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Unlocking European Defence. In Search of the Long Overdue Paradigm Shift

by Arnout Molenaar

ABSTRACT

The European Union's range of new EU security and defence initiatives are ground-breaking, but they can only deliver on their potential if member states shift the paradigm towards truly thinking, acting and working together as Europeans, based on a strategic consensus regarding the future of European defence in the changing global context. The new Strategic Compass, to be adopted by the Council in early 2022, provides a framework to develop such a shared vision. It should help to operationalise the EU's strategic autonomy in concrete terms, in mutual reinforcement and coherence with NATO, while seizing the opportunity to strike a new transatlantic bargain with the Biden Administration. In this context, the Union should agree on concrete steps forward to become a more active security provider abroad, reinforce its resilience and protection at home, enhance its operational readiness for different scenarios, and develop new capabilities through deeper cooperation while stepping up its cooperation with partners.

keywords

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Introduction

Let's start with a provocative question: When are Europeans *really* going to do what is necessary to make the EU a global power? One that is more autonomous in promoting a rules-based world order, projecting peace and security beyond its borders and effectively protecting its citizens within?

This sensitive and often unspoken question is always somewhere on the mind of those working and writing on European defence, with equal portions of exasperation and inspiration. It is a historically loaded question, but it is also a question that will determine Europe's future. It is rarely discussed as straightforwardly as formulated here, at least not in formal meetings, but rather obliquely under the concept of strategic autonomy – on which a new discussion has emerged recently in the context of renewing transatlantic relations with the incoming Biden Administration. The question was also very pertinent when the European Union proved unable to intervene in the Western Balkans without help from the United States in the 1990s, when it was confronted with the unilateralism of the Bush Administration in the early 2000s, when it faced an eruption of instability and conflict in its neighbouring regions in the 2010s or when US voters elected as president a businessman who had dismissed the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) as "obsolete".

For sure, it remains a very necessary question still today. In a world dominated by continent-sized powers, which are increasingly competing for influence, control of technologies and access to resources, the European Union has no choice but to become a power in its own right or to remain a playing field for others. Moreover, with neighbouring regions rife with persistent instability and conflict, the Union has no choice either but to become more active in resolving these crises or to watch others putting their boots on the ground. The perennial problem that the

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European Union is an economic powerhouse but punches militarily still well below its weight is gaining new urgency. In today's world, therefore, Europe will need to learn using the "language of power", as called for by High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and Vice-President of the Commission (HR/VP) Josep Borrell Fontelles. Beyond learning the language of power, Europeans should also develop the *mindset* and most of all the *means* to actually exert power – and the mindset and the vision will be driving a more ambitious development and use of the means.

The answers to this ambitious question need to be grounded in realism, assuming there is no missing secret ingredient or silver bullet to be found, such as a change in the EU Treaties, however welcome that might be. So this is not a paper about developing a "European Army" or even a "28th Army".[1] Nor will it enter specifically into the recent discussions on the desirability versus the reality of Europe's dependencies as regards the nuclear deterrent underpinned by the US security guarantee. It will also not address the individual concerns or perspectives of member states. Instead, it will uncover the underlying lines of thinking – the paradigm – that need shifting. It will focus on the security and defence dimension, even if it is clear that a paradigm shift in defence needs to be seen in conjunction with the development of a stronger EU foreign policy vis-a-vis key global and regional powers – while noting of course that a stronger defence policy will in turn also enhance the credibility and impact of EU foreign policy.

The starting point to search for an answer is the series of ground-breaking new security and defence initiatives that the European Union has launched in recent years, including the development of a Strategic Compass by early 2022, which have a great potential to make the Union a stronger security provider and strategic actor. True, the defence-related budgets under the Multiannual Financial Framework, the EU budget for the 2021–27 period, were reduced by the European Council in June 2020 compared to the original proposals.[2] Moreover, the difficulty of translating the new ambitions into actual capabilities (which takes time) or into new operational deployments on the ground (which takes mostly political will) have led some to question if Europe's "defence moment" has passed. There should be no doubt, however, that a lot of progress has been made and that the face of the European Union as a security and defence actor has fundamentally changed. What is more worrying is rather the continuation of predominantly national orientations and transatlantic reflexes in the defence policy and planning of member states and that, linked to this, there appears too often to be a lack of political consensus and/or lack of clarity on key strategic issues, including the vision for the future of European defence. A symptom in this regard is that there is no agreement in the

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[1] As proposed by the parliamentary fraction of the German Socialist Party: SPD-Bundestagsfraktion, *Diskussionspapier 28. Armee*, Berlin, 6 October 2020, https://augengeradeaus.net/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/20201006_SPD-AGSV_Diskussionspapier_28Armee.pdf.

[2] In 2018 prices: European Defence Fund (7 billion compared to 13 billion), Military Mobility (1.5 billion compared to 6.5 billion) and the off-budget European Peace Facility (5 billion compared to 10 billion).

Council to use the term "European Defence Union", as the Commission and the European Parliament have already declared it, while the formally agreed political objective of enhancing the EU's "strategic autonomy" remains deliberately vague.

This lack of strategic consensus goes to the heart of the matter: it is as if the Union has found the key to unlock a new room in the building of European defence, but is still undecided about whether to actually walk into it. The sign over the door says "strategic autonomy", although there is no agreement on what this actually means for the interior design. Some would rather stay in the comfort of the bigger transatlantic living room – where the landlord is making clear that the lease is going up and that his priority has become to take care of his own private mansion first – despite the fact that the new EU defence room can be organised as an "en suite" with sliding doors, which will allow the Europeans to think and act alone if necessary and decide on their own whom to invite to their party. Others are hesitant to walk in because they would rather stay in their national quarters.

Whatever the analogy, the point is that such political and strategic divisions and hesitations are impeding the concentrated effort, from input to output, that is needed to turn the new EU defence ambitions into reality. As the *Financial Times* commented: "The biggest barriers are psychological. Europe is divided in its own mind about how to respond to the world's troubling new geopolitical realities".[3] The new tools and mechanisms created at the EU level can only be implemented and operationalised effectively based on a shared and up-to-date strategic vision which drives the prioritisation of resources, operational contributions and joint capability development based on member states thinking and acting as Europeans. And, if we are honest, there is still a lot of work to be done to upgrade Europe's ability to act autonomously.

So let us now walk into this new room of European defence and see how we can optimise the limited space we have to work with.

1. Develop a common vision through the Strategic Compass

The main vehicle to develop a common vision is the so-called "Strategic Compass" document to be adopted by the first half of 2022 under the French EU presidency. It aims to give new impetus to the new security and defence initiatives, develop and update a common strategic perspective on key issues, while also tackling the different factors that have impeded full implementation thus far. Of course, no strategy can be a substitute for operational action and delivering tangible new military capabilities – and the European Union should continue to push forward in this regard. But that should not stop it from addressing at the same time the

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[3] "The EU Needs to Learn the Language of Power", in *Financial Times*, 1 January 2020, https://www.ft.com/content/8d0f7c58-1aa1-11ea-97df-cc63de1d73f4.

structural underlying issues that are necessary to make the Union a stronger security provider and strategic actor. The Strategic Compass should therefore in essence continue where the 2016 EU Global Strategy for Foreign and Security Policy (EUGS), and the Level of Ambition derived from it, left off – and hence define more specifically what we need to achieve and how to achieve it.

Agreed by the Council in November 2016, and endorsed by the European Council in December 2016, the Level of Ambition set out three strategic priorities: responding effectively to conflicts and crises, capacity building of partners, and protecting the Union and its citizens.[4] To achieve this, the European Union launched a series of security and defence initiatives, adding new acronyms to the EU jargon: it activated a legally binding framework for closer defence cooperation that was left dormant in the EU Treaty, the Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO); created its first defence-related Commission programmes, the European Defence Fund (EDF) and the Military Mobility funding envelope; developed a feedback mechanism to link EU-level and national defence planning, known as the Coordinated Annual Review on Defence (CARD); set up its first permanent military command centre, the Military Planning and Conduct Capability (MPCC); launched work to set up a new comprehensive instrument including for the first time the possibility to fund military support to its partners, the European Peace Facility (EPF); and agreed on a Civilian Compact under the Common Security and Defence Compact (CSDP), for which we regrettably (or luckily) never found a suitable acronym.[5] Moreover, the leap forward in EU-NATO cooperation under the EU/NATO Joint Declarations signed in the summer of 2016 and 2018 – which together define 10 areas of cooperation under which 74 common actions have been initiated – has been an integral pillar, as well as key political enabler, of the EU's progress in security and defence.

The broad-brush strategic priorities of the Level of Ambition remain overall valid, but as the initiatives launched since then are progressing, it becomes necessary to define our goals and objectives in more detail – while also updating our understanding of them in light of the evolving situation. For example, the EUGS calls for an appropriate degree of "strategic autonomy" for the European Union – but what does this mean precisely? And what structures and capabilities do we need to be able "to act autonomously when and where necessary and with partners wherever possible", as the European Council stated in December 2016? It is important to address these questions as the Permanent Structured Cooperation and the European Defence Fund are moving into the next phase. Thus, by defining

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[4] Council of the European Union, *Council Conclusions on Implementing the EU Global Strategy in the area of Security and Defence*, 14 November 2016, http://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ ST-14149-2016-INIT/en/pdf.

[5] See for an overview: Pedro A. Serrano de Haro, "The Bundle of Sticks: A Stronger European Defence to Face Global Challenges", in *Elcano Working Papers*, No. 03/2019 (May 2019), http://www. realinstitutoelcano.org/wps/portal/rielcano_en/contenido?WCM_GLOBAL_CONTEXT=/elcano/ elcano_in/zonas_in/wp03-2019-serrano-the-bundle-of-sticks-stronger-european-defence-to-face-global-challenges.

more specific (intermediate) goals and objectives, the Strategic Compass should provide focus and impetus to achieve concrete output. Of course, the Compass would need to follow a civilian/military approach, as it remains important to develop European defence in lockstep with a further strengthening of the civilian dimension of Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) that is so unique to the European Union.

The Compass is not only about capabilities, however. Its main purpose is to maintain a coherent strategic approach to the different security and defence initiatives and to update and further strengthen our policy in light of the evolving threats and challenges. What future operations should we prepare for? How and where to build partners' capacities, including by operationalising the new European Peace Facility? How to reinforce our resilience and protection from ever-evolving hybrid threats? How to position the Union in strategic domains such as cyber, maritime and outer space? How to ensure our technological "sovereignty" in what promises to be a transformative decade in which 5G and artificial intelligence (AI) will make their impact felt also on security and defence?

2. Develop a common strategic culture

Beyond specifying goals and objectives, the work on a Strategic Compass should update our common understanding of the security environment. This is a fundamental prerequisite for closer security and defence cooperation – and the Council formally launched the process in June 2020 by requesting the High Representative to present a comprehensive intelligence-led analysis of threats and challenges. While this classified threat analysis serves as a background for policy discussions, and does not need to be endorsed as such (as is done in the NATO context), it should contribute to building a strategic consensus on the challenges that the European Union is facing at the start of the third decade of the 21st century. This assessment of the security context could then be reflected in the opening chapter of the Strategic Compass.

Building a strategic consensus is easier said than done. Member states have very different security outlooks due to history and geography, explaining also the political divisions we so often see. The intelligence-led threat analysis cannot replace geography and history, of course, but it should enable trade-offs and enhance mutual awareness, forging a European common understanding, or strategic culture, out of different national perspectives.[6] Enhancing a common strategic culture (or "common European security and defence culture" as referenced by the Council in June 2020) essentially starts from a shared understanding of the threats and challenges Europe *collectively* faces in light of the common interests

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[6] Daniel Fiott, "Unchartered Territory. Towards a Common Threat Analysis and a Strategic Compass for EU Security and Defence", in *EU ISS Briefs*, No. 16 (July 2020), https://www.iss.europa.eu/node/2457.

and values it seeks to defend. The threat analysis should therefore not be used to prioritise threats – which would be impossible in any case – but to see the bigger picture, the inter-connections and hence the implications for Europe's collective security. Clearly, these threats and challenges go beyond the capacity of individual member states, while they also underscore the sometimes forgotten reality that Europeans are already interdependent. The development of a common strategic culture does not happen overnight, nor on a piece of paper, but developing this shared understanding should contribute to create more unity, solidarity and trust.

There is also another cultural aspect to be considered. The European Union overall still prides itself in its "soft power", as the European project was historically conceived as a way to remove the causes of war and great power competition on the continent by fostering economic integration and pooling resources. There is still a learning curve for the Union to develop a "hard power" mentality. In a geopolitical setting the European Union will need to be able to defend its values and interests more vigorously, from trade and technology to security and defence matters. Becoming a more geopolitical security and defence actor does not mean that the Union should abandon its good conscience nor its good behaviour, of course. Quite the opposite: to promote rules-based multilateralism and foster human rights in an unstable and more competitive world, which is also in our own interest, the European Union needs to have the capacity to act and help enforce those rules, including through the use of force if so authorised by the UN Security Council. Such a principled approach can and should go hand in hand with defending our own strategic interests. Instability beyond our borders is not only uprooting people who seek to escape suffering and/or oppression and providing a breeding ground for terrorist organisations and organised crime organisations that pose direct security threats to Europe. It should also be understood as part of the bigger strategic chess game of power politics – and as a responsibility that Europe should not outsource to others.

3. Unpack strategic autonomy

Developing a common vision on the future of European security and defence cannot be done without putting the objective of enhancing Europe's strategic autonomy into effect. This term has been part of EU agreed language since 2013 but remains nevertheless a contested concept especially from a transatlantic perspective, mainly because it is politically interpreted by some as a signal of distancing from (NATO) partners. The HR/VP's Implementation Plan on Security and Defence of 2016, which was welcomed by the Council, already underlined that it should not be understood as a disengagement from (transatlantic) partners – to the contrary:

> Europe's strategic autonomy entails the ability to act and cooperate with international and regional partners wherever possible, while being able to operate autonomously when and where necessary. This adds to the EU's

credibility vis-à-vis partners. There is no contradiction between the two. Member States have a 'single set of forces' which they can use nationally or in multilateral frameworks. The development of Member States' capabilities through CSDP and using EU instruments will thus also help to strengthen capabilities potentially available to the United Nations and NATO.[7]

In short, when it comes to security and defence (the term is now also used in the areas of trade, digital, etc.) strategic autonomy essentially means that the European Union needs to strengthen its capacity to act autonomously when necessary and to protect itself. Strategic autonomy provides a lens to assess and enhance the Union's ability to plan, decide and act autonomously. This can be done in mutual reinforcement with NATO, the United Nations and other partners, in the realisation that it is also in the Union's interest to work proactively with partners to address the daunting threats and challenges we face – and the Strategic Compass should set a clear policy in this regard. The parameters and implications of the objective of enhancing EU's strategic autonomy have never been clarified, however. To lower the sensitivity of the term, as well as to actually apply it more concretely, the European Union should unpack its meaning and scope – essentially by taking the threat analysis as a basis to determine its security and defence needs and hence the level of strategic autonomy required to achieve its political goals and objectives. Concretely, this could be done by reviewing CSDP's civilian and military ambitions to project security abroad as well as assessing the strategic vulnerabilities we need to address to be able to protect ourselves.

Crucially, in a geopolitical context there is a growing need to recognise that outside powers are using non-military levers of power and exploiting vulnerabilities in our economies (buying up critical infrastructure and start-ups with promising new tech), cyber networks (hacking and other malicious activities), energy supply (pipelines), societies (disinformation campaigns on social media) and democracies (funding anti-European political parties), in order to gain an advantage over us. And let us not forget that these powers are also ramping up their defence spending and modernising their armed forces while global competition is emerging as regards the development and control of key technologies and their future application across the globe. Conventional military threats are not to be underestimated either, though here the EU needs to carefully explore its role in light of NATO's responsibility for the collective defence of its members. Non-state actors are meanwhile blurring the lines between internal and external security as well, as organised crime and armed groups can be linked to smuggling, proliferation and terrorism while exploiting for these purposes the lack of governance in different geographical areas affected by instability and conflict. An assessment of these vulnerabilities should drive the work to connect external security and defence to these wider domains in which the European Union has a broad civilian-led portfolio of programmes to build our

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[7] High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, *Implementation Plan on Security and Defence*, 14 November 2016, http://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-14392-2016-INIT/en/pdf.

resilience and enhance our protection.

Such vulnerabilities are one key aspect of the EU's security and defence needs that flow from the changing strategic environment. The Strategic Compass should also determine a realistic set of possible future crisis management operations and missions that the European Union needs to prepare for. The first "Headline Goal" of 1999 – being capable to deploy 60,000 troops in 60 days – was based on the size of NATO's operations in the Western Balkans; the ambition was for the Union to be able to undertake such an operation in its vicinity by itself if need be. Similarly, member states should now reflect on realistic contingencies in light of the ring of instability and tension around Europe and beyond. In essence, in addition to preparing for one major contingency (which has subsequently been complemented by several other illustrative scenarios), the European Union now needs to focus much more on preparing to undertake simultaneously several smaller and medium-sized operations – and not only on land, but also at sea and in the air.

Back in 2008, the European Council had already identified such a list of likely operations though it was never really followed up at the time.[8] An annex in the 2016 Level of Ambition also identified different types of missions and operations, but they were left without any parameters. In addition to the seventeen already ongoing CSDP missions and operations, a broad overview of the security situation could provide a basis for identifying such parameters now for planning purposes, for example:

- Given the instability in North and West Africa (Libya, Sahel) the European Union should be ready for one or more military combat operation to prevent or react to a terrorist takeover, while a medium-sized peacekeeping operation might also be necessary in Africa or other continents to support the implementation of a peace agreement or assist in reaching one.
- Moreover, in light of the systemic need to support the capacity building of weak or fragile states, including by operationalising the new European Peace Facility, the Union should prepare for the continuation and possible expansion of several robust military and civilian capacity-building missions (training, mentoring, advising, etc.), which already form the bulk of ongoing missions and operations.
- The Civilian CSDP Compact also identified the ambition to conduct a civilian

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[8] The EU should be capable "of planning and conducting simultaneously: 1) two major stabilisation and reconstruction operations, with a suitable civilian component, supported by a maximum of 10 000 men for at least two years; 2) two rapid response operations of limited duration using inter alia the EU's battle groups; 3) an emergency operation for the evacuation of European nationals (in less than ten days) [...]; 4) a maritime or air surveillance/interdiction mission; 5) a civilian-military humanitarian assistance operation lasting up to 90 days; 6) around a dozen ESDP civilian missions [...], which could last several years". See European Council, *Declaration by the European Council on the Enhancement of the European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP)*, Annex 2 to Presidency Conclusions, Brussels European Council, 11-12 December 2008, p. 16, http://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-17271-2008-INIT/en/pdf.

mission of 200 staff to be deployed in thirty days, while the most demanding civilian scenario of deploying a mission with executive tasks (i.e., temporarily taking over national tasks of a host government) would need to be taken up as well.

- Furthermore, the COVID-19 pandemic has shown us the importance of being ready to possibly use military means for evacuation operations, bringing home European citizens stranded abroad, while disaster response might become prominent as a consequence of a climate-change-induced higher frequency of severe weather events.
- Finally, given the increase in EU naval operations since 2008 and the rising number of possible maritime contests resulting from regional or global geopolitical tensions (Indo-Pacific, the Strait of Hormuz, the Baltic Sea, etc.), there would be a need to determine a specific scenario dealing with maritime security, while also air surveillance or air interdiction should be developed as a dedicated scenario (to offset the political reluctance to put "boots on the ground").

Many of these types of missions and operations have been integrated into the illustrative scenarios used in the current Headline Goal process, but it would be politically and operationally worthwhile to determine the generic parameters of such a list (how many, what size, etc.) as well as to separate them out in the subsequent scenario work in order to go beyond capability planning into force and contingency planning to enhance the EU's operational readiness in concrete terms. This overall needs-based set of scenarios should thus drive several other policies, tools and instruments, while enhancing the public and political support to maintain a positive trend in defence spending. It should not only help to determine the needs for new capabilities that are missing from the collective inventory, but also more immediately to put more focus on reinforcing operational readiness – which is key in these unpredictable times and should help to reinforce operational effectiveness as well.

Thus, this scenario-based approach could underpin the further development of the MPCC as part of the wider availability of operational headquarters for CSDP (including its civilian counterpart, the CPCC). Created in 2017 and reviewed in 2018, the MPCC is under construction to fulfil its currently agreed mandate, of being ready to plan and command "non-executive" military (training) missions and one "Battlegroup-sized" executive operation. Building on its demonstrated operational added value and its contribution to enhanced civ/mil coordination with CPCC, the MPCC should be further reinforced in the coming years to be ready for planning and commanding more demanding CSDP operations.

It could also help to develop modules of combat forces – and air and naval equivalents – which plan, train and exercise together for different specific scenarios, thus contributing to operationalise the "coherent Full Spectrum Force Package" (a long-term objective mentioned in the founding acts of PESCO) that is required to fulfil the EU's Level of Ambition. These modules would not be standby forces, meaning that they would not be specifically earmarked for EU operations

with a high degree of readiness, as this would be too costly. They could include, however, the EU Battlegroups, thus putting to use the EU's only rapid response standby forces composed of around 2,500 troops which have never been deployed since their creation in 2007.[9] These modules could work together to concretely reinforce joint readiness, deployability and interoperability, including also aspects of military mobility, as agreed under the PESCO Strategic Review of 2020. This work should tap into the Crisis Response Operational Core PESCO project which aims precisely to do such concrete scenario-driven work to go beyond capability planning. At first, these modules could be developed on a project basis within PESCO.

As part of this, member states could also establish a naval force package which could prepare itself for deployment in EU naval operations. Such a naval force package could train and drill together, also linked to the wider set of EU maritime structures, in coherence with NATO's standing naval forces, while allowing the European Union to share the burden of keeping maritime routes safe for commercial shipping. This would complement the EU's new Coordinated Maritime Presences concept, which aims to coordinate the presence of national naval assets in designated strategic maritime areas that remain under national command but also sail under an EU flag and share information.

4. Strike a new transatlantic bargain

Europe needs to prepare for these threats and challenges while its core partner, the United States, is shifting its strategic outlook in response to the changing global context as well. Europe has always had to adjust to policy swings between different administrations in Washington, but the Trump Administration has arguably taken the political (seemingly even personal) need to break with its predecessor much further than others before it. The Biden Administration intends to mend fences with its allies and partners and bring the focus back to multilateralism, but the underlying causes of the reorientation of the US grand strategy have not gone away. The domestic backlash in the United States against globalisation and free trade (think of the so-called "rust belt", states where manufacturing has largely disappeared to cheap labour countries) and to some extent also against an internationalist foreign policy ("bring the boys home") is strong – and may only become stronger in the post-COVID world. Moreover, from talk about a *Pax Americana* at the turn of the century, in which the United States would ensure global and regional stability by outspending any competitor and intervening unilaterally if necessary, the debate is now rather about a retrenching United States and the rise of global competition structured by US-Chinese long-term rivalry.

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[9] Reasons vary from financial, political to also military aspects, most notably that the crisis scenario needs to fit the (limited) size and capability of an EU Battlegroup and match the political interest of especially the framework nation which is providing it in a given time frame.

The Biden Administration might be less inclined to unduly precipitate the withdrawal of US forces deployed abroad, but the underlying logic remains that the United States cannot afford to be "distracted" by instability and conflicts ("endless wars" as Trump would say) on Europe's periphery but needs to free up resources for the strategic challenge in the Pacific. It was President Barack Obama who first proposed a "pivot to Asia" in 2012. Today, it is even clearer that NATO is navigating a multipolar strategic context in which the United States, its backbone, will need to worry about a strategic challenger in the Pacific alongside its security guarantee to Europe. This means that Europe's dependencies on the United States are becoming less sustainable – both from a European but also a transatlantic perspective, as the United States has an even further growing interest to pressure the Europeans to beef up their contribution to the Alliance and take more responsibility for their own security. Trump's particularly strong rhetoric towards certain European Allies should not obscure the fact that there is a bipartisan consensus in Washington that the rich European Allies should increase their defence spending and do more for their collective defence. Remember, it was President Obama's Defence Secretary Robert Gates who said in his farewell speech in 2011 that Europeans cannot and should not continue to rely by default on the United States "to make up the difference".[10]

The Biden Administration will have a more favourable attitude towards the European Union in general and might hence be persuaded to see the development of a stronger EU defence pillar less as a threat than as an opportunity, provided that it adds value and works in complementarity with NATO. The Trump Administration questioned the EU's defence ambitions in 2019 and 2020 with arguments (warning of "decoupling", "duplication", "discrimination") which were very similar to earlier transatlantic discussions when the European Union took a step forward in European defence, going back to the launch of CSDP at the start of the century. New was the strong industrial dimension to these reproaches – an area in which the Biden Administration may also play its cards differently – as the United States criticised the EU's defence initiatives for aiming to waste money on less competitive European products and effectively making it more difficult for US (-owned) companies to take part in the EDF, thus in its view also risking interoperability problems across the Atlantic. The Trump Administration warned of "poison pills" in the EDF and PESCO regulatory framework and threatened to retaliate, even if the transatlantic defence market is heavily tilted in favour of the United States and there is no European equivalent to the Buy American Act. US business subsidiaries inside the Union can take part under certain conditions in industrial consortia applying for EDF subsidies, although the European Union cannot legally accept any external "controls" on the defence products and technologies developed with assistance from the EU budget that would inhibit

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[10] Text of Speech by Robert Gates on the Future of NATO, Brussels, 10 June 2011, https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/?p=62392. See for a comprehensive analysis: Max Bergmann, *Embrace the Union. A New Progressive Approach for Reviving the Trans-Atlantic Alliance*, Center for American Progress, October 2019, https://www.americanprogress.org/?p=476483.

free movement even within the common market.[11] The United States should also acknowledge that spending defence budgets with their industries in Europe is actually an important incentive for European governments to increase spending (same way as it works in the United States). The headline of a news report from *The New York Times* on the US public criticisms of PESCO and EDF captured it well: "Europe vows to spend more on defence, but U.S. still isn't happy".[12]

There is a fair discussion to be had on where to strike the balance between buying advanced US products (such as the F35 Joint Strike Fighter) and investing in European alternatives. And, if we are honest, for many European Allies buying American military equipment is precisely a way to tie themselves to the United States in the longer term for fundamental security reasons. The flipside of that coin is that the United States, which invests far more in innovation than does Europe, is not ready to transfer sensitive high-end technologies to its allies. Hence, preserving skills and know-how represents a long-term strategic interest for the European Union, and is hence a key driver for enhancing EU strategic autonomy.[13] The EU-US dialogue on the compatibility of the EU's defence initiatives and transatlantic cooperation has moved to calmer waters since then. Indeed, the United States has recently welcomed the Decision on the "conditions under which third States could exceptionally be invited to participate in individual PESCO projects"[14] – which provides a basis for reinforcing EU-US defence cooperation including by pursuing an EU-US dialogue covering security and defence issues.

Moreover, the European Union and NATO have stepped up cooperation in recent years, to cope with the growing common challenges both organisations are facing. The Joint Declarations signed in 2016 and 2018 have already led to 74 common actions in ten policy areas. The Union brings to the table its broad civilian and military toolbox, a real comparative advantage in the evolving strategic context in which security is pursued not only by military means but even more so through non-military ones. Not only is a comprehensive civilian/military approach – or integrated approach in EU-speak – necessary to "win the peace" after conflict, a broad interconnected "whole of government" approach is also the only way to address vulnerabilities in our security related to hybrid threats, disinformation, terrorism, migration, cyber security, foreign direct investment, defence industry and military mobility. The EU's complementarity with NATO is also ensured by the fact that the EU Treaty recognises (twice) the Alliance as the forum for the collective

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[11] See for a good overview: Paul Taylor, "A Minefield of Opportunity. Transatlantic Defence in the Trump Era", in *Friends of Europe Reports*, Spring 2020, https://www.friendsofeurope.org/insights/a-minefield-of-opportunity-transatlantic-defence-in-the-trump-era.

[12] Steven Erlanger, "Europe Vows to Spend More on Defense, but U.S. Still Isn't Happy", in *The New York Times*, 6 June 2019, https://nyti.ms/2wAGn8z.

[13] Daniel Fiott, "Strategic Investment. Making Geopolitical Sense of the EU's Defence Industrial Policy", in *Chaillot Papers*, No. 156 (December 2019), https://www.iss.europa.eu/node/2397.

[14] Council of the European Union, *Council Decision (CFSP) 2020/1639 of 5 November 2020 Establishing the General Conditions Under Which Third States Could Exceptionally Be Invited to Participate in Individual PESCO Projects*, http://data.europa.eu/eli/dec/2020/1639/oj.

defence of its members.

Thus, a stronger EU role in defence can – and should – go hand in hand with a stronger NATO as well as stronger EU-NATO relations. As indicated before, there is no contradiction between the two: the Union has hardwired coherence and mutual reinforcement with NATO in its policies. The EU's capability development priorities are coherent with those of the NATO Defence Planning Process, and at the level of projects new proposals are screened for any overlap with existing projects including on the NATO side. Indeed, the capability gaps are *European*, and not unique to the European Union, although the latter has launched a unique set of legal and financial instruments to break the endemic fragmentation of the defence sector. To illustrate: 38 out of the 46 collaborative PESCO projects are also addressing NATO priorities.

The opportunity thus arises to strike a new bargain across the Atlantic on European defence, in which the United States actively supports the European Union to take forward its new defence initiatives, in mutual complementarity and reinforcement with NATO, while the Europeans step up defence spending, enhance their operational readiness and cooperate more closely in developing capabilities. Instead of leaning back with a sigh of relief at the change of the guard in Washington, Europeans should send a strong message that the European Union remains committed to becoming a more capable transatlantic partner and more effective security provider while recognising the close bonds with the United States as its primary security partner. The United States should help make the new EU defence initiatives a success, as it is in its own national interest to see the Union become a stronger global partner capable of projecting stability in its neighbouring regions. The Union is mobilising unique instruments to solve the deadlock of European defence fragmentation that has also hampered NATO for decades, while leaving transatlantic paths to cooperation open to the member states. The European end of the bargain is to actually deliver more capabilities, to back up its rhetorical statements on strengthening strategic autonomy.

So here we come to the means.

5. Deliver capabilities, deepen cooperation

The coming years are crunch time for member states to deliver more capabilities and deepen their defence cooperation by using the new defence initiatives to the fullest possible extent. The European Union punches below its weight as a military power in part because its defence sector is too fragmented. As 80 per cent of defence investment has been spent nationally for decades, that has resulted in a vast number of different weapons systems in Europe – six times more than the US (178 compared to 30) – also of varying quality. The lack of economies of scale is also

costing billions per year in inefficiencies, as studies have found.[15] Moreover, the lack of effective *coordination* has also left the pool of forces not only fragmented but also incoherent, with significant gaps and shortfalls especially with regard to the critical enablers that are necessary to i) transport and sustain deployed forces strategically (including outsized cargo) and locally (helicopters); ii) refuel fighter jets in the air; and iii) provide accurate tactical intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance to ground forces. As a result, the European Union would still be hard pressed to deploy larger or more demanding military combat operations.

The EU's set of new defence initiatives – from PESCO and CARD to the EDF – provides the best answer yet to reverse the decades of fragmentation and develop the required capabilities based on cooperation, by combining PESCO's legally binding framework, CARD's pathfinder function for new collaborative opportunities and the financial incentive through the EDF. Though more work still needs to be done, the progress already made is significant.

The Permanent Structured Cooperation represents a game-changer, as its 25 participating member states have undertaken a comprehensive set of more binding commitments ranging from investment, capability development, operational availability and readiness to industrial policy. This was unthinkable even five years ago and it shows that, despite all possible criticisms, there has been a fundamental shift in thinking and engagement. The 2020 PESCO Strategic Review has identified the main goals for the next phase ending in 2025 for the fulfilment of the commitments, including to start working towards the coherent "Full Spectrum Force Package" (mentioned earlier) that needs to be further specified in light of the Strategic Compass. Defence ministers also agreed to push for tangible results from the ongoing PESCO projects by 2025 – identifying that 26 out of the 46 PESCO projects will be doing so – and agreed as well to highlight the EU-level tools, needs/priorities and collaborative opportunities in national defence spending reviews and white papers, which are key moments where governments give new orientations for the future of the armed forces.

The Coordinated Annual Review on Defence has recently produced its first full report, mapping the national priorities in defence planning across the participating member states against the agreed priorities of the EU Capability Development Plan – its findings are highly relevant to inform national planners of collaborative opportunities. Generating multilateral defence capability development projects takes substantive effort, while bringing in additional risks such as delays, complex work-share negotiations and compromises on the requirements and specifications. CARD helps national planners at least to prioritise collaborative options from the outset, *before* the national operational military requirements are developed

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[15] See for example: Anthony Teasdale (ed.), "Europe's Two Trillion Euro Divided. Mapping the Cost of Non-Europe, 2019-24", in *EPRS Studies*, April 2019, https://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document.html?reference=EPRS_STU(2019)631745. This report covers all areas of the European Union. As regards defence, it identifies a potential of 22 billion euro in annual savings across investment and infrastructure, personnel as well as maintenance and operations (p. 220).

– so as to have maximum flexibility to find common ground with partners for a collaborative effort.

The European Defence Fund's financial incentives for industrial consortia, located in three member states or more, to do research and development together are a game-changer as well, mobilising resources from the EU budget to addresses the heart of the problem of the fragmentation of Europe's defence sector. The production of ever-more-costly sophisticated defence equipment largely through national industries or based on the *just retour* principle, as is presently the case, is no longer affordable – even for larger European powers. There is therefore a strong business case for a process of defence industrial consolidation, although this remains very sensitive from both an economic (jobs...) and security point of view, as most member states still see their national defence industries as an essential component of their national security policy. The EDF should drive over time towards a greater convergence in capability programmes and consolidation of the technological and defence industrial base – though it is clear from examples such as the next generation fighter jets or ground combat systems how difficult it is to bring all players into a single European programme.[16]

Innovation is also critical in the emerging geopolitical context, in view of the technological revolution that will unfold in the coming decades, with automated systems, artificial intelligence and space-based assets taking on a growing role in the armed forces. Russia and China are heavily investing in next generation military capabilities. Europe cannot afford to be the loser in this global transformation. Here the European Union can provide a clear added value, not only through the EDF but also by providing links to civilian research and technology programmes and ensuring cross fertilisation. This is not to say that the Union should fuel an arms race; it should remain in the lead in the global discussions to develop a normative and regulatory framework for lethal autonomous weapons systems. But it should also bring this together with its own innovation efforts in a comprehensive and realistic approach to enhance EU technological sovereignty. Moreover, as we move into the era of automated systems, the European Union should consider more systematically how to use drones in the air and at sea to strengthen our surveillance and situational awareness. Over the next decade this trend of automated systems could bring fundamental changes to the way we plan and take decisions on military deployments, as we would no longer be sending soldiers into harm's way. As part of the Strategic Compass process, reflections could start on the implications of automation and digitalisation for our operational posture and wider defence policy.

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[16] See for example: Ester Sabatino, "EU Defence: Franco-German Cooperation and Europe's Next Generation Battle Tank", in *IAI Commentaries*, No. 20|58 (August 2020), https://www.iai.it/en/node/11972; Renaud Bellais, "Combat Air Systems for the 21st Century: A Shared Stake for Europe", in *Security Policy Briefs*, No. 131 (November 2020), https://www.egmontinstitute.be/?p=37839.

So the potential is there, and these initiatives need to be given some time to arrive at concrete capabilities, but at least three conditions are essential to ensure longer term success and to push defence cooperation in the EU to the next level: 1) resources, 2) rigorous prioritisation and 3) a stronger European reflex.

Resources: The EU-27 collectively have the world's second largest defence budget of around 200 billion euro annually, which is more than twice that of Russia and near equivalent to that of China, although it is still more than three times *less* than the US defence budget. One study found that to defend itself in case of a US withdrawal from NATO, European allies would need to invest around 300 billion euro over 20 years to build the capacity to prevail in a limited regional war against a peer adversary.[17] Since 2014, defence spending has gone up significantly, after years of cuts following the financial crisis of 2008. Spending of PESCO's 25 participating member states currently hovers around 1.37 per cent of GDP, which is still far from the NATO commitment of moving towards 2 per cent, even if PESCO commitment #1 of "regularly increasing defence budgets in real terms" provides a basis to push further. Of course, this remains a very difficult discussion among member states, constrained by competing priorities more generally and the current budgetary deficits more specifically. The European Council could take the lead to level the playing field and identify benchmarks for gradual increases in national defence spending to enhance European defence capabilities.[18] This would also have a beneficiary economic effect. The EDF moreover already acts like a "fly wheel" to generate collaborative investments among member states, as they are co-funding different EDF projects implemented by the consortia of industries.

The EU defence ambitions arguably took a hit when the European Council agreed on lower funding for the main new defence-related instruments under the next Multiannual Financial Framework. The overriding priority of recovering from the COVID-19 pandemic's economic effect is largely responsible for this and the glass could still be seen as half full as the European Union created a Security and Defence chapter in its budget for the first time in its history. In a way, it only adds to the pressure of showing to the leaders and the wider public that these new programmes deliver tangible results. Taking lessons from the aftermath of the 2008 financial crisis, member states should reflect in a timely manner on how to avoid a "renationalisation" of defence and safeguard collaborative programmes including by possibly using the financial toolbox that the European Commission is putting together to bridge funding gaps between member states' joint investments. In any case, the Strategic Compass including the threat analysis should enhance Europe's

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[17] Douglas Barrie et al., "Defending Europe: Scenario-Based Capability Requirements for NATO's European Members", in *IISS Research Papers*, April 2019, https://www.iiss.org/blogs/research-paper/2019/05/defending-europe. The report finds that Europe would need to invest between 288 and 357 billion dollars for this scenario over a 15 to 20 year period to be able to prevail in a limited war against a peer competitor. This would come down to a sustained annual increase of 8 to 10 per cent in spending per year.

[18] One of the complicating factors in this regard is the different levels of defence spending among the member states.

strategic consensus and ultimately also drive home to politicians and parliaments the need to shore up defence spending.

Prioritisation: Given the relative scarcity of resources, the member states need to rigorously prioritise their investments through a well-coordinated mechanism. Prioritising investment is a quintessentially political and strategic question. The European Union simply cannot afford a scenario in which after, say, five or ten years, PESCO and EDF would not have reinforced its capacity to undertake certain military operations alone if necessary – i.e., strengthening its operational autonomy in concrete terms. To achieve this, the Strategic Compass should guide the EU emerging defence planning system centred on the Capability Development Plan as the main prioritisation tool, recognised also by the EDF regulation (to ensure that it is capability-driven rather than industry-driven) as well as by PESCO. The Capability Development Plan – including its inputs from the military Headline Goal process – should also become a real driver for national defence planning, moreover, with CARD as a feedback mechanism linking the EU level and the national level. The respective PESCO commitments in this regard would need to be implemented more forcefully.

European reflex: This year's CARD findings as well as earlier PESCO assessments still show unfortunately that national orientations and NATO priorities drive national defence planning, rather than EU priorities and mechanisms. Though this may still improve over time, it is clear that for now a European reflex is missing. This is not only a technical issue. Most member states still seem to think narrowly about their sovereignty as an exclusively national concept. As between EU/NATO, we should get away from thinking in zero-sum terms: sovereignty should not be thought of only in procedural terms (i.e., the constitutional authority to deploy troops) but rather as the *capacity* to provide security and protection for your citizens. From this perspective it becomes easier to conceive of sharing national sovereignty with other member states in the EU framework. Deeper defence cooperation, even integration, should not be implicitly thought of therefore as limiting national sovereignty, but rather as adding to it.[19] Claudia Major and Christian Mölling have rightly observed that, overall, governments seemingly prefer "to manage their ever-shrinking national capability inventory rather than engage in strategic cooperation – let alone integration – with a view to enhancing their collective security and defence capacities and ability to act".[20] Again, this is essentially a political question.

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[19] See for an early study: Advisory Council on International Affairs, "European Defence Cooperation. Sovereignty and the Capacity to Act", in *Advisory Reports*, No. 78 (January 2012). The European Air Transport Command (EATC) and also the Belgian-Dutch Navy can be cited as models of defence integration where respective national decision-making authority is maintained despite integrated command (EATC) or integrated logistics and maintenance (Belgian-Dutch Navy).

[20] Claudia Major and Christian Mölling, "The EU's Military Legacy. Over-Institutionalised, Under-Equipped and Strategically Divided", in Daniel Fiott (ed.), *The CSDP in 2020. The EU's Legacy and Ambition in Security and Defence*, Paris, EU Institute for Security Studies, 2020, p. 38-49, at p. 39, https://www.iss.europa.eu/node/2423.

The idea of defence integration is even more sensitive when it comes to the EU level. The development of "EU-owned" capabilities – even for example in the area of transport or communications – is still a taboo, despite examples on the NATO side (AWACS) as well as on the EU side (Galileo). Moreover, historically and legally, defence was not really part of the European integration process, as the EU's Common Security and Defence Policy is under exclusive control of the Council. At the same time, the Commission, through its new Directorate-General Defence Industry and Space, is playing a new role in the broader area of defence by implementing the European Defence Fund and coordinating the Military Mobility initiative in particular – thus creating an institutional impetus alongside the continued intergovernmental character of PESCO and other member state–driven mechanisms. More structurally it can be argued that collective security and defence cooperation is a public good without which an EU common market and other policies cannot properly function.[21] For now, however, defence (including also for example export policies) remains the final frontier of the EU integration process.

6. Become a more active security provider

A more integrated way of developing capabilities needs to be more closely linked to a more strategic *use* of such capabilities. At the end of the day the Union's defence ambitions need to be translated into operational action in the field – where we see too often gaps in force generation, delays in deployments and perhaps the apparent lack of appetite to play a more active role with regard to certain crises in our immediate vicinity. One can debate whether such reluctance is caused by insufficient capacity, as forces are stretched thin and shortfalls persist, or by insufficient political will, as there is a post-Iraq and -Afghanistan intervention fatigue, or whether the theatres in question (Libya, Syria, Nagorno Karabakh) are strategically and politically too complex – or perhaps all of the above. But the fact is that other regional powers are very active in providing military assistance and expanding their influence in doing so. We have to consider as well that Europeans are also deploying forces through NATO, the UN and other multinational formats – and especially for the latter there is a discussion to be had if they could not be brought into the EU framework, notably under Article 44 of the EU Treaty, which allows for coalitions of willing member states to execute operations on behalf of the European Union.[22]

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[21] Valerie Herzberg and Edouard Vidon, "The Sword and the Marketplace. The EU Needs a Defence Union to Support Its Economic Integration", in *European Issues*, No. 486 (2 October 2018), https://www.robert-schuman.eu/en/european-issues/0486-the-sword-and-the-market-a-defence-union-would-strengthen-european-economic-integration.

[22] Such operations still need to be authorised by the Council acting unanimously, but this provision could be used especially to "Europeanise" ongoing national or multilateral operations initiated outside the EU framework.

The Strategic Compass should reinforce a common perspective on the role of CSDP to address insecurity and instability beyond our borders, as part of a wider EU integrated approach to conflicts and crises. This brings us back to the question of "when and wherever" does it become "necessary" to act autonomously. Of course, this cannot be answered in the abstract and should be connected to the development of the scenario and contingency thinking mentioned earlier. Not in all crises would the Union intervene alone, if at all, or consider the use of military force,[23] but the Strategic Compass could look into operationalising the Union's vital foreign policy interests (security, prosperity, democracy and rules-based global order) and geographical focus (on Europe and surrounding regions while pursuing targeted engagement further afield) as put forward in the Global Strategy. It could further develop these into a set of parameters that define the EU security and defence interests – for example: promotion of stability, resilience and good governance in neighbouring regions; prevention of terrorist attacks or weakening terrorist organisations abroad; secure access to the "global commons" (cyber, air, maritime and outer space); and facilitating UN peacekeeping, etc.

The aim is not more paperwork but to enhance the strategic consensus among member states (and within them) on when to intervene. The Strategic Compass could look comprehensively at the ring of instability and conflict beyond its borders and devise a coherent doctrine with a tailored mix of civilian and military, security and development instruments – including the new European Peace Facility – to address the pockets of instability and areas without effective governance, while consolidating those countries that are relatively stable. In this context, perhaps ironically, member states also need to consider the strategic price of *non-action* by leaving the vacuum to others to fill. This is not about the European Union starting its own geopolitical scheming and spheres of influence politics, but about realising that this is precisely what motivates other powers to send troops and advisors into contested areas.

The overall need for CSDP deployments is likely to grow further – especially in the Sahel where the European Union is planning a scaled-up regionalised CSDP effort to stem the tide of spreading instability. Climate change can be expected to further destabilise different regions, as it will have a growing impact on security across the globe by making vast areas more inhospitable, creating more competition for dwindling resources and generating geopolitical tensions in such regions as the Arctic. The European Union should therefore keep addressing the operational and capability implications of climate change in the defence area, as part of the wider climate/security nexus and the European Green Deal, through its recent Climate Change and Defence Roadmap with concrete short-, medium- and longer term actions. This involves not only reducing the carbon footprint by using cleaner technologies but also preparing for more extreme weather conditions and more severe natural disasters in which also military forces might be called upon to

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[23] See: Sven Biscop, "Fighting for Europe. European Strategic Autonomy and the Use of Force", in *Egmont Papers*, No. 103 (January 2019), https://www.egmontinstitute.be/?p=28237.

provide assistance.

The European Union also needs to maintain a clear focus on supporting fragile and post-conflict countries to take care of their own security. The new EPF will enable the Union from 2021 onwards to provide equipment to military counterparts, including lethal equipment, as part of EU reform and capacity-building activities (also in areas where there is no CSDP mission or operation deployed). Safeguards are put in place to avoid the misuse of such equipment by the recipient, in the knowledge however that other, less scrupulous powers will otherwise do it for us (and are already doing so – thus limiting any leverage that our training efforts might give in Mali or the Central African Republic, for example). Similarly, the European Union should develop a comprehensive approach to capacity-building support towards its Eastern flank through CSDP, EPF and other EU instruments.

7. Enhance resilience and protection

Becoming a more active security provider is one answer to the persistent instability in our wider region, but we also need to deal with the non-military threats to our own security which originate abroad, to further enhance our resilience and protection. The logic here is to ensure synergy between the Union's internal security tools, as also expressed in the recent EU Security Union Strategy presented by the Commission, and external ones, to be further developed in the Strategic Compass. The latter could help to operationalise the internal/security nexus, while remaining focused on the external dimension primarily. A lot of work has already been done, for example to identify the potential for civilian CSDP missions to contribute directly and indirectly to wider EU efforts addressing different security threats and challenges that have a direct link to our own security, such as terrorism, organised crime, hybrid threats, etc. The missions are often already working with internal security actors, such as Frontex or Europol, but there is still scope to structure this cooperation further. The same applies mutatis mutandis for military CSDP missions and operations.

The Strategic Compass should also set out further work to strengthen Europe's cyber defence capabilities, complementing the recently revised EU Cyber Security Strategy. Different building blocks that are currently being developed separately, including different PESCO projects which respectively aim at sharing information, enhancing training and providing response teams, could be brought into a coherent package. The EU's work on countering hybrid threats has advanced in recent years as well, and the Compass could focus here on identifying concrete measures among the member states to promote resilience in security and defence, in synergy with the Commission's work to enhance resiliency aspects in different policy areas.

Another question is how to include the growing role of the armed forces *inside* the European Union. The legal definition of CSDP as an operational tool to be

used only outside EU borders is a legacy of the time when the current Treaty was written, in the early 2000s – the age of "humanitarian intervention" and NATO's "out-of-area" operations. Respecting NATO's role in collective defence, the Treaty on European Union does provide in Article 42.7 for an obligation on the part of member states to provide "aid and assistance by all the means in their power" when one of them is the victim of armed aggression. Member states are currently engaged in clarifying the implementing modalities of this Mutual Assistance Clause, which has been invoked once, by France after the Paris terrorist attacks of November 2015. The process is based on lessons from scenario-based exercises, including the identification of possible EU-level support measures if so requested by the attacked state. As ever, this remains sensitive for those member states (and allies) who fear that the European Union is encroaching on NATO's Article 5 – even though it should be clear that the legal concepts are complementary. An added value of the European Union is that such armed aggression on the territory of a member state would most likely also trigger the activation of many other EU tools and mechanisms (sanctions, etc.). Preparedness, coordination and decisiveness will be key in such circumstances.

The initial stage of the COVID-19 crisis furthermore confirmed that the armed forces of the member states are also at times, as a last resort, needed to support civilian actors *within* national borders. They were called in to support national efforts to contain the spread of the virus, including by providing medical facilities, supplies, logistical support as well as security presence. At the EU level, practical steps were taken to facilitate information exchange regarding the use of the national military to assist civilian authorities through a dedicated Task Force in the European External Action Service. The growing domestic role of the armed forces to provide assistance to civilian actors – including through the EU civil protection mechanism led by the Commission, but also in national and bilateral settings – should be integrated into EU defence policy and key initiatives such as PESCO (including at the project level). Indeed, PESCO projects are already providing for military cooperation within the European Union – for example the cyber response teams are designed to assist defence ministries, as well as CSDP missions and operations, to cope with malicious cyber activities. Similarly, we could look at the role of the PESCO project on setting up a medical command, for example, and consider other collaborative structures to help cope with future pandemics or disasters.

In conclusion: Unlock European defence

This paper has tried to identify what the European Union and particularly its member states could do to *really* change course to acquire greater strategic autonomy. The steps that the Union has taken so far in security and defence need to be accompanied by an updated common vision and change in mindset to think and act as Europeans – as a way to bolster also both national and transatlantic frameworks. In essence, empowering Europe requires the European Union to

become more *integrated* in the way it develops its capabilities and more *strategic* in the way it employs them. This will take a lot of technical work and a lot of time, but the Union should embark on it with a clear long-term approach in mind, which is perhaps the quintessential hallmark of geopolitical policy.

The Strategic Compass, and the process leading to it, should provide a vision of what the Union needs to achieve and how to get there. The stakes are arguably higher than before, and the urgency as well. The European Union needs to not only learn the *language* of power, but also to actually develop the *mindset* and the *means* to act as one. It comes down to the singular point that the Union needs to be able to act alone and protect itself in an unstable and dangerous world, while always seeking to work with its partners wherever possible. There is a potential to strike a new transatlantic bargain with the Biden Administration to push Europeans to take more responsibility for their security and to become a more active and capable partner in preserving the liberal rules-based world order that is unravelling before our eyes.

In doing so, the Strategic Compass should take away the lingering inhibitions among Europeans to walk into the room which it unlocked a few years ago and engage together to do what is necessary to *actually* develop the European Union into a global strategic actor or even power. This will take time, for sure, but it might be the only way to ensure our survival in the profoundly transformative decades that lie ahead.

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