

Una brújula estratégica para la seguridad y la defensa de la Unión Europea. ¿Un documento más?

Resumen:

El pasado 21 de marzo, el Consejo Europeo aprobó unánimemente el documento conocido como la «Brújula Estratégica», que pretende concretar el nivel de ambición de la Unión en su acción exterior, así como a fomentar una cultura común de seguridad y defensa. Pero, a parte de un reducido número de nuevas iniciativas, el documento parece agrupar una amplia panoplia de deseos e intenciones que habrá que comprobar si se llevan a cabo, en qué grado y, en dicho caso, la eficacia de las mismas. En el presente trabajo se analiza dicho documento de una manera crítica.

Palabras clave:

Brújula Estratégica, Unión Europea, autonomía estratégica, OTAN, defensa

How to cite this document:

PONTIJAS CALDERÓN, José Luis. *A strategic compass for the security and defence of the European Union. Another document?* IEEE Analysis Paper 42/2022.
https://www.ieeee.es/Galerias/fichero/docs_analisis/2022/DIEEEA42_2022_JOSPON_UE_ENG.pdf and/or [bie³ link](#) (accessed on day/month/year)

Introduction

On 16 June 2020, defence ministers agreed to develop a strategic compass for security and defence (Council of the European Union, 2020), an idea forged during the German Presidency of the Council of the European Union (EU). The initiative was developed over a two-year period, ending during the French Presidency, following its approval by the Council on 21 March 2022 (Council of the EU, 2022).

The document aims to specify the Union's level of ambition as a security provider on the international stage. In addition, the process is intended to contribute to fostering a common security and defence culture, which Brussels has traditionally identified as one of the fundamental weaknesses of the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP). The process was developed in two phases:

- Phase 1: Threat analysis.
- Phase 2: Preparation of the "Strategic Compass" (throughout 2021 and until its approval in March 2022) based on the above analysis.

It is hoped that the document and the actions deriving from it will contribute to the development of a common security and defence culture, which will facilitate the EU's external action, having previously been impossible to establish a shared understanding of its purpose. The fact that the Strategic Compass has been endorsed by the Council (which neither of the two previous European strategies were, but were only "annotated") indicates the full support it has received from Member States.

The title of the document leaves little doubt as to its intent: "A Strategic Compass for Security and Defence: for a European Union that protects its citizens, defends its values and interests, and contributes to international peace and security". A declaration of intent from the outset.

The document (Council of the EU, 2022) is divided into seven key chapters:

- A synthesis, which gives a general idea of the highlights of what is stated in the document.
- An introduction, which expresses the ideas guiding the drafting of the document: multilateralism, values, complementarity with NATO, etc.
- An analysis of the world we face, both in general and in our strategic environment, and of emerging and transnational threats and challenges.

- The four building blocks that bring together the aims to "make the EU a stronger and more capable security provider", are respectively entitled: act, secure, invest and partner.

Each of these chapters will be discussed below.

The Strategic Compass

Beginning with the recognition of the fact that war has returned to Europe and after stressing that the EU, with 450 million citizens, is the largest single market in the world and the largest source of development aid, the second paragraph recognises complementarity with NATO, albeit under the principles of inclusiveness, reciprocity and the Union's decision-making autonomy. This in itself is already a de facto major self-limitation on strategic autonomy, indeed arguably the most important if not the only one, with the aggravating factor that it is self-imposed. One might think that the interests of the US, the Alliance's chief executive and practically plenipotentiary, would be enshrined.

It is recognised that the crisis of multilateralism is leading to more conflictual international relations, where soft power is used in an increasingly coercive manner, with the return of power politics, which challenges human rights and democratic values. The conclusion is that "... the EU and its Member States must invest more in their security and defence to become stronger political and security actors ... to build a stronger and more capable Europe as a security provider...".

It is made clear that the vision proposed in the document, which aims to "... help to build a common strategic culture, to strengthen our unity and solidarity and, above all, to increase our capacity and willingness to act together", has a time limit of 5 to 10 years.

In short, it argues that through the commitment of the Union and its Member States, the Strategic Compass:

- Provides a common assessment of the European strategic environment
- Brings greater coherence and unity of purpose.
- Sets out new actions and means
- Specifies clear objectives and milestones to measure progress.

In the section "the world we face", establishes that the threat analysis will be reviewed at least every three years. It is not the purpose of this study to make a detailed analysis of

the multidimensional challenges and threats envisaged by the EU, but it must be noted that the EU presents itself as a strong advocate of effective multilateralism and an open, rules-based international order based on human rights, fundamental freedoms, universal values and international law, in which the use of force and coercion has no place. Russia and China feature prominently. The former as a clear and multifaceted threat, especially militarily since the invasion of Ukraine in February. The second as a systemic partner, competitor and rival, who is increasingly involved in regional tensions.

Special mention should be made of the fundamental principles on which European security has been built, as enshrined in the UN Charter and the founding documents of the OSCE (Helsinki Final Act and the Charter of Paris). To defend these principles, it expresses a willingness to build closer relations with like-minded partners and countries in the UN, NATO and the G7, with a prominent place reserved for the US as the "most important and unconditional partner".

The section concludes with a call for the EU to urgently take greater responsibility for its own security by "acting in its neighbourhood and elsewhere in the world" in cooperation with partners, but also alone when necessary.

The ambiguous statement "other parts of the world" suggests a willingness to play a global role as a guarantor of peace and international law. However, based on experience, when this is attempted in areas far from Europe, some member states will find it very difficult to achieve unanimity. In any case, the will has been clearly expressed and, more importantly, it is again stressed that a stronger and more capable Union in terms of security and defence complements NATO "...which remains the basis of the collective defence of its members". Nonetheless, however much the EU is trying to boost its strategic autonomy, even having global ambitions, it is simultaneously limiting itself to a role as a mere complement to NATO. This is somewhat surprising, because in principle the Atlantic Alliance would limit its action to collective defence, that is, from the borders inwards and not to all the countries of the Union, with the famous Art 5 only applying to the member states of the Alliance, leaving countries such as Finland and Sweden outside the "complement".

The document then goes on to detail each of the four main lines of action proposed for progress in the fields of security and defence.

Act

The first of the four main lines of action proposed by the Strategic Compass is to "act", to operate promptly in the five major strategic domains: land, sea, air, cyberspace and outer space. In this, it would not differ from the individual action that each Member State might take, within its constraints, except that the Union wishes to do so through the so-called "integrated approach", i.e. by making full and coherent use of all the policies and instruments at its disposal, alongside the civilian and military dimensions of the CSDP, with particular reference to crisis management. To this end, it differentiates between two fundamental aspects: performance and preparation.

In terms of action, the aim is to gain speed, competence and efficiency in decision-making and subsequent action, which needs to not only be faster but also more decisive and flexible to be able to carry out the full spectrum of crisis management. To this end, an "EU Rapid Deployment Capability" will be created, consisting in "a modular force of up to 5,000 troops comprising land, air and maritime components, with strategic support elements". This capability would be dedicated to rescue and evacuation operations, and also to the initial phase of stabilisation operations, through "a substantial modification of battlegroups" to make them a more robust and flexible tool.

This attempt to move forward, based on an initiative, that of the battle groups, is both striking and has not worked. And it has not worked, not because it was designed inadequately operationally (since its design is flexible enough to adapt to a wide range of missions), or because there were no opportunities to put it into operation (in crises such as those in the Central African Republic, Mali and Libya), but because of a lack of political will, the Achilles' heel of the CSDP. The question is, if there has been no political will for an initiative that envisaged the commitment of some 1,500 troops (plus the corresponding support elements), will there be political will for a more ambitious initiative that requires not only a greater military and economic effort, but also the fundamental elements of any strategic deployment, some of which are largely lacking? Political will will continue to be the weakest link in this entire initiative, and will therefore be the measure of its effectiveness.

To try to alleviate this problem to the maximum, the aim is to make the decision-making process more flexible through a possible reinterpretation of Article 44 of the Treaty on European Union and the use of constructive abstention, which would allow a group of states to take a decision to act within the framework of the Union. To

encourage the participation of the partners, there is also the intention to extend the possibilities of financing common costs.

Furthermore, there is a desire to make greater use of the European Peace Facility, so that military equipment can be provided to non-EU partners, as has already been done in the case of Ukraine. In addition, the aim is to improve coordination between the various initiatives and instruments available to support non-member partners, and to improve coordination between civilian and military missions, as well as with other European-led missions and operations in the same or adjacent areas.

Civilian missions will receive a major boost to be able to deploy faster, precisely 200 civilian experts in 30 days, speeding up the decision process, strengthening operational planning, improving personnel recruitment and improving response tools. There is also a desire to enhance cooperation between the CSDP and actors such as EUROPOL, EUROJUST, CEPOL and FRONTEX, improving synergy between them.

Likewise, command and control capabilities will be strengthened with a substantial increase in personnel and two planning and conduct units for improved communications, the Military Planning and Conduct Capability (MPCC) and the Civilian Planning and Conduct Capability (CPCC). The coordination unit between the two, the Joint Support Coordination Cell, will also be strengthened.

The objective of the "preparing together" section of the document includes exercises that may be required to prepare for both crisis management missions and for civilian and military operations and missions. It also includes the ambition to equip itself with intelligence capabilities (including geospatial means) that enable early warning together with advanced planning ahead of crises, based on adapted and regularly updated scenarios, in which military mobility will be present. Preparedness and interoperability through civilian and military exercises in all domains are considered of paramount importance and contribute to forging a common strategic culture.

As a summary of the objectives of the "act" section, the following are highlighted:

- A Troop Rotation Cycle Record will be agreed by 2022 for the Union's civilian and military missions.
- By mid-2022, military field missions will need to be adapted to improve their effectiveness.

- By the end of 2022, liaison will be established in the stage of operations between EUNAVFOR Atlanta and the Maritime Mission in the Strait of Hormuz, as well as in our missions in the Sahel.
- By the second half of 2022, other maritime areas of interest will be considered, in addition to the Gulf of Guinea and the expansion of the Coordinated Maritime Presence to the northwest Indian Ocean.
- By 2023, a decision will be taken on the practical modalities for the implementation of Article 44 TEU, allowing a group of capable Member States to plan and conduct a mission or operation within the framework of the Union and under the political control of the Council.
- By 2023, the military concept for aviation security operations will be agreed.
- A new Civil CSDP package will be adopted by mid-2023, with the aim of being able to deploy a civilian mission of 200 experts within 30 days, even in complex environments.
- By 2023, the network of human rights and gender advisors in CSDP missions and operations will be strengthened.
- By 2023 the scope and definition of shared costs will be analysed.
- By 2025, the EU military Rapid Deployment Capability (EU RRDC) will be fully operational, with operational scenarios agreed in 2022 and regular exercises starting in 2023.
- By 2025, the MPCC should be able to plan and conduct any non-executive military mission, two small-scale military operations, one medium-scale military operation and exercises.
- By 2025, the improvement and harmonisation of border crossing procedures to improve military mobility will be completed.

In view of the initiatives and actions proposed, it could be said that it exudes a certain air of "déjà vu" since some of them were already agreed upon previously, including deploying 200 experts, improving interaction and the coordination of civilian and military operations, as well as others underway on the same stage or on adjacent stages (a long-standing mantra among the conclusions of all analyses of CSDP missions and operations). The CDRUE, an initiative that aims to deploy 5,000 troops and which, as we have mentioned, is the heir to the battlegroups, a useless initiative in its decade-long existence despite the fact that it only intended to deploy 1,500 troops, deserves its own mention. A new and

expanded level of ambition does not seem to be the most appropriate recipe for overcoming the lack of political will for its use, which is the ultimate and real reason for its non-utilisation.

What is more, subordination or subservience to NATO means de facto accepting the dictates of Washington, which dominates and directs the Alliance. This is a de facto renunciation of full strategic autonomy, besides having to accept strategic approaches that will not always coincide with the interests of the Union.

Secure

The second main area of the Strategic Compass focuses on the need to secure access to the maritime, air, cyber and space domains, in awareness of the progressive growth of threats of a hybrid, transnational nature, which requires enhancing European resilience by anticipating, detecting and responding to threats of this type. To this end, five main areas are envisaged:

- Strengthening early warning, intelligence and secure communications
- Promoting and developing cyber-diplomacy and opposing information manipulation and foreign interference
- Securing European access to strategic domains
- Combating terrorism
- Promoting disarmament, non-proliferation and arms control

The aim is to increase intelligence capabilities and strategic foresight by strengthening and making more efficient and extensive use of the tools available for this purpose: the EU's Intelligence Analysis Capability and the Satellite Centre. This should make it possible to guarantee the Union's autonomous decision-making capacity. Member States' intelligence assets must contribute to this, as they are already doing.

An important aspect of this is to provide secure communications by issuing rules and regulations on communications security, bringing together the resources and entities of the Union and of the Member States and partners to strengthen the protection of information, infrastructure and communications systems.

Of particular relevance is the importance of resilience in the face of hybrid threats, cyber-attacks and interference and manipulation of information by foreign (state and non-state)

actors. To this end, the EU Hybrid Toolbox will be expanded to provide a coordinated response to any hybrid campaign affecting the EU and its members. Nonetheless, it recognises that the attribution of aggression, which is the Gordian knot of the issue, is a prerogative of national sovereignty, which could undermine the effectiveness of the Union's reaction, given the different sensitivities and interests that populate the European ecosystem. EU Hybrid Rapid Response Teams will be set up, as well as a joint operational mechanism to monitor electoral processes, to ensure that there is no interference.

Open access to cyberspace, space, air and maritime space is one of the Union's fundamental concerns. Regarding cyberspace, the EU's Cyber Defence Policy will be developed with four key objectives: to protect, detect, defend and deter cyber-attacks. Cooperation between the Union and the Member States, as well as with partners, especially NATO, is called for. A new cyber-resilience law will be issued, to increase the joint approach to infrastructure and standards. In this regard, the desire is to establish an infrastructure based on interlinked Security Operations Centres. Cyber intelligence capabilities will also be strengthened to increase resilience by increasing cooperation between military Computer Emergency Response Teams (milCERT).

In the specific case of the space domain, there is a desire to be prepared for a more competitive and even unfriendly space environment. It aims to propose the implementation of a secure, space-based global communications system, included in the Union's Secure Connectivity Agenda 2023-2027, and to develop a new Space Strategy for Security and Defence. Exercises will also be conducted to test the resilience of space assets of the Union and its Member States and to identify needs and vulnerabilities.

In the air domain, its importance for the security of territories, populations, international trade and travel, threatened by state and non-state actors, is recognised. In this area, however, ambition seems to be rather contained, limiting itself to a strategic reflection, in which there is a desire to include leading representatives of civil aviation and NATO.

Last, the maritime domain, which aims to update the EU Maritime Security Strategy and its Action Plan. The Union's objectives are to invest in global presence, to ensure free access to the high seas and lines of communication, and to enforce international law of the sea, along with the protection of critical maritime infrastructure. To this end, it is proposed to make better use of Permanent Structured Cooperation (another mantra that

has been repeated practically since its inception, with little success), to develop

the mechanisms of Coordinated Maritime Presence (which basically means counting as the Union's maritime presence the sum of the individual maritime presences of each of its member states, which basically act according to national guidelines and which nobody bothers to coordinate a priori) and to organise naval exercises.

In terms of counter-terrorism, the ambition is rather reduced. In fact, what is desired is to use the instruments available through the CSDP and "other tools" (unspecified); to support partner countries through diplomacy and political dialogue, prevention and cooperation programmes; close cooperation with the UN and "other multilateral fora"; and the reinforcement of EU delegations with counter-terrorism experts. However, the lack of concrete objectives, budgets, etc., suggests that the intention is basically to continue with what is already in place, with practically no new contributions.

A field that is also disappointing is that of disarmament, non-proliferation and arms control. It does mention the centrality of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, but ignores the fact that it is precisely the states that are trying to acquire nuclear weapons that have not signed it, which means that its effectiveness as a tool to discourage their proliferation is considerably reduced in an increasingly competitive and unstable international system. On arms control itself, "exchanges and efforts will be intensified" in the search for solutions, especially with the US and NATO. In a matter of the utmost importance for the European continent, the lack of ambition and subordination to Washington could not be more obvious, as can be seen in the phrase "we will work on these issues later", expressing a huge vagueness of intentions, possibly conditioned by a certain impotence.

Here too, as previously alluded to, there is a certain sense of "déjà vu", with initiatives that were already proposed and activated in the past that have simply been re-wrapped, basically contributing little. NATO remains omnipresent, which de facto means a renunciation of full European strategic autonomy and a lack of ambition, disguised by the formulation of phrases expressing desires and intentions rather than concrete actions and objectives, leaving a frustrating aftertaste.

It is a similar scenario in terms of resilience to climate change and disasters. The assertion that "the transition to neutral economies can have social, economic and political impacts that can amplify conflict-prone situations" is surprising. The risk alone should advise caution when taking decisions in this field, if not outrightly discourage them. In any case, there is no mention of new initiatives, tools or funding, only a commitment to increasing

energy efficiency and reducing the environmental footprint of EU missions and

operations, without reducing operational effectiveness. The intention is to achieve this through improved technology and sustainable digitalisation in the armed forces and defence sector and awareness of climate change and environmental considerations. This will require Member States, which will develop national strategies and missions and operations, to have an environmental footprint advisor.

Last, with regard to disasters and emergencies, the EU Military Staff will be able to contribute to the logistical coordination of disasters that require mutual assistance, and there will be tools, such as the European Peace Facility, at the disposal of the Member States.

As a summary of the objectives of the "securing" section, the following are highlighted:

- By 2022, adopt additional rules and standards to ensure cybersecurity and information security. The EU Hybrid Toolbox will also be developed, which should provide a framework for coordinating the response to hybrid campaigns affecting the Union.
- In 2022, the Cyber Diplomacy Toolbox will be strengthened, exploring new countermeasures, and the Foreign Information Manipulation and Interference Toolbox will also be developed.
- In 2022, the Cyber Defence Policy will be developed, along with a new law on Cyber Resilience.
- By the end of 2022, the EU Threat Analysis will be reviewed at least every 3 years.
- By the end of 2022, a strategic reflection will be launched to ensure free and safe European access to airspace.
- In 2023, an EU Space Strategy for security and defence will be adopted.
- In 2023, actions supporting disarmament, non-proliferation and arms control will be strengthened.
- In 2023, the EEAS crisis response structures, including the Situation Room, will be reinforced.
- By the end of 2023, programmes and tools to enhance partners' capacities will be reviewed.
- By the end of 2023, Member States will develop national strategies to prepare their armed forces for climate change.
- By 2024, all CSDP missions and operations will be equipped with this latest capability.

- By 2025, the Single Intelligence Analysis Capacity and the EU Satellite Sceptre will be strengthened to increase our autonomous geospatial intelligence capability.
- By 2025, maritime safety alert mechanisms will be developed and strengthened.
- By 2025, all EU operations and missions will have an environmental footprint advisor.

As stated previously with regard to the initiatives and actions proposed in the "act" section, there is a certain air of "dejà vu", with initiatives that were previously agreed along with a certain amount of good intentions but no clear plan of action, all wrapped up in the optimistic rhetoric to which European bureaucracy has accustomed us. Here, too, NATO is a constant and unavoidable reference point, with all that this implies in terms of renouncing genuine and total European strategic autonomy.

Invest

In line with the Versailles declaration ¹ (March 2022), the aim is to invest more and better in defence capabilities and cutting-edge technologies, both at EU and national level. The objective is to achieve an adequate level of technological sovereignty in critical areas and mitigate dependencies in others, reducing vulnerability in supply and value chains. An important point is the acceptance by member states of the commitment to substantially increase their defence budgets, an issue that is clearly expressed for the first time in a Council document.

The ultimate goal is to have full spectrum forces that are agile, mobile, interoperable, technologically advanced, energy efficient and resilient. An important part of this objective is to adapt planning and capacity building, to build capacity and to fill the gaps that currently hamper European action at the strategic level. To this end, the capacity planning scenarios will be reviewed, which must include the following:

- Rapid military deployment in non-permissive environments
- Responding to hybrid threats
- Securing access to strategic domains (high seas, air, space and cyberspace)
- Providing military assistance to civilian authorities

¹ Available at: <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/54773/20220311-versailles-declaration-en.pdf>

Again, the results of the process should be consistent with NATO process. Notably, NATO does not insist with the same forcefulness that its capability planning process must be consistent with that of the EU, resulting in an asymmetric relationship between the two organisations that claim to respect the principles of "inclusiveness, reciprocity and autonomy in decision-making" in the transatlantic relationship. In any case, in view of the scenarios, they clearly mark the level of ambition as far as hard power is concerned.

Civilian capabilities are also taken into consideration and, as far as they are concerned, the Strategic Warehouse and the Mission Support Platform are intended to help provide equipment, capabilities and services for civilian missions, so that they can operate even in less permissive environments.

In terms of capabilities in general, there is an emphasis on the willingness to invest in capabilities that are strategic enablers and that facilitate deployment of the full spectrum of missions and operations. Strategic capability gaps include the perennial ones: strategic airlift, space-based connectivity and communications, amphibious, health, cyber defence, ISTAR (Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance) and drones. Thus, the recommendations contained in the 2020 Coordinated Annual Defence Review (CARD) report are considered to be of the utmost importance to reduce fragmentation and promote the development of European capabilities, for which Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) and all available European funding instruments must play a major role. To this end, the High Representative will chair annual meetings at defence ministry level on European defence initiatives.

Aware of the importance of new technologies, especially those considered potentially disruptive (artificial intelligence, quantum computers, nano-technology, new materials, etc.), the aim is to create a Defence Innovation Hub (DIH) within the European Defence Agency, which should ensure appropriate synergies with the European Innovation Council and the European Defence Fund in these areas. This move is intended not only to avoid the fragmentation and inefficiency that has occurred so far, but above all to reduce Europe's strategic dependence on critical technologies and value chains. The Critical Technologies Observatory and the EDA Action Plan for Disruptive and Emerging Technologies are expected to contribute to this effort.

In the field of cyber security, the European Cyber Security Competence Centre is to be made operational as quickly as possible to develop a robust technological and industrial

ecosystem in the cyber domain. It also wants to work with partners, such as the UN, to promote ethical and legal standards.

But in view of all that the Strategic Compass proposes, apart from the High Representative's new mission to chair annual ministerial meetings on European defence initiatives and the establishment of IHL, little else is revealed in this section. Once again we see that, for the most part, it simply seems to bring together initiatives that were already underway and projects that had already been approved, resulting in a long list of expected and/or desired results whose effectiveness and completion have yet to be confirmed and depend to a large extent on the willingness to participate of the Member States, who are unlikely to change the policy they have maintained until now unless the conditions that favour and encourage it are substantially modified, which does not seem to be the case.

As a summary of the objectives of the "invest" section, the following are highlighted:

- From 2022, meetings of defence ministers will be organised on European defence initiatives, led by the High Representative.
- By mid-2022, increase and improve defence spending
- In 2022, establish the Defence Innovation Centre within the EDA.
- In 2022, identify strategic dependencies in the defence sector, through the Critical Technologies Observatory.
- By 2022, boost research, technological development and innovation to reduce strategic dependence on technology and value chains (clearly a pie in the sky statement, lacking of any expression of means, incentives, etc.).
- By early 2023, the Commission will work to develop a proposal to facilitate the joint acquisition of defence capabilities.
- By 2023, review the Capability Target process
- By 2023, steps will be taken to facilitate private financing of the defence industry.
- By 2024, the civilian capability development process will be launched.
- By 2025, substantially reduce gaps in strategic enablers.
- Work on a possible modification of the European Defence Fund Regulation (which, without a date and expressed in potential, does not seem very convincing).

Partner

The last of the four main strands of the Strategic Compass is devoted to the instrument of partnership, i.e. it seeks to forge partnerships with the states or groups of states that can contribute to the Union's global or regional objectives: multilateralism and an international order based on international law, with the UN at its core. To this end, the EU not only wants to forge partnerships that are beneficial to itself, but also to strengthen the partners that are under threat. The aim is a flexible design that can easily adapt to the multiple situations required by the different characteristics of the partners, their geopolitical environments and their capacities and needs, at the multilateral and bilateral levels.

The first and most prominent organisation is NATO, with which three joint declarations have already been made (2016, 2018 and 2022), resulting in 74 lines of action so far. The aim is to promote political dialogue, information exchange, crisis operations management, military capability development and military mobility. In particular, maritime security, hybrid threats and cyber security receive attention. To this end, more frequent high-level political meetings are desired, as well as at mid-level, parallel and coordinated exercises and exchange of critical information to allow for a common understanding of the security situation.

The second major international organisation is the UN, with whom the aim is to strengthen the strategic partnership to promote multilateralism based on international law and the principles of the UN Charter. But unlike NATO, there is no requirement for annual meetings at the highest level, nor for increased contacts and exchanges at the medium level. This shows a willingness to cooperate that does not receive a clear framework for cooperation. However, it does mention a willingness to implement a new framework of joint priorities for peace operations and crisis management for the period 2022-2024, along with a more dynamic approach to early warning, conflict prevention and mediation. But again, without explaining how it will be implemented.

The third reference is the OSCE (Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe), with which cooperation in the fields of conflict prevention and crisis management is to be extended, in particular with the OSCE Conflict Prevention Centre. To this end, activities such as preparation and exchange of best practices and lessons learned are identified, but no mention is made of how improving these activities will be attempted.

On the African continent, the African Union is mentioned as an object of desire to strengthen strategic cooperation from Somalia to the Sahel region, through

political dialogue and operational engagement. And there is also a desire to develop a robust and balanced security partnership with organisations such as the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the G-5 Sahel, the Southern African Development Community (SADC) and the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD). The overall objective is to contribute to peace and security on the African continent by developing contacts at the military and political levels to support and contribute to African initiatives that contribute to this objective.

The Indo-Pacific area is also mentioned, with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) as the main reference point. In this area, the aim is to promote early warning and information exchange on violent extremism, chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear threats, cyber security, maritime security, international crime, disaster relief and crisis management. This broad agenda is to be addressed through the Union's admission as a full member of the ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting and participation in the ASEAN Regional Forum.

For its part, the League of Arab States and the Gulf Cooperation Council, with which greater cooperation is desired, are mentioned rather succinctly, this time without mentioning objectives, but merely expressing a vague wish.

With regard to bilateral partnerships, the aim is to strengthen the network of partnerships, each specifically designed on a case-by-case basis, with security and defence issues more systematically included in political dialogues. To this end, a Security and Defence Partnership Forum will be institutionalised, bringing together all the Union's partners biannually. In addition, the network of military advisors and counter-terrorism experts in the various EU delegations is also to be strengthened.

The most prominent partner mentioned first and foremost is the US, which is considered strategically important and with which security and defence cooperation should be deepened. To this end, it wants to build on the EU-US summit declaration of June 2021 to develop areas such as respective security and defence initiatives, disarmament and non-proliferation, the impact of disruptive technologies, climate change and defence, cyber defence, military mobility, hybrid threats, crisis management and relations with strategic competitors, in a clear allusion to China and Russia. The so-called transatlantic link continues to guide the relationship.

Other Western countries such as Norway, Canada and the UK are also mentioned. The latter is intended to create broader and more ambitious security and defence cooperation. With Turkey it wants to cooperate in areas of common interest in a commitment to developing a mutually beneficial partnership, but warns that Turkey must initiate a de-escalation in the eastern Mediterranean, where its relations with Greece, France and especially Cyprus are strained.

In the Western Balkans, the aim is to help build civilian and military capabilities and resilience in the region by cooperating with the UN, OSCE and NATO. Special attention is given to Ukraine, Georgia and Moldova, with whom cooperation in security and defence, as well as in the fields of hybrid threats and cyber-security, is to be fostered by demanding the territorial integrity of these nations. The latter forges a sine die confrontation with Russia.

In relation to the neighbourhood to the south, mutual interdependence and the need to establish closer security and defence cooperation to counter threats such as terrorism, violent extremism, radicalisation, cyber and hybrid threats, organised crime, irregular migration, which are specific to the region and interconnected in many cases and affect both shores, is recognised. To this end, in line with the "comprehensive approach", it undertakes to implement the Union's full range of security and defence tools: civilian and military missions and operations, peace and stability programmes, and support and financing measures. Better linkage between military assistance and structural reforms, including Security Sector Reform, is seen as particularly relevant, as well as closer cooperation with the most capable African partners.

In the Indo-Pacific area, Japan, South Korea, India, Indonesia, Pakistan and Vietnam are identified as key partners in establishing a regional security architecture based on international law. The basic tools to be employed are securing lines of communication, assistance to partners' capacity building and the naval presence of EU states, which will include joint naval exercises and port visits.

In the wider Ibero-American area, Colombia and Chile are the key partners, with whom it is intended to deepen dialogue on security and defence, providing them with more assistance in the fields of hybrid threats, cyber-attacks, organised crime, naval security and climate change. A clear objective is to promote the participation of Ibero-American countries in the Union's security and defence efforts.

To financially support all these efforts, the Union wants to make use of existing tools, such as the European Peace Facility and the Neighbourhood Instrument for International Development Cooperation.

However, the truth is that on analysis of the long list of initiatives, we again find that virtually all of them were already previously underway and that they form a broad set of desires and intentions, rather than realities structured into a concrete programme. In fact, the summary of the objectives to be achieved clearly reflects this, given the fact that it is rather succinct:

- From 2022, expand and deepen the relationship with NATO, building on that of the new joint declaration.
- From 2022, establish a new joint list of priorities for EU-UN cooperation.
- In 2022, hold the first biennial meeting of the Security and Defence Partnership Forum in Brussels.
- By 2022, deepen political dialogue and strengthen cooperation with the OSCE, the African Union and ASEAN. More specifically, develop an agenda with the OSCE on conflict prevention and crisis management with concrete actions at regional and thematic level; and closer cooperation with the African Union in the planning and conduct of operations at the operational level.

Conclusions

The Strategic Compass envisages a small selection of novel initiatives (such as the CDRUE, the civilian CSDP package, the Defence Innovation Centre, or the creation of the Security and Defence Partnership Forum chaired by the HR), but for the most part it appears to bring together initiatives that were already underway, projects that had already been approved or that had already been announced and were in the process of preparation. The outcome seems to be a long list of expected and/or desired results, the effectiveness and completion of which is yet to be ascertained, not least because they depend to a certain extent on the willingness to get involved of the Member States, who are unlikely to change the policy they have maintained until now unless the conditions that favour and encourage it are substantially modified, which does not seem to be the case.

In particular, the EURC, the heir to the battlegroups, which it replaces with a new and expanded level of ambition, does not seem to be the most appropriate recipe for fostering the political will of states in terms of its use, which is the ultimate and fundamental reason for its non-use to date.

The rest is a broad panoply of desires and intentions, difficult to measure but easy to interpret positively when the effectiveness of what the European bureaucratic apparatus has achieved in the coming years is assessed. This is particularly evident with regard to security, investment and partnership.

Furthermore, giving NATO complementarity such a high profile while advocating a stronger and more capable Union in security and defence matters, could mean that however much the EU tries to boost its strategic autonomy, even including global ambitions, it is limiting itself to a secondary role vis-à-vis the Atlantic organisation, thus subordinating European interests to those of the United States.

In any case, despite the short time since its promulgation, the document has already received its first criticism², accusing it that the changes it proposes are incremental, rather than transformative, which suggests that there is still no solid European political consensus to advance in the Europe of defence.

In short, while the Strategic Compass represents an important step forward in some areas (especially in military and civilian rapid intervention and in the planning of both aspects of the Union's missions and operations), in others, as we have already said, it gives off a certain and intense sense of "déjà vu", although this will have to be verified depending on if and the degree to which its objectives are implemented, and how effective they are.

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² Defence Innovation and European Union Strategic Compass; International Institute for Strategic Studies (May 2022). Available at <https://www.iiss.org/publications/strategic-comments/2022/defence-innovation-and-the-european-unions-strategic-compass>, last view 2nd June 2022.