a major increase of scope of EU defence cooperation made possible by the EPF, it suffices to note that in April 2023 it was decided that the funding for the first fully live EU military exercises be provided from the EPF.

The outlined development of the military capabilities of the EC and the EU over the course of the past three decades shows that the major steps were taken only in response to actual crises, in fact war, impacting the EU. This resembles the institutional development of the EU, which over the course of roughly the same period gained traction only when a response to a crises was necessary.[7] On a more conceptual level, the fact that steps were taken only in response to actual crises means that it was only in times of crises that sufficient political will could have been formed

6 Christoph O Meyer, Ton Van Osch, Yf Reykers, "From EU battlegroups to Rapid Deployment Capacity: learning the right lessons?", *International Affairs*, Volume 100, Issue 1, January 2024, 181–201, 194.

7 For a more detailed presentation of this claim, see Maja Lukić Radović, "Crises and Institutional Transformations of the EU", *Iustinianus Primus Law Review,* Volume 12, Special Issue, 2021, 1–13.

for making such steps. In other words, such fact suggests that the process of constitutionalization of the EU, whereby it becomes a standalone guarantor of its interests, independent of any particular Member State, is far from over.[8]

2. THE STATUS OF THE COMMON SECURITY AND DEFENSE POLICY

The creation of CSDP dates to the 1999 Cologne Council meeting, the same one in which the goal of developing a 60,000-men strong rapid reaction force with overseas reach was agreed upon. These developments were instigated directly by the 1998-1999 war in Kosovo.

The CSDP is a crucially important component of the CFSP. As Cremona has pointed out, the CFSP/CSDP is both a distinct Union competence and a policy field.[9] The CSDP is a very young policy in comparison with most other EU policies of similar importance. Since its creation in 1999 it has remained confined almost exclusively to a conceptual level, with few practical implications focused on the cooperation with NATO. With the onset of political and security crises the EU faced during the second decade of the 21st century, i.e. the migration crisis, precipitated by the climate change as well as by the (first) civil war in Libya of 2011 and the war in Syria, followed by the internal rift with certain Member States in the East regarding the rule of law, the Russian occupation of Crimea in 2016 and the Covid-19 pandemic, the CSDP began to develop itself. Certain authors pointed out also to the fact that the scope of foreign policy substantially increased during the same period, for it had to deal with threats ranging from cyber security to Ebola epidemic.[10] Finally, after all the enumerated developments came the Covid 19 pandemic, which has all led to a substantial reduction of the liberal world order in which the EU has developed itself and for which it had only been prepared.

Joint defence spending and cooperation in the realm of defence within the European Union remains an exception, instead of a rule. In 2020, cooperative equipment spending fell to 11 percent of total defence spending, three times less than the European Union's target of 35 percent.[11] Spending on cooperative research

8 For a comprehensive view of the subject process, see Maja Lukić, „How long before a Bundle of Treaties becomes Sovereign? A Legal Perspective on the Choices before the EU", in: SEE|EU Cluster of Excellence in European and International Law, *South Eastern Europe and the European Union – Legal Aspects*, Verlag Alma Mater, Saarbrücken, Germany, 2015, 127–137.

9 Marise Cremona, "The Position of CFSP/CSDP in the EU's constitutional architecture", *Research Handbook on the EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy* (eds. Steven Blockmans, Panos Koutrakos), Edward Elgar Publishing, Cheltenham – Northampton, 2018, 6.

10 Steven Blockmans, Panos Koutrakos, "Introduction", *Research Handbook on the EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy* (eds. Steven Blockmans, Panos Koutrakos), Edward Elgar Publishing, Cheltenham – Northampton 2018, 1–3.

11 EDA, Defence Data 2020–2021: Key Findings and Analysis (Brussels: EDA, 2022), 15, https://eda.europa.eu/publications-and-data/brochures/eda-defence-data-2020-2021, 1 May 2024.

and development suffers from the same downward trend: in 2020 it reached the record low of 6 percent of overall investment in research and development, which was more than three times less than the EDA's 20 percent target.[12] The downward trend in cooperative research and development ("research and technology") is present since 2008, constantly failing to meet the 20 percent target threshold.[13]

The EU Battlegroups have never been used since becoming operational in 2007, despite the fact that there were several occasions on which their use would have been justified and/or needed.[14] The subject lack of use has been explained in academic literature mostly by structural obstacles, namely lack of political will, non-functioning command and control structures and unreliable funding.[15] Soon after they become operational in 2007, it became more and more difficult to secure that at any given point in time there was a battlegroup of standby, indicating that political support among Member States for the mechanism was diminishing.[16]

As has been presented in the first part of this paper, there is long string of efforts aimed at creating an EU army, which thus far has not come near success. Some authors argue that the failure may be attributed to a weakness of the EU identity – national identities are still much stronger than the common one.[17] It seems to us that the importance is secondary; the primary is the allegiance to a certain political community. The EU still lacks democratic legitimacy, through which its citizens would be able to develop perception of their belonging to the EU as their primary political community.

One major change of global security environment looms large over the CSDP of the EU: the shift of the US towards Pacific. The EU has thrived under NATO shield since its very inception. The shift, which is already taking place, puts a burden of an entirely new order of magnitude on the EU.

3. THE STRATEGIC COMPASS

The Strategic Compass for Security and Defence of the EU (the Strategic Compass) was formally endorsed by the European Council on 24 March 2022. Although this happened after the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the Compass was

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12 *Ibid.*, 15.

13 EDA, Defence Data 2021–2022: Key Findings and Analysis (Brussels: EDA, 2023), 15, https://eda.europa.eu/docs/default-source/brochures/2022-eda_defencedata_web.pdf, 1 May 2024.

14 Christoph O Meyer, Ton Van Osch, Yf Reykers, "From EU battlegroups to Rapid Deployment Capacity: learning the right lessons?", *International Affairs*, Volume 100, Issue 1, 2024, 181–201, 181.

15 *Ibid.*, 183.

16 *Ibid.*, 193.

17 Vasiliki Charitaki, "Reasons behind European Union's Inadequacy to Create a European Army", Finabel Committee edition (ed. J. E. Colombo), *Food for Thought* 11-2022, 12, https://finabel.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/49.-Reasons-behind-European-Unions-inadequacy-to-create-a-European-Army-2.pdf, 1 May 2024.

endorsed in the form which had been prepared several months earlier. It had been in the making since the second half of 2020.[18] Effectively the only change prompted by the invasion was the foreword by Josep Borrell, High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, titled "Europe's Geopolitical Awakening".

The Strategic Compass stands in the line of succession of strategic defence policy documents of the EU, the most significant of which were the European Security Strategy of 2003 and the Global Strategy for the European Union's Foreign and Security Policy (the EUGS), of 2016.

The document is divided into four work strands, titled Act, Secure, Invest and Partner.

The principal element of the "Act" component of the Compass, the development of the EU Rapid Deployment Capacity of up to 5,000 troops, which is described as a "modular" force, deployable in different phases of operations (entry force, reserve reinforcement, securing an exit), in "non-permissive" (i.e. hostile) environments. RDC is supposed to become operational by 2025. As opposed to the Battlegroup Concept, which was land-based, the RDC explicitly includes air, land and maritime components, as well as strategic enables. The inclusion of the reference to the capability to secure an exit was evidently motivated by the rather bleak performance of the US withdrawal from Afghanistan in 2021. In the document, it is explicitly stated that the RDC represents a modification of the Battlegroup Concept.[19] The document, however, remains silent in relation to what happens to the commitment to maintain a 60,000-strong ERRF.

The "Secure" work strand comprises boosting EU intelligence capacity, creation of the EU Hybrid Toolbox and further development of EU Cyber Defence Policy, Coordinated Maritime Presences, and the EU Space Strategy. The "Invest" basket is centred around enhancing capacity and use of the PESCO and the European Defense Fund programmes. The "Partner" strand emphasizes the strategic partnership with NATO, as well as cooperation with regional partners, namely the OSCE, Australia and the ASEAN.

Prominent changes to the political discourse of EU officials introduced by the Strategic Compass is the emphasis on the mutual-assistance clause in EU Treaties, requiring Member States to aid a Member State facing aggression, as well open reference to Russia as a threat. In contrast, the language used in relation to China is much more subdued: China is described as a "partner for cooperation", an "economic competitor" and a "systemic rival." In addition, the fact that China is "increasingly more assertive" in South-East Asia is also mentioned.[20] Another visible change in the Strategic Compass in comparison with the EUGS is the

18 Christian Moelling, Torben Schuetz, "The EU's Stratetic Compass and Its Four Baskets", *DGAP Report* No. 3, November 2020, https://dgap.org/sites/default/files/article_pdfs/dgap-report-2020-13-en.pdf, 1 May 2024

19 Council of the European Union, A Strategic Compass for Security and Defence – For a European Union that protects its citizens, values and interests and contributes to international peace and security, Brussels, 21 March 2022, 7371/22 (the Strategic Compass), 25.

20 Strategic Compass, 20.

omission of reference to fostering "the resilience of states and societies to the East and South of the EU as a means to achieve greater interconnectedness, prosperity and security"; according to Bargués, "it seems as if the EU is retreating from shared responsibilities and collective action with external players, while giving priority to European security interests", since in the Strategic Compass, "resilience only refers to 'our' resilience, the resilience of member states, which needs to be bolstered to respond to diverse crises and threats. Concepts such as 'multilateral governance' or 'global governance' are nowhere to be found in the text."[21]

Finally, a prominent feature of the threat assessment comprised in the Strategic Compass is the numerosity of references to hybrid threats and hybrid tactics. Considering the complexity of the present EU relations with China, it seems as though the emphasis on hybrid threats complements the relatively soft language used in explicit references to China.

Overall, the Strategic Compass seems to be a crossover between a common threat assessment and an agenda, but not much of a strategy. Blockmans et al. correctly noted that the EU should not be satisfied with it, because sticking to it would mean that the EU would remain limited to reacting to threats, instead of formulating a genuine strategy for promoting its own interests.[22]

4. CONCLUSION

Every major step towards a stronger and more unified CSDP was instigated, solely or substantially by an actual war – the Petersberg tasks of the WEU by the wars in Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, the formation of Eurocorps and the Helsinki Headline Goal by the Kosovo war, the Headline Goal 2010 by the Afghanistan and Second Iraq Wars, the EU Global Strategy by the Russian annexation of Crimea, collapse of Libya, the war in Syria and the migration crisis. Similarly, the adoption of the Strategic Compass coincided with the Russian invasion of Ukraine, although that document had been in preparation for a better part of the year that preceded it. Both concrete forms of EU rapid reaction forces that preceded the 5,000-strong RDC planned in the Compass, the ERRF and the Battlegroups, were modelled after real-world examples of intervening/peace-keeping forces (IFOR and Operation Artemis force, respectively). These two facts each by itself, but particularly when taken in conjunction, show that the EU lacks the means to form political will, by transmitting appropriate information in advance to its democratic constituents and allowing them to form informed

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21 Pol Bargués, "The EU Strategic Compass: A Blueprint for a European Defensive and Securitisation Policy", *JOINT Brief,* No. 16, March 2022, 3, https://www.iai.it/sites/default/files/joint_b_16.pdf, 1 May 2024

22 Steven Blockmans, Dylan Macchiarini, Crosson Zachary Paikin, "The EU's Strategic Compass – A guide to reverse strategic shrinkage?", *CEPS Policy Insights* No 2022-14/March 2022, 8–9, https://cdn.ceps.eu/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/CEPS-PI2022-14_EU-Strategic-Compass.pdf, 1 May 2024

decisions, to act proactively in the sphere of common defence and security, and, consequently, lacks institutional capacity to form vision of how defence security threats should be tackled in an optimal and creative manner, as well as to take responsibility for taking such action without showing actual real-world examples of similar action.

That is why probably the most promising elements of the Strategic Compass are its proclamations of global challenges threatening the very core of the EU, as well as the plans for enhancing joint intelligence gathering and analysis. Neither these, however, nor the increased common defence budget and the increased and multi-domain enabled rapid reaction force, may not mean anything without political capacity to take accountable decisions to act swiftly, energetically and decisively once the need for such action arises. Development of such capacity, however, stands outside the realm of the CSDP, concerning the very core of the EU constitutionality. In view of the ongoing shift of the US security focus to the Pacific, such development on the part of the EU seems necessary if the EU purports to have at least a fair chance to uphold its interests and values in the security vacuum that the subject shift shall generate.

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Summary

The defence policy of the EU has from the very outset remained in the shadow of NATO, as the primary and dominant defence forum for EEC/EC/EU member states. The challenges of the multipolar world, however,

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may make it in the interest of NATO itself that the military capabilities of the EU be finally developed. The Strategic Compass for Security and Defence is at the same time a common security assessment and a plan of action for strengthening the EU's security and defence capabilities by 2030. It is not a strategy, since CSDP is still not able to generate a proactive vision of, and a requisite will how to promote EU security interests. The ongoing shift of US security focus to the Pacific makes the development of such capacity on the part of the EU a bare necessity.

Keywords: EU Common Security and Defence Policy, Strategic Compass for Security and Defence, NATO, constitutionalization, EU army.