

THE RELEVANCE OF THE STRATEGIC COMPASS AS THE NEW COMMON DEFENSE POLICY OF THE EUROPEAN UNION

Associate Professor Mihaela Adina APOSTOLACHE, PhD.

Petroleum-Gas University of Ploiesti, Romania

mihapostolache@yahoo.com

Abstract:

The "strategic compass" is a newly emerged concept that is used in the European space. The phrase refers to an action guide that sets an ambitious way forward for the EU's security and defense policy until 2030. The goal of creating a strategic compass is seen as a great one, helping to take on security responsibilities. The starting point was the more hostile security environment, which led to an increased EU capacity and willingness to act, to strengthening resilience and increasing investment in defense capabilities.

Keywords: *strategic compass, security, defense, resilience, partnerships, accountability*

Preamble

The process of developing the document known as the "Strategic Compass" was the result of the simultaneous manifestation of two directions: one at the national level, of each member state, and another at the European level. Analyzing the national or the state level, it is known that the main actors involved in addressing this subject were the member states of the European Union, who decided, at the Security and Defense Council in June 2020 [1], to start the reflection process on the Strategic Compass, a document that was approved in March 2022 by the European Council [2]. The discussions held in the summer of 2020 took into account, in broad terms, the current situation of the security environment and the need for such an approach on the part of the European Union.

It was appreciated that "the strategic compass will define policy directions, as well as specific targets and objectives in areas such as crisis management, resilience, capacity building and partnerships"[3]. This communication also stated the stages to be followed in the process of initiation, elaboration and implementation of the document by the European institutions.

One problem that arose was related to the financing of this commendable initiative. It was established, thus, that the sources will be provided, equally, by the

European Union and the member states, which should allocate the necessary financial resources for security and defense at the European and national level, thus achieving important steps in consolidating the economic recovery, especially in critical sectors in the EU.

European and national approaches to the strategic compass

The first version of the Strategic Compass [4] was presented by the High Representative in November 2021, based on the first analysis of the threats reported by the internal structures of the 27 EU member states and a dialogue phase between these states, the EU institutions and experts. Successive versions were discussed in February and March 2022, to reflect on the debate between the Member States and to take into account the Commission's defense and space package (from 15 February 2022) as well as the latest international developments, including Russia's military aggression against Ukraine.

The whole effort to make the *EU a stronger and more capable security provider* [5] was completed by the adoption, in March 2022, of the Strategic Compass. An important role also belonged to the initiatives started in 2016 through the EU Global Strategy [6], which outlined a set of principles designed to reflect and react to the profoundly transformed context inside and outside the Union: unity, involvement, responsibility and partnerships [7]. This also emerged from the Communication of June 2020, when the Council referred to this strategy [8] and the need to continue the activities already launched. It should be noted that in this document the phrase *strategic autonomy* was used, as an objective towards which the European Union should strive.

Another European document that was used in the development of the Strategic Compass was the EU Strategy regarding Security Union [9]. The period covered by the strategy is 2020-2025 and it promotes a deeply oriented approach to strengthening security in pressing areas in the following years: critical infrastructures in economy and society, cyberspace, democracy, the European way of life [10]. In other words, priority areas are considered where the EU can help Member States to promote security for all those living in Europe, while respecting European values and principles.

As stated in the Council press release, the strength of the Union lies in unity, solidarity and determination. This allows the EU to protect its citizens and contribute to international peace and security, in a context where war has returned to Europe, following Russia's unjustified and unprovoked aggression against Ukraine, and also at a time of major geopolitical transformations. This Strategic Compass is expected [11] to strengthen the EU's strategic autonomy and its ability to work together with partners in order to protect its values and interests [12].

The doctrine [13] talked about a *two-dimensional approach* that can contribute to greater support for the content of the Strategic Compass from the actors involved in its approval and implementation, starting from *the four priorities identified by the Council in June 2020: crisis management, resilience, development of capabilities, partnerships*. The specialized literature also provides clarifications regarding the use of the concept of resilience, a term borrowed from the technical field, then taken over by other disciplines. "Resilience is a fluid, adaptable concept, with nuanced approaches and evolutions of conceptual developments. For any system that presents at least one vulnerability and that is exposed to risk or threats, resilience can define and measure its ability to continue its existence through solidity in maintaining vital functions and flexibility in other respects" [14].

The finalization of the European document was the result of inter-institutional cooperation. Thus, at the European level, the following were involved in the drafting of the document: the Council of the European Union, the Commission, the High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy. At the same time, the member states constantly participated in the elaboration of the final form of the document by offering suggestions and comments.

Thus, the Commission has set strategic cybersecurity priorities meant to ensure that the EU can anticipate and respond to evolving threats [15]. In addition, the establishment of a common cyber unit is aimed at as a platform for structured and coordinated cooperation.

In the same context, the Council expressed its support for the intensification of strategic, operational and technical cooperation between the European level and the member states, for the consolidation of the single market of cyber security products,

services and processes, as well as for the consolidation of the Union's technological and industrial capacity to protect against cyber threats [16].

The entire approach then continued with the consultation of Member States and the initiation of a Strategic Dialogue in early 2021, in which the European External Action Service contributed with a study entitled Scoping Document: preparing the Strategic Compass. As the study shows [17], the first part of the Strategic Compass contains the threats and challenges the EU faces and how it "contributes to the development of the common European security and defense culture, based on the EU's common values and objectives".

The Content of the EU Strategic Compass

The document reflects, on the one hand, two levels of threat manifestation: the global and the regional level, and, on the other hand, a separate category is identified: threats to the EU.

The public part of the document [18] comprises six main sections of the Strategic Compass. The first is a general section, where threats and challenges are presented or assessed, as well as strategic planning, followed by crisis management and resilience (sections detailing some of the challenges), and the final sections mention capabilities and partnerships as tools needed to achieve the goals proposed.

In the foreword of this document entitled "A strategic compass to transform Europe into a security provider", the High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy stated that the purpose of this Strategic Compass is to enable the European Union: "to become a provider of security for its citizens, protecting our values and interests" [19] and prevent the risk of 'strategic restraint'. Thus, the main objective of the Strategic Compass is to contribute to a more coherent and politically motivated approach to topics in the security and defense sectors.

It was appreciated in the doctrine that, from this perspective, the Strategic Compass: "provides a joint assessment of our strategic environment, of the threats and challenges we face and their implications for the EU; brings greater coherence and common purpose to security and defense actions already underway; establishes new ways and means to improve our collective ability to defend the security of our citizens and

the Union; specifies precise objectives and milestones for measuring progress".[20] In order to achieve these desired goals, the methods by which they can be carried out were also mentioned: faster action; ensuring the security of citizens in the face of threats; investments in capabilities and technologies; building partnerships [21].

The adoption of this document shows the firm assumption of a more coherent and dynamic position of the member states in terms of ensuring greater cohesion and solidarity in the face of present and future threats to their security in an increasingly competitive and fragmented international environment [22].

By virtue of Article 42 paragraph (7) of the Treaty on European Union (TEU), the Strategic Compass aims to increase the EU's capacity and willingness to act, to strengthen resilience and ensure mutual solidarity and assistance. As such, it seeks to enhance the EU's presence, effectiveness and visibility in its neighborhood and on the world stage through joint efforts and investments, and the EU's contribution to shaping the world's future by pursuing a strategic course of action.

The EU's quality as a strong and coherent [23] political actor is required to support the values and principles underlying European democracies, to assume responsibility for the security of Europe and its citizens, and to support international peace and security, as well as human security, together with partners, recognizing at the same time the specific character of the security and defense policy of certain member states.

The compass covers all aspects of security and defense policy and is structured around *four pillars* [24]: *action, security, investment and partnership*.

Related to the first pillar – *action*, the steps to be taken to be able to act quickly and firmly whenever a crisis breaks out, together with partners, if possible, and alone when necessary, have been established.

The second pillar – *security*, gives the EU the opportunity to strengthen its capacity to anticipate, deter and respond to current and rapidly emerging threats and challenges, as well as to protect its security interests by establishing a cyber defense policy, developing a set of tools for handling information and external interference; developing an EU space strategy for security and defense, and also by further developing the cyber diplomatic toolkit.

Regarding *the investment* pillar, the Member States have committed to substantially increase their defense spendings in order to meet the collective desire to reduce critical gaps in military and civilian capabilities and strengthen the European defense industrial and technological base.

To address common threats and challenges, under the fourth pillar – *partnerships* – the EU aims to strengthen cooperation with strategic partners such as NATO, the UN and regional partners, including the OSCE, the AU and ASEAN; develop better-tailored bilateral partnerships with like-minded countries and strategic partners such as the US, Canada, Norway, the UK, Japan and others; develop tailored partnerships in the Western Balkans, the Eastern and Southern Neighborhood, Africa, Asia and Latin America, including by strengthening dialogue and cooperation, by promoting participation in Common Security and Defense Policy (CSDP) missions and operations, and supporting the strengthening of capabilities.

Conclusions

In addition to the attributions and working methods of the decision-making mechanisms, to which mutual relations and interactions are added, the European Union was established and matured within an evolutionary historical process. The Strategic Compass, the European Union's new common defense policy, provides a joint assessment of the strategic environment in which the EU operates and the threats and challenges it faces. It is a document that, for the first time, makes concrete and actionable proposals, with a very precise implementation timetable [25], to improve the EU's ability to act decisively in crises and to defend its security and its citizens.

The compass also clearly underlines the importance of the transatlantic relationship and NATO's role in collective defense, as a stronger and more capable EU in the field of security and defense will contribute to strengthening transatlantic security and NATO. Embracing one scenario or another naturally contains a significant subjective element, but in reality any political decision is subjective because it represents a desirability of those who are responsible for its realization. The question of the future of Europe should be approached in such a way that we are aware of the core of national

interests in a heterogeneous integrative system, which clearly includes economic interests in addition to cultural and institutional perspectives.

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