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Europe, Germany and defense: priorities and challenges of the German EU presidency and the way ahead for European Defense

An ambitious agenda meets COVID-19

On the 1st of July 2020, Germany took over the rotating EU presidency. As many other things in 2020, this presidency has become a victim of the Covid-19 pandemic. Under the leitmotiv of "Together for Europe's Recovery", the entire presidency is focusing on enabling Europe to cope with the consequences of the pandemic.

Germany is taking over in rocky times. This concerns not only the pandemic, but also European cohesion and the security developments around Europe, from the tensions in the Eastern Mediterranean up to the Caucasus. It also applies to the increasingly difficult transatlantic relationship. It will be Germany, together with the president of the Commission Ursula von der Leyen, the president of the European Council Charles Michel, and the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy/vice-president of the European Commission (HR/VP) Josep Borell, who will be the voice of the EU when it comes to react to the US presidential elections scheduled for November 2020.

While the security and defense environment around Europe seems to require the European Union (EU) to think even more about its role, defense is likely to get less attention. Most countries, and the EU, are focusing on coping with the health, economic and social consequences of the pandemic – the economic recovery of the European countries and

necessary decisions to empower the EU in the area of health being top priorities. Already prior to the pandemic, defense was not high on the list of many states, neither of the EU's. Now, it risks getting even less attention, and funding. Defense did not feature in the State of the Union Address by Commission president von der Leyen on September 16, 2020[1]. Its funding suffered in the proposed Multiannual Financial Framework (MMF). It does not feature prominently in the official programme of the German EU presidency either – in fact, it features on the last page[2].

The German EU presidency: program, constraints and opportunities

EU presidencies are not what they used to be: the last time Germany had the EU presidency, in 2007, was in the pre-Lisbon Treaty settings. Back then, the countries had far more power and instruments to shape EU policies in the six months they ran the presidency. Now the EU institutions enjoy more formal competences. While this has been the case for the last decade, it still makes a difference for a country that did not have a presidency under these conditions. Yet, the country holding the EU presidency still has influence, mainly as a broker and an agenda setter[3]. Germany can thus put topics on the agenda it deems crucial, as it does with the Strategic Compass. And it can broker deals, such as possibly on the European Peace Facility.

More importantly, the Covid-19 pandemic has fundamentally changed the setting and affected both the content and the formats of the presidency. Germany decided to focus on managing the crisis, as reflected in the leitmotiv. Accordingly, the first issue on the agenda is "Europe's response to the Covid-19 pandemic", which is in the same time a cross-cutting issue that transcends the other German goals. Accordingly, the main priorities of the German EU presidency are:[4]

- Europe's response to the ongoing pandemic,
- a "stronger and more innovative Europe", with a focus on expanding digital and technological sovereignty, enhancing competitiveness and shaping a sustainable and stable financial architecture;
- A fair Europe, with focus on social cohesion, social security and solidarity;
- A sustainable Europe, which includes climate and environmental policies;
- A Europe of security and common values, with focus on laws, values, migration;
- An effective European Union for a rules-based international order anchored in partnership; united, responsible and powerful European external action policy.

It is under this last heading that security and defense issues are treated.
Not only the content but also the functioning of the presidency had to be adapted. The usual working methods could hardly be used, given that physical meetings, from working groups up to informal exchanges, Council meetings and public gatherings cannot take place in the usual way. Travel restrictions and the limitations for physical meetings complicate classical diplomatic approaches and informal negotiations and raise the risk of misunderstanding.
The presidency is taking place at a moment where it is not yet sure whether the pandemic drives European countries apart or serves as a catalyst for cooperation. This is also due to the fact that

[1] State of the Union Address by President von der Leyen at the European Parliament Plenary, 16 September 2020 (accessed 23.09.2020).
[2] Together for Europe's Recovery. Programme for Germany's Presidency of the Council of the European Union. 1 July to 31 December 2020 (accessed 15.09.2020)
[3] Olivier-Rémy Bel, "Tying Loose Ends and Asking Hard Questions: What Germany's EU Presidency can Achieve on Defense", Atlantic Council, 9 July 2020 (accessed 20.09.2020).
[4] The following is quoted from the presidency program "Together for Europe's Recovery. Programme for Germany's Presidency of the Council of the European Union", *op. cit.*

the pandemic is not yet over and that we are likely to see another peak in the autumn and winter 2020/21.

During the first phase of the pandemic, in spring 2020, the national instinct dominated. Many countries adopted an inward-looking focus and considered instinctively the nation state as the reference point, including to close borders. European coordination and solidarity hardly worked. One example is the initial lack of answers when Italy activated the EU Civil Protection Mechanism in February 2020[5].

As the crisis unfolded, most European states recognized the necessity of managing it together. To help repair the economic and social damage and relaunch Europe's economy, they agreed on 21 July 2020 on an unprecedented recovery plan with a €750bn fund[6]. Yet, traditional cleavages persist, as the opposition of the so-called frugal states to the recovery fund showed.

The adoption of this recovery plan was possible due to a reenergized Franco-German leadership and the willingness of European countries to overcome traditional red lines, such as to accept non-refundable grants. EU states also decided to cooperate on the development of a Coronavirus vaccine, as the formation of an inclusive vaccine alliance by France, Germany, Italy and the Netherlands and the EU Vaccine Strategy demonstrate.

As a result, the EU seems to benefit from a new dynamism. After having first served as a disintegration element, the pandemic seems to have turned into a catalyst for European cooperation. Demonstrating that Europe can deliver, turning the pandemic into a motor rather than a blocker for European cooperation is hence a key objective of the presidency.

Yet, the spillover of this dynamic into security and defense policy seems to be limited. While the competition with China, the lack of US leadership, the difficult relationship with Washington and the volatile security environment around Europe require a stronger EU, the traditional national positions limit the room for manoeuvre. The EU seemed to become more assertive, for example when criticizing the poisoning of the Russian opposition politician Alexander Navalny in September 2020[7]. Yet, when national priorities differ too much, like on Russia or Turkey, the EU struggles to act. This was the case with Belarus: it was only weeks later, on 2 October 2020, that the Council imposed sanctions against 40 Belarussian individuals identified as responsible for repression and intimidation around the 2020 presidential election in Belarus, and for misconduct of the electoral process[8].

These cases underline that a common understanding among Europeans is the precondition for joint European action. This is exactly where a key project of the German presidency comes in: the Strategic Compass aims to forge a European strategic culture.

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[5] Alessandro Marrone, "The COVID-19 Pandemic and European Security: Between Damages and Crises", *IAI Commentaries*, April 2020 (accessed 23.09.2020).

[6] European Council conclusions, 17-21 July 2020, July 2020 (accessed 10.09.2020).

[7] Declaration of the High Representative on behalf of the EU on the poisoning of Alexei Navalny, 3 September 2020 (accessed 24.09.2020).

[8] "Belarus: EU imposes sanctions for repression and election falsification", 2 October 2020 (accessed 3.10.2020).

Finish, start, manage: priorities in the area of defense

Defense is not a key priority of the overall EU presidency, as the official program shows. Yet, those ministries in charge of the defense aspects consider the presidency a crucial element to advance European defense. Germany wants to see the EU as an efficient and resilient actor, to "*develop the Common Security and Defense Policy (CSDP) and to bolster its overall resilience and capability to act in civilian and military domains*"[9]. In fact, Germany's presidency has a triple task:

- **Finish:** to finish the EU defense initiatives launched in 2016-2017 in the follow up of the Global Strategy and the Brexit referendum;
- **Start:** to set the EU on track for the next cycle in European defense, in accordance with the new MMF and the EU leadership personnel in place since 2019; while also keeping in mind the constraining external (degradation of the security environment, transatlantic relations) and internal conditions (potential financial austerity as a consequence of the pandemic-induced economic downturn);
- **Manage:** deal with current challenges due to the pandemic.

The presidency's program reflects this triple approach: it tackles the strategic review of PESCO and other defense initiatives, while also trying to move forward with the Strategic Compass and implementing lessons learned from Covid-19 with the Medical Cooperation. The overall program has been adapted accordingly, with the main topics being:[10]

Table 1: Overview over the main German priorities[11]

Topic	Objective
Strategic Compass	Built on a joint threat analysis, the SC should concretize the EU's strategic goals, identify a level of ambition and translate it into capabilities (see more details in section "The Strategic Compass as the core project").
Third state participation	To reach progress on how to allow non-EU states and their companies to take part in the new projects in PESCO.
European Peace Facility (EPF)	Launch the EPF to assure that the EU can train *and* equip partners, that is, to support them by funding their operations or supplying them with military equipment, thanks to a dedicated financial instrument.
PESCO Strategic Review (PSR)	PESCO is finishing its first phase (2017-2021) and is undergoing a strategic review, which will have to be completed before the launch of the second phase (2021-2025). The PSR should be ready for the Council meeting in November.
MPCC	To enable it for executive mandates up to a battlegroup-size operation.
Cyber	To strengthen the digital competence and cyber defense capabilities of the armed forces of the Member States.

[9] "Together for Europe's Recovery. Programme for Germany's Presidency of the Council of the European Union", *op. cit.*, p. 23.

[10] This list is not comprehensive. It is based on the presidency programme "Together for Europe's Recovery. Programme for Germany's Presidency of the Council of the European Union" and conversations with officials.
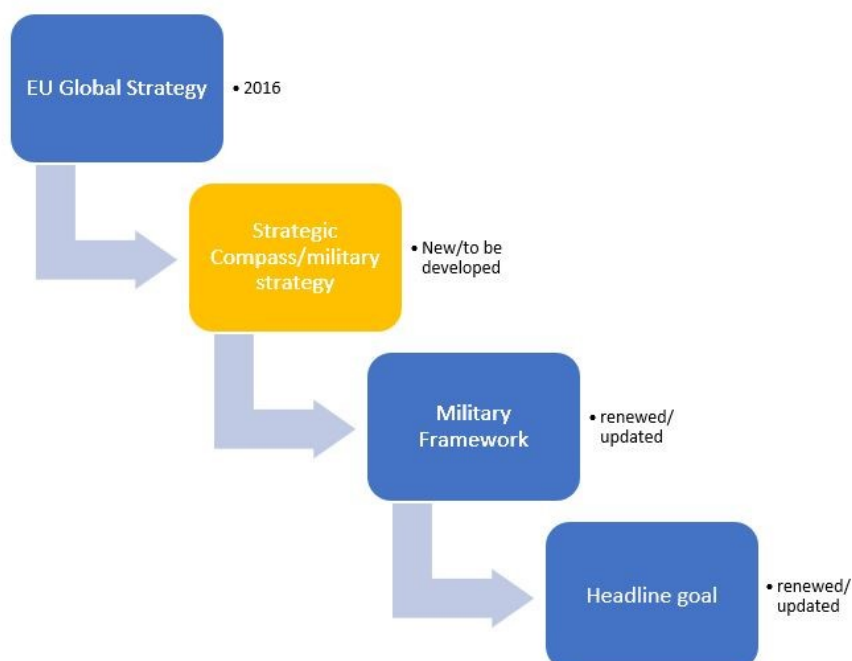
[11] This compilation is based on the official Programme "Together for Europe's Recovery. Programme for Germany's Presidency of the Council of the European Union" and conversations of the authors with national and European officials.

Civilian Center of Excellence for Civilian Crisis Management (CoE)	Assure the running of the CoE, launched in September 2020 in Berlin. It is tasked to develop conceptual standards and recommendations for civilian crisis operations and to enhance civilian capacities for EU crisis management. It supports its members and EU institutions in implementing their commitments under the Civilian CSDP Compact[12].
EU-NATO Cooperation	While recognizing the usual obstacles, to promote cooperation through dialogue, transparency and more regular coordination, on various issues, such as military mobility. In view of Covid-19, this can include topics such as improving disaster protection, military support for civilian structures, building resilience.
Medical cooperation (brought up by the pandemic)	It is intended to demonstrate the commitment of the EU in support of the Member States. It comprises two areas: stockpiling of medical material and a joint exercise, "Resilient response", in November.

The Strategic Compass as the core project

Germany's most prominent goal in the defense area is the Strategic Compass (SC). EU Defense Ministers agreed on 16 June 2020 to develop a "Strategic Compass"[13]. According to the presidency program, the SC should allow to "*further concretise the EU's strategic goals for the security and defense sector and make the EU's activity faster, more effective and more plannable, within the framework of the 2016 Global Strategy (…) and based on a joint threat analysis. This should also cover its responsiveness to pandemics*"[14]. The SC is supposed to identify more clearly the level of ambition of the EU in security and defense and to translate that ambition into capability needs. It would therefore offer the lacking operationalization of the 2016 EUGS and subsequently inform a new military framework and a new Headline Goal. The SC aims to cover the next ten years.

Table 2: Hierarchy of EU documents

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[12] See https://www.coe-civ.eu/about/the-coe (accessed 22.09.2020).
[13] "Council Conclusions on Security and Defense", Brussels, 17 June 2020 (accessed 22.09.2020).
[14] "Together for Europe's Recovery. Programme for Germany's Presidency of the Council of the European Union", *op. cit.*, p. 24.

Developing such a document seems like a logical step in view of external and internal development. The ambitions of the EU have increased, with European Commission president Ursula von der Leyen calling for a "*geopolitical Commission*", and HR/VP Josep Borrell asking Europe to "*learn the language of power*". At the same time, one of the most strategic actors, the United Kingdom, is leaving the EU. This affects the strategic thinking inside the EU, but likely also the perception that external actors have of the Union; they might consider the EU as less ambitious[15].

Besides, the 2016 EU Global Strategy (EUGS)[16] is considered to be partly outdated. The geopolitical context has become more competitive, with the Sino-US rivalry intensifying, the US redefining its global leadership role, and the overall questioning of global order structures.

But particularly, there is a conceptual gap in the EU's approach. The EUGS has not been properly operationalized, that is, translated into requirements. The EUGS argued that "*an appropriate level of ambition and strategic autonomy is important for Europe's ability to promote peace and security within and beyond its borders*"[17]. However, it did not define how European strategic autonomy in security and defense should look. Moreover, then HV/HR Federica Mogherini was under pressure to advance the EUGS process and sought to start the implementation of at least some projects during her time in office.

As a result, the EU jumped directly from the EUGS into the Implementation Plan on Security and Defense (IPSD), which HR/VP Mogherini tabled in November 2016[18]. It aimed to translate the 2016 EUGS into practice and developed a level of ambition. Accordingly, the EU wanted to engage in crisis management; support capacity-building for partners; and protect the EU and its citizens. Yet, this ambition has not been translated into requirements. The EU omitted the necessary step between EUGS and IPSD: to define a defense strategy. It would have offered guidance for the implementation by identifying tasks and scenarios in which military means should play a role, and what they should achieve.

Without this element, national governments and policymakers could avoid a more substantial discussion on the military level of ambition, how it would translate into capabilities and cooperation needs, and how existing forces fit into a future concept of defense. Also the EU institutions struggled when they were tasked to adapt the EU's military portfolio according to the EUGS. There was considerable uncertainty about the level of ambition and the capabilities this would require. Eventually, it hindered the EU to engage in a foreign policy that is supported by a comprehensive set of tools.

Instead, the EU embarked on an inconclusive two-year debate of what "strategic autonomy" might mean. Unsurprisingly, major differences among Member States on the concept, particularly with regard to defense, complicated the debate. Particularly those interpretations of autonomy that call for the EU to engage in defense beyond crisis management, that is, potentially taking over territorial defense tasks, and doing so without the United States, created additional divisions among EU Members.

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[15] Claudia Major, Alicia von Voss, "European Defense in View of Brexit. Europe's Military Power might not Suffer, but its Political Clout is at Risk", *SWP Comments*, 2017/C 10, April 2017.
[16] "Shared Vision, Common Action: A Stronger Europe. A Global Strategy for the European Union's Foreign and Security Policy", June 2016 (accessed 20.09.2020).
[17] *Ibid.*, p. 9.
[18] "Implementation Plan on Security and Defense", 14 November 2016 (accessed 3.10.2020).

It is this conceptual gap that the Strategic Compass aims to fill: it seeks to better link the EU's strategic, operational and capability needs in view of making it ready for strategic action.

Besides, most Member States felt little ownership with regard to the 2016 Global Strategy; they did not officially endorse it. Unsurprisingly, several states were initially sceptical about the SC, fearing it would be just another lengthy and resource-intensive process that would produce yet another paper that would lack implementation. The SC hence needs to respond to a content-wise need, but also to a need in terms of Member States ownership. From this perspective, it could serve as a tool for Member States to regain authority over EU institutions, and security and defense as such. The SC is thus originally designed as a Member-State-driven process. If they consider the result t*heir* document, their motivation to implement it might increase.

The two-step process of the Strategic Compass

For Germany, the SC offers a double value: the *process* of its elaboration, and the *result* in the form of a document. With regard to the process, it allows to connect and engage states and EU institutions, thereby – if it works – contributing to the development of a common European security and defense culture[19]. While the Member States should have a crucial role, the HR/VP and the European External Action Service (EEAS) will be the penholders in the process, with the Commission and the European Defense Agency being "*associated as appropriate*"[20].

The process follows a precisely organized and deliberately political two-step process that reaches from the German EU presidency (2020) to the French EU presidency (2022). Germany launched the process; France is supposed to close it. The process thus links the two major players in the EU and binds together four presidencies over two years (Germany, Portugal, Slovenia, France).

The process itself comprises two steps: first, threat analysis; second, the "Strategic Dialogue", which includes a writing up and a concertation phase, before submitting the final result in 2022.

Table 3: The process leading to the Strategic Compass, 2020-2022

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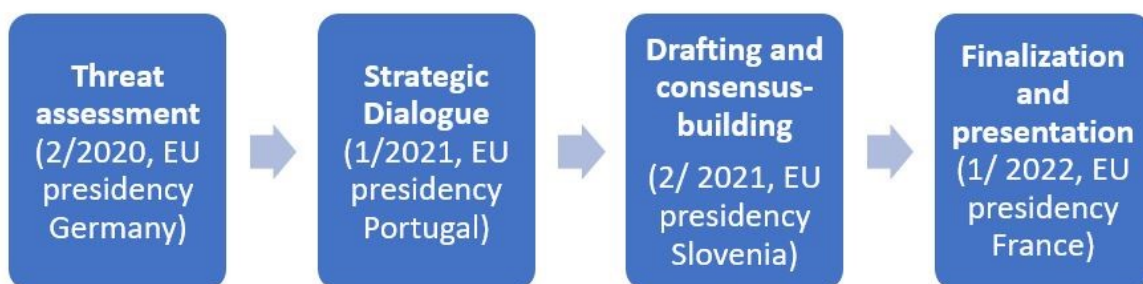
[19] On the challenges see for example Daniel Fiott, "Uncharted Territory? Towards a Common Threat Analysis and a Strategic Compass for EU Security and Defense", *Policy Brief*, EU ISS, n° 16, July 2020 (accessed 24.09.2020); Claudia Major, Christian Mölling, "Common Ground for European Defense: National Defense and Security Strategies Offer Building Blocks for a European Defense Strategy", *GMF Policy Brief*, 26 January 2016 (accessed 24.09.2020).
[20] "Council Conclusions on Security and Defense", *op. cit.*, p. 3.

The first step: a confidential, intel-based threat analysis (2020)

The first step aims to elaborate a threat analysis. The challenges for such an exercise are well known: the unique strategic cultures of EU Member States explain that there are deeply engrained differences on how they see the world – on whether the main threat comes from the East or the South, is a state or a non-state actor, how to respond, but also with regard to transatlantic relations, weapons and technologies. It is hardly possible to agree on a political prioritization among EU Member States. At the same time, if Europeans want to progress on a shared understanding, a threat analysis is a necessary starting point.

In order to overcome these well-known problems, the SC devised a three-step solution:

- First, the threat analysis is going to be intelligence-based and will remain confidential;
- Second, it is a stock taking rather than a classical threat analysis that weighs and offers a hierarchy of threats. It aims to deliver a 360-degree overview of the full range of threats and challenges in a prospective time frame until 2025-2030, that is, an inventory that explicitly avoids prioritization;
- Third, the resulting document will formally be outside the SC, hence does not need to be politically consented (as it is for example the case in NATO), which avoids painful debates and a watering down of the document. Defense ministers can just take note. However, this carries the risk of ending up with an endless shopping list of threats without hierarchy, with little usability.

Member States had until late September 2020 to submit their contributions. Now, civilian and military intelligence units (Single Intelligence Analysis Capacity, SIAC) within the EEAS, in cooperation with the Member States, are putting together the threat analysis. Obviously, the quality of this document depends upon the willingness of the states to submit meaningful contributions. It should be ready for November 2020 for the defense minister to take note.

This threat analysis is formally not part of the SC, but it is crucial in that it forms, together with two other elements, the basis for the second step, scheduled to start in January 2021: the Strategic Dialogue.

Second step: a Strategic Dialogue (2021-22) to lead to a Strategic Compass

The Strategic Dialogue is scheduled to run for about six months. It will be followed by a writing process, and then the concertation among the states. According to the current planning, the resulting Strategic Compass should be finalized and agreed under the French presidency in 1/2022. Informed by the threat analysis, the Strategic Compass would then translate the political level of ambition defined by the Global Strategy into concrete policy orientations and allow the Member States to define more specific objectives for and needs in security and defense.

This Strategic Dialogue is informed by three elements:

1. The **threat analysis** (as mentioned above).
2. A **gap analysis** that is currently under way under the responsibility of the EU Military Staff

and that the EU Military Committee will consent. Here, the military should bring up those questions for which they would like to have political guidance. The gap analysis is expected to structure the Strategic Dialogue, and the final document of the SC should then offer answers to the questions raised in the gap analysis. It is informed by the ongoing work on the "Military Framework 10" which seeks to translate the EUGS in military concepts.

3. Priorities of the Member States.

The Strategic Dialogue will be organized in four thematic baskets:
1. Crisis management
2. Resilience (which includes protecting Europe, and the ongoing operationalization of art. 42.7.)
3. Capabilities
4. Partnerships.

In each basket, Member States should discuss which priorities they should pursue together and which capabilities are therefore necessary. While the overall topics of the four baskets are defined, the content-wise questions to be treated in each basket remain to be identified. Here are some suggestions of the questions that could be addressed in each basket:

Table 4: The four baskets and potential questions to be addressed in the Strategic Dialogue (based upon N. König 2020, S. 6 and adapted by the authors)[21]

Crisis management	Capability development
• What scale of operations and at what concurrence? • What functional priorities (e.g. maritime security)? • What regional priorities (e.g. Eastern vs. Southern neighbourhoods, Asia)? • What links of the CSDP to other policy areas (e.g. counter-terrorism)? • How should the EU's command structures be transformed? • What priorities in the implementation of the Civilian Compact?	• What meaning of EU strategic autonomy in capability development? • What link between capabilities and crisis scenarios? • How can PESCO and the EDF better address pressing capability gaps? • How to link EU capability and defense planning processes to NATO? • What priorities for military mobility (territorial defense *vs* expeditionary operations)? • Should there be a revision of the 1999/2004 Headline Goal?
Resilience	**Partnerships**
• What EU contribution to territorial defense? • What articulation of the mutual assistance (Art. 42(7)TEU) and solidarity clauses (Art. 222 TFEU) in light of NATO's Article 5? • What lessons for civil-military cooperation from the pandemic? • How to sharpen EU tools to address hybrid threats, including disinformation? • What division of labour/synergies between the EU and NATO in responding to hybrid and cyber threats? • To what extent and how should the EU act jointly in space?	• How to deepen EU-NATO cooperation despite political obstacles? • What does a more strategic approach to third country partnerships in CSDP effectively mean? • Should there be a deeper and *sui generis* security and defense partnership for the UK and what would that entail?

[21] Nicole König, "The EU's Strategic Compass for Security and Defense: Just Another Paper?", *Policy Paper*, Hertie School, Jaques Delors Center, 10 July 2020 (accessed 23.09.2020).

How to go ahead: risk and opportunities

At first sight, this looks like a typical EU process: (too) long, comprehensive but likely to be watered down by concertation and hence with little tangible result. Yet, from a German point of view, the process itself has an added value. And in view of the hesitance of several states, having succeeded in launching it is already a success for Germany. By offering the room for a constant exchange, the process (even if complicated by the Covid-19 pandemic) can in the best case allow states to better understand the priorities of fellow Europeans, approach their views and allow them to eventually agree on core threats, challenges, interests and objectives. Broadly speaking, this would be a significant step forward towards a European strategic culture. More precisely, it would allow the EU military to dispose of a better planning basis. In the worst case, such a process could just cement views, underscore differences and block any progress. As always in the EU, it depends upon the political will of the states to turn both process and result into something meaningful.

The Compass as a new opportunity to increase the EU's capacity to act

Given the gap in the planning documents (*i.e.* the missing EU defense strategy) and the widespread impression among EU Member States that the discourse on autonomy and sovereignty has led into a dead end, the Strategic Compass offers the opportunity to solve this problem by restarting the discussion on a different basis. This time it would be wise to avoid big terminology. One option is to now focus on the *Capacity to Act* as new terminology. Putting autonomy and sovereignty aside and concentrating on another term is not only a language trick. The Capacity to Act lies at the core of both autonomy and sovereignty: it describes the ability to achieve political objectives and solve political problems. Only effective governments, those who achieve objectives and solve problems, are also legitimate governments. Without the capacity to act, other actors would define the course of a country's politics and deny autonomy of domestic political action.

There are additional advantages of using the term Capacity to Act:

- Contrary to the terms autonomy and sovereignty, the Capacity to Act does not carry a historical burden (sovereignty) or has become toxic (autonomy) as a result of recent debates in EU circles.
- Capacity to Act is intuitively graspable as something of which you can have more or less of. Hence, the term lends itself to a more differentiated debate, for example on what exactly the EU and its members need to do to improve their capacity to act, and how much would be a relevant minimum.
- Capacities or capabilities provide a common denominator: Member States might be divided over policy priorities but they all want to stay capable, no matter what policy priority they exactly want to execute. Hence, there is a baseline compromise.

What generates the capacity to act differs across issue areas. However, especially in the area of defense, there is an agreed body of what provides this capacity: military capabilities. And even though preferences for types of operations vary among Europeans, the majority of capabilities needed (and lacking) for all scenarios is similar, for example command and control and reconnaissance capabilities.

Some think tankers and government experts question the utility of the SC, fearing "just another bloody paper"[22]. However, given the challenges Europe faces with regard to the rapidly growing number and intensity of conflicts around the EU, a new effort to increase the Union's capacity to act should be welcomed. Yet, lessons should be drawn from all failed previous defense and capability initiatives, be they EU, NATO, WEU or multinational based, in order to avoid repeating them. *A priori*, those policies are bound to fail that only follow a narrative and do not present a credible implementation perspective, because they are not backed by resources and a compelling rationale.

The current process might face an additional complication: the level of ambition cannot only be driven by risks and threats. There is a widespread belief that the EU has to assert itself in view of an increasingly intense great power competition. A potential EU level of ambition would need to reflect this rivalry and define EU interests and priorities. Yet, this will hardly be possible given that the threat analysis leading to the Strategic Compass is confidential and avoids prioritization.

Potential outcomes: four options

The Strategic Compass is at its initial stage. States and the EU can still shape its dimensions and purpose. As the thematic baskets (crisis management, capability development, resilience, partnerships) have been agreed, they seem to be the obvious variables to generate direction and content. Moreover, the outcome depends on the ambition of the EU, its Member States and whether the implementation is feasible. Depending on the influence of each of these factors, various outcomes of the SC process are conceivable. Below, we sketch four potential types of outcomes, that is, where the SC could take European defense:

1. **Defining new cornerstones for CSDP defense planning**. In this option, the SC would exclusively and very rigidly focus on the military dimension of CSDP. This could allow to deliver a focused result – which is useful, even if it does not solve the EU's political problems. As a minimum outcome, a decisively military strand is needed in the SC to generate the certainty that defense planners need for their planning assumptions. Hence, the minimum would be a defense ambition document that allows to deduce needed capabilities. A strong focus to achieve the one key objective could make it difficult to adapt the outcome to the other elements of CSDP, which will develop further in parallel. This could be the case for instruments related to defense industries and other areas of EU security policies like the European defense industrial development Programme (EDIDP) and the European Defense Fund. This approach would remain within the remits of the pre-Lisbon world. It has the highest feasibility potential. Yet, because of the more complex security environment, a military-centred approach could be seen as outdated. Additional opposition against a "military only" approach will come from those critics that argue that climate and health should be put at the centre of security concerns. An alternative would possibly to try and align military and civilian CSDP, as some states see this as a necessary element to get domestic support. Eventually, the parallel running process of the civilian CSDP Compact could also benefit from the output from the threat assessment.

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[22] Nicole König, "The EU's Strategic Compass for Security and Defense: Just Another Paper?", *op. cit.*

2. **Moving towards EU Defense beyond CSDP**. So far, the SC focuses exclusively on CSDP – it does not even include CFSP, not to mention other instruments under the Commission that would support CSDP, such as the European Defense Fund (EDF). However, if Member States would focus on resilience, they should widen their toolbox to include CFSP and Commission instruments and explore a "whole of EU approach". This would also imply to not put defense but security into the center of the SC and search for the intersections of various instruments that the EU institutions and Member States then need to manage. The outcome would possibly be a qualitatively much broader and quantitatively much higher level of ambition. It would especially include a first-time ambition or at least an indication for areas like cyber defense, protection of critical infrastructures and other areas that are linked to resilience. An alternative version of this option that would stay primarily in the area of defense would still go beyond CSDP into the defense industrial and technological realms of the EU, not at least because many states have pushed for it and the Lisbon Treaty, the EUGS and the IPSD were calling for it. PESCO and the European Defense Fund would be at the center of this option. Yet, tensions with the European Commission, which has become ever more ambitious in this area, would presumably rise. If managed constructively, this could lead to a work programme that more systematically shapes the interaction and helps the Commission bureaucracy to better understand defense and defense industry. Yet, in this area, inter- and inner institutional conflicts often prime progressive solutions, which makes this a risky option. As the approach remains within the EU, it is unlikely that it opens a discussion about the roles of NATO and the EU with regard to territorial and alliance defense.

3. **Moving towards European Defense beyond institutional pillars**. This option would give defense capabilities the prime importance; institutional frameworks only matter as the necessary support for capability development. Thus, this option would have a very clear focus on the partnership with NATO and on multinational cooperation that contribute tangible capacity through defense capabilities. The latter would include those critical infrastructure protection and cyber- related activities that are shared among and within EU and NATO. One key instrument could be those 22 EU members that are also NATO allies: they could link the EU and NATO. One key challenge would be to assure that the SC results at least do not contradict outcomes out of the ongoing NATO processes: the reflection process NATO 2030 and the new round of NATO capability planning, and *vice versa*. In fact, this parallelism might even offer a good reason to coordinate among Europeans and to take into account what has already been decided on the political, strategic and military challenges that NATO faces. NATO and EU staffs could be tasked to identify capabilities needed for a cross-institutional mission spectrum. Otherwise, the 22 states that are members of both organizations could build an informal task force. Its job would be to determine which priorities should be pursued in the NDPP and which with the help of EU instruments (CDP, CARD, PESCO, EDF) – with maximum transparency towards NATO and the EU. Although such an approach is likely to meet reservations and counter-arguments, it would allow to truly connect the two institutions and should at least be thought through and formulated in order to decide whether and how to share it with allies. A joint threat analysis by NATO and the EU or driven by the states represented in both organizations could also be envisaged.

4. **Defining the European way of conflict**. In this option, the EU would aim to file its strategy for future conflict, *i.e.* a comprehensive description of how the EU would engage with which type of actors over which essential conflicts. This would inevitably need to go beyond the Union and its members to include key partners, such as the United Kingdom, but possibly also some that are geographically further away, like Japan and Australia, to allow for interest

projection in the Indo-Pacific. It would be an important signal if the EU would skim through its long register of strategic and other partnerships and end those that are just practiced by doing annual meetings but do not contribute to achieve core interests of the EU and its members.

As an alternative and sobering exercise, the EU could also define a realistic level of ambition with and without specific partners. Such an outline would include the assumption that partners would indeed respond in crises – and most probably *vice versa*. This raises the question whether the EU is a reliable partner, and for whom.

Given the quickly deteriorating security environment this would be an appropriate approach. Yet, it is the most difficult with regard to implementation. The SC could only represent an intermediate step.

Political context offers opportunities and risks

The SC does not take place in a vacuum. It inevitably interacts with other ongoing politics like the Franco-German divergences over foreign policy, the interest of EU institutions and parallel NATO processes like the reflection process NATO 2030, but also with current uncertainties that have a huge potential to affect the EU's security and defense: the consequences of Covid-19 and the US elections. The EU countries should try to use this situation as an opportunity.

It would be worth using the Compass to relaunch the Franco-German relationship: the SC spans from the German EU presidency in 2020 until the French presidency in 2022. This gatekeeper function and responsibility of the two key states on security and defense should encourage them to use the Compass to foster political discussion and rapprochement between Berlin and Paris. In recent months, the gap between Germany and France in defense has not narrowed. The SC could serve as a palpable project that spans from now to 2022; Berlin and Paris should use it as a pretext to discuss many issues that are at the core of European Defense. The key questions are: where does the EU need to be and where do we want it to be in 2030, and whether the stated policy objectives can be implemented.

Other Member States should view the SC as a lever to foster Germany's security policy commitment. It would be clever to accept a certain German shaping power even beyond its presidency, in order to keep Germany interested in the process and in the outcomes. In the best case, the SC can serve as a driving force for reforming German defense policy.

One key risk is that member states lose interest and ownership because the EU institutions, mainly the EEAS and HR/VP, become too ambitious and take too much leadership in the process. This can especially happen when the presidencies of the smaller members, Slovenia and Portugal, receive more support from the EEAS and the HR/VP. Hence, all stakeholders should worry to keep the right balance of power: it is about avoiding to have too much influence as this would make the other stakeholders lose ownership and lead to a lose-lose situation, *i.e.* just another time-consuming inconclusive process that then widens the gap between the EU institutions and capitals. This would further delegitimize the EU in security and defense. Clearly, it would not be a success for the EU if Member States were again only to take note of the results. After all, it was also the missing endorsement of the EUGS by the member states that led Germany to launch the SC.

A second key risk is that the SC does not factor in uncertainties. This mainly concerns the

impact of Covid-19 on European and US defense. It will unfold over the next months, thus in parallel to the SC process, thereby also defining the conditions for the SC[23].

- Covid-19: in parallel to the SC, the consequences of the Covid crisis will affect the defense and security realm of the EU in various forms, such as financial austerity. This can potentially upset the overall setup and will definitely impact the capacity to act. Hence, the SC should anticipate the impact and help provide solutions. Otherwise, EU institutions, and, more importantly, Europe as a whole, could slip into strategic irrelevance.
- NATO: parallel processes are running in NATO; the reflection process under the leitmotif of NATO 2030 and the next round of NATO defense planning. Both are good reminders to coordinate among Europeans and avoid contradictions.
- US elections: much linked also to NATO is the result of the US presidential elections and its impact on NATO, the EU and the wider security environment.

The SC can hardly create the political gravity to boost EU capabilities and operations. CSDP has not progressed much, capabilities have not been delivered, most operations remained at the lowest level. Eventually, it is a political dynamic which will change only if the political approach in the capitals changes. Hence, the SC alone will not change much: it is the classical problem of offering a technical solution to a political problem. But it can support and enable: support Member States in rising awareness on the need of better defense, and enable them to move in a right direction once they have agreed that defense really matters.

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[23] Claudia Major, Christian Mölling, "Saving European Defense from the Coronavirus Pandemic", Carnegie Europe, 30 April 2020 (accessed 3.10.2020).

Les opinions exprimées ici n'engagent que la responsabilité de leur auteur.