

Strengthening EU Defence and Foreign Policy: A 2022 Assessment

An assessment of the EU's Common Security Defence Policy in 2022; how the Union is implementing its own geopolitical objectives, and what could be done to meet those objectives better.

REVITALISING **MULTILATERAL** PERSPECTIVE AND POLICY SERIES

POLICY BRIEF

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1. INTRODUCTION

The state of the world in 2022 paints a bleak picture of a return to war and realpolitik as a means to project political goals and ambitions. War has returned to Europe in Ukraine with Russia's invasion, while political tensions have risen between the main global powers; the United States (US), Russia and China over outstanding issues such as Taiwan. Meanwhile conflict has continued in other parts of the world such as in Syria and Libya, and the threat of violence through terrorism and the like is still very high.

Europe, thus, finds itself in a crossroads. Trapped geographically between the other major powers of the world, with the political union of the EU struggling to project the combined strength of its 27 Member States. A series of inter-political disputes have caused the Union to repeatedly stumble in its attempts to project its

considerable military and defensive power, leaving it seemingly absent whilst conflicts and violence permeate on all sides of its borders.

This policy brief presents an analysis of the EU's flagship foreign policy mechanism, the Common Security Defence Policy (CSDP) and considers some of the challenges that this policy faces. The brief also considers the relationship between the EU and NATO, and how the shared goals between both has proven to be very useful in some instances, but has incumbered the development of a truly autonomous European foreign policy in others. The paper concludes with a set of policy recommendations to improve the CSDP and its implementation moving forward.

2. A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE CSDP

The idea of a common security policy between European states dates to the immediate post-WW II years, but the development, specifically, of the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) was initiated with the Treaty of Lisbon, which entered into force in 2009. Of two articles of note, the Lisbon Treaty defined EU foreign policy objectives as:

'Promote peace, its values and the well-being of its peoples' (Art. 3.1)¹

'Preserve peace, prevent conflicts and strengthen international security' (Art. 21.2 (c))²

Among many key measures was a mutual assistance and solidarity clause between Member States, as well as the creation of the European External Action Service (EEAS) under the authority of the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs & Security Policy/ Vice-President of the European Commission (HR/VP). According to the EEAS³:

"The two distinct functions of the post give the HR/VP the possibility to bring all the necessary EU assets together and to apply a "comprehensive approach" to EU crisis management."

¹ Consolidated version of the Treaty on European Union. (2008) TITLE I: COMMON PROVISIONS - Article 3 (ex Article 2 TEU).

² Consolidated version of the Treaty on European Union. (2008) TITLE V: GENERAL PROVISIONS ON THE UNION'S EXTERNAL ACTION AND SPECIFIC PROVISIONS ON THE COMMON FOREIGN AND SECURITY POLICY - Chapter 1: General provisions on the Union's external action – Article 21.

³ https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/shaping-common-security-and-defence-policy_en

This comprehensive approach has been a core concept for EU foreign policymaking but has several definitions⁴. However, the understanding of this paper suggests that the comprehensive approach, when related to CSDP foreign policy, is civil-military integration. This means that in response to crises, the EU's action is to utilize a broad set of assets and capabilities not limited to military, but also including civilian tools for strengthening the rule of law and developing administrative capabilities within the country in question. Thus, the EU is engaged with both conflict response and conflict prevention, in order to strengthen a country so that it does not fall into conflict again.

Since 2009, there have been several notable developments in the CSDP, but for brevity a few will be mentioned here. In 2016, the Global Strategy for the European Union's Foreign and Security Policy⁵ added new priorities to the CSDP, including political goals for more European strategic autonomy, new financial tools for developing defence capacities, and follow-up actions to the 2016 EU-NATO Joint Declaration⁶ to identify areas of joint cooperation.

In 2017, a Treaty implemented Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO)⁷ between willing Member States to strengthen European defence capabilities and increase integration between them. PESCO was conceived as a means to make European military capacities more united, efficient and readily available to respond to potential threats. PESCO was followed by the implementation of the European Defence Fund⁸ by the European Commission, as a means to support defence research and development.

In 2021, the European Peace Facility⁹ was implemented as a fund with a mechanism to finance CSDP missions and actions. It also introduced monitoring and compliance accountability measures to assess risk and ensure CSDP compliance with international law and respect for human rights. There are also some measures to allow civil society to report on any documented violations.

⁴ Wollard, C. 2017. *The EU and the Comprehensive Approach*. European Peacebuilding Liaison Office.

⁵ European Union (2016). *Shared Vision, Common Action: A Stronger Europe. A Global Strategy for the European Union's Foreign and Security Policy*.

⁶ https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_133163.htm

⁷ <https://www.pesco.europa.eu/>

⁸ https://defence-industry-space.ec.europa.eu/eu-defence-industry/european-defence-fund-edf_en

⁹ <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/european-peace-facility/>

3. CURRENT POLITICAL OBJECTIVES OF THE CSDP: THE 2022 STRATEGIC COMPASS

This year, the Strategic Compass¹⁰ was introduced to assess the current strategic environment of concern to the EU, identify risks and challenges and develop concrete proposals.

The Compass identified several threats that the EU considers as priorities, including its place in a world affected increasingly by aggressive global power politics by actors such as Russia and China. In terms of geographical location, the EU is concerned firstly with the neighbourhood which can be sub-divided by region:

- The Eastern Neighbourhood: Chiefly the current Russian aggression in Ukraine, as well as instability in Moldova, Georgia and the South Caucasus, and the violent authoritarian repression in Belarus.
- The Arctic: With reference to global warming, geopolitical rivalries, and access to natural resources.
- The Southern Neighbourhood: The ongoing crises in Syria and Libya, the impact of terrorism, migrant trafficking, and organized crime.
- The Eastern Mediterranean: Mainly tensions between Turkey and EU Member States (i.e., Greece and Cyprus) including the weaponization of irregular migration.

In addition, the Compass identified geo-strategic interests in Africa (namely the Sahel, the Gulf of Guinea, the Horn of Africa, and the Mozambique Channel), the Middle East and Gulf region, the Indo-Pacific (in relation to China), other issues in Asia (such as North Korea), and Latin America (mentioning Venezuela and the Central American region by name).

After discussing additional prominent threats, such as terrorism, cyber-terrorism and climate change, the Compass articulates a clear objective¹¹ for the EU's foreign policy:

¹⁰ European Union (2022). *A Strategic Compass for Security and Defence. For a European Union that protects its citizens, values and interests and contributes to international peace and security.*

¹¹ Ibid.

“We must be able to and ready to protect our citizens, defend our shared interests, project our values and contribute to shape the global future. We need to redouble our efforts to implement our integrated approach to security, conflicts and crises.”

The Compass proposes an action plan to strengthen the CSDP by 2030 in four areas:

- Act – Measures to develop military capacity by having more troops on standby, conducting regular live exercises, reinforce the both the civilian and military components of the CSDP, and make full use of the EPF.
- Secure – Mainly measures to develop intelligence capabilities such as cyber defence, but also includes aspects related to maritime and space capabilities.
- Invest – Measures to increase economic funding, and research and development into defence.
- Partner – Measures to strengthen cooperation with strategic partners, at the international (UN, NATO etc.), regional and bilateral level.

4. ONGOING CSDP MISSIONS

There are currently 19 active CSDP missions, seven of which are military missions. The military missions are split into three categories:

1. Military Missions - EUFOR ALTHEA (Bosnia and Herzegovina i.e., BiH)

ALTHEA¹² has been in operation since 2004, when EU forces took over from pre-existing NATO forces within BiH, following a mandate from the UN Security Council Resolutions 1551 (2004) and 1575 (2004), which welcomed and allowed a multinational security taskforce to act a security provider in BiH. ALTHEA is closely linked with NATO and uses NATO capabilities under the ‘Berlin Plus’ agreement, as discussed below. Most notably, ALTHEA is currently the only EU mission tasked actively with on-ground peacekeeping and security,

2. European Naval Force Missions - EUNAVFOR MED IRINI (Libya);
EUNAVFOR Somalia ATALANTA

¹² <https://euforbih.org/>

The two missions have slightly different characteristics. IRINI¹³ acts as an implementor of the UN Security Council's arms embargo on the conflict in Libya, utilizing capacities to monitor and track weapons smuggled into the Libyan conflict via the Mediterranean Sea. ATALANTA¹⁴, however, has a more direct focus, insofar as it is a counter-piracy operation tasked with directly protecting vessels and deterring armed piracy in the sea. ATALANTA, importantly, is also mandated based upon existing UN Security Council Resolutions.

3. Training Missions - EUTM Mali; EUTM Mozambique; EUTM RCA (Central African Republic); EUTM Somalia

These missions¹⁵ are tasked with training national security providers such as military and local law enforcement to encourage security robustness and self-sufficiency in the relevant countries. They are not strictly speaking military deployment missions, beyond training and capacity development providers.

The other, civilian, missions¹⁶ are tasked with priorities such as police and strengthening the rule of law, civil administration and protection, monitoring capabilities, and other generic support. On such missions, the EU sends police, judges, prosecutors, and other experts to assist in the priorities on ground. The inclusion of a civilian component to CSDP missions is an important aspect of the CSDP in general, and its intention to maintain a comprehensive approach to foreign policy.

Through the categorization of CSDP military missions, we can observe some notable unifying features of them. Firstly, all missions involving force have been mandated by the UN Security Council and have not been a politically autonomous decision. The EU has proven reluctant to directly engage with politically contentious crises, especially those that involve prominent UN Security Council Members such as Russia.

Secondly, all missions are present in cases where there has been a security gap, that is to say where there has been an absence of alternative security providers such as NATO or individual countries such as the US.

¹³ <https://www.operationirini.eu/>

¹⁴ <https://eunavfor.eu/>

¹⁵ <http://eutmmali.eu/>; https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eutm-mozambique_en?s=4411; https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eutm-rca_en; <http://eutmmali.eu/>

¹⁶ https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/missions-and-operations_en

Thirdly, all missions are conservative in their use of both economic and military assets. Figures from 2013¹⁷ suggested that only 1,400 troops were involved in ALTHEA, while another 1,400 were involved in EUNAVFOR Somalia. This number is relatively small compared to the capacities of some prominent EU Member States. The involvement of certain Member States also widely varies in these missions, reflecting the first key issue with the implementation of the CSDP.

5. DIFFICULTIES AND TENSIONS

5.1. Disunity

Given the lack of a generalized European military presence, the CSDP has had to depend upon the participation of certain key Member States; notably France who invests significantly more in defence than its neighbours¹⁸. For several years, this imbalance of assets has led to fears of an imbalance of leadership, and therefore decision-making power of such key States. Even with the development of newer forms of cooperation, such as PESCO, the foreign policy decision-making power remains with the European Council and therefore national ministers.

The other side to this is the wide variation of military engagement by certain EU Members, which follows a pattern of differing security priorities, and attitudes to issues such as European strategic autonomy, NATO, political neutrality, and the development and hosting of nuclear weapons.¹⁹ In ALTHEA for example, there are only 15 EU Member States directly engaged with the multinational task force, supported by five non-EU troop contributing countries. A notably significant objector to most EU military engagement has been Denmark, who until June 2022 had opted out of the CSDP arrangements altogether²⁰.

5.2. Tension with NATO

Similar to the last point, the presence of NATO has also been significant to CSDP tensions. 21 EU Member States are part of NATO, with another two (Sweden and Finland) currently applying for NATO membership. There are, however four EU

¹⁷ Keukeleire, S. & Delreux, T. (2014) 'The Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP)'. Ch. 8 in: The Foreign Policy of the European Union. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

¹⁸ <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1293572/expenditure-on-military-defense-as-gdp-share-in-the-european-union-eu-27/>

¹⁹ https://ecfr.eu/special/independence_play_europes_pursuit_of_strategic_autonomy/

²⁰ https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/denmark-statement-high-representative-outcome-referendum-opt-out-defence-matters_en

Member States that are not present within NATO: Austria, Ireland, Cyprus, and Malta.

Historically, the US, the most significant NATO Member in terms of both military and economic provision, has been reluctant to support the CSDP seeing this as a potential rival, not so much in direct competition but in terms of deviating European military and economic assets outside of NATO²¹. The compromise worked out with the EU in 2002 was the 'Berlin Plus'²² agreement, which allowed for the EU to conduct operations outside of NATO or using existing NATO assets. This allowed for a genuine interlinking of EU military power with NATO, to assuage any fears of the US, whilst providing EU CSDP missions with military assets that the EU was, at the time, lacking.

But this close relation between the EU and NATO has created some problems. Again, France is probably the most significant military provider within the EU, but also retains an extremely prominent role within NATO leading to questions of how it utilizes its capabilities. This has also led to France circumventing inter-EU objections to some of its decisions, such as the intervention in Libya in 2011²³, by involving itself through its NATO status instead.

Another significant problem is the political dispute between EU Member State, Cyprus, and NATO member, Turkey²⁴. Cyprus and Turkey have continued to block each other's engagements with the alternative organization due to ongoing territorial disputes. And Turkey's presence within NATO has prevented the EU from acting at all in the Eastern Mediterranean, despite those ongoing tensions being identified within the 2022 Security Compass as a direct threat to European stability.

One of the difficulties with pushing for greater EU military autonomy has been that NATO, in 2022 seems more essential to defence than ever²⁵. The current conflict in Ukraine has revitalized the commitment of NATO members, including EU members, to invest economically and military within the alliance. It has also prompted two new EU Member States, Finland and Sweden, to seek NATO

²¹ https://ecfr.eu/special/independence_play_europes_pursuit_of_strategic_autonomy/

²² <https://www.europeanleadershipnetwork.org/commentary/nato-eu-cooperation-dont-forget-berlin-plus/>

²³ Marchi, L. (2017) 'The EU in Libya and the collapse of the CSDP'. US-China Law Review Journal. 14:6.

²⁴ <https://www.brookings.edu/opinions/cyprus-and-the-nato-eu-divide/>

²⁵ <https://www.vox.com/22994826/nato-resurgence-biden-trip-putin-ukraine>

Membership. The reality is that NATO, and the protection and assets it provides through the association with other powerful countries such as the US, continues to be an attractive option for defence. For instance, in the event of an attack on Finland without it being a NATO member, under the current CSDP framework there would have been little that the EU could have done that would have not involved NATO anyway as so many EU members are also NATO members. But consequently, the calls for truly autonomous EU military policy seem to be a moot point in the present security environment.

5.3. The Necessity of the UN Mandate and Russia

The Strategic Compass identified Russia as the most significant threat to Europe, as a consequence of its ongoing military action in Ukraine. Russia had become a difficult state to engage with politically for several years and given its permanent membership of the UN Security Council, it has notably utilized its veto power to block certain UN Security Council Resolutions that would have otherwise mandated for more significant military action in a variety of contexts.

A notable example is EUNAVFOR MED IRINI. The UN Security Council has failed to implement any significant action in Libya beyond an arms embargo that has existed for several years. Russia at the UN has on several occasions criticised Western initiatives on Libya, including limiting the renewal of the UN Support Mission in Libya²⁶ as well as the European implementation of IRINI²⁷. Furthermore, its access to a veto at the UN Security Council has long acted as a looming threat to any substantive action in Libya, given its vested interest and role in the conflict there. This has limited the EU operation strictly to monitoring in the maritime space. Unfortunately, the impact of said operation has been minimal due to the fact that most weapons that have entered Libya have done so via land borders. The continued violence within Libya too has demonstrated that the EU Mission has had limited impact.

On a more existential level, however, is the conundrum facing EU foreign-policy makers moving forward. If Russia is currently the most prominent threat to European stability, yet maintains its position of the UN Security Council, will CSDP

²⁶ <https://apnews.com/article/russia-ukraine-middle-east-africa-elections-34c2af32d8d122346fc4a456a4585235>

²⁷ <https://www.euractiv.com/section/global-europe/news/europe-tries-to-reassure-russia-over-libya-arms-embargo-mission/>

Missions continue to function only in the event of a UN Security Council mandate? This problem demonstrates the urgency of the EU to adopt additional ways to determine the appropriateness of CSDP missions beyond merely UN Security Council Resolutions.

6. THE WAY FORWARD

6.1. Revisiting the Purpose of the CSDP

With the renewed importance of NATO, it is appropriate to question the point of the CSDP in today's political climate. On a simple reading, with active conflicts on both the eastern and southern flanks of Europe in Ukraine, Syria and Libya, tensions in the Eastern Mediterranean with Turkey, as well as ongoing disorder around the world especially in Africa and Asia, one could suggest that the objectives of European foreign policy have not been met. Frankly, the 2022 Strategic Compass paints an extremely worrying picture for European security. And given the inability of the EU to project its power sufficiently, it is unsurprising that countries have instead turned towards NATO and the power of a military alliance with the likes of the US.

But moving from purely military objectives, a positive for European foreign policy has been its civilian component. NATO, for all its successes at projecting military power, has difficulty engaging with affected civilian populations in conflict zones in a way that the EU itself does not²⁸. In addition, the EU does maintain a vast array of assets, both economic and technical, that it can bring to bear in such civilian-based projects.

There is also still a fundamental need for an autonomous foreign policy instrument, for while allied countries within NATO often share the same policy objectives as the EU, they are not synonymous. We can see this in the level of European engagement within Africa, particularly the Sahel and central areas. There have and continue to be foreign policy problems that require specifically European solutions.

This, however, raises the next issue regarding the current inefficiency of European foreign policy response. Currently, the EU is reluctant to react militarily without the support of a UN mandate. Given the current political climate, this dependence

²⁸ Keukeleire, S. & Delreux, T. (2014) 'The Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP)'. Ch. 8 in: The Foreign Policy of the European Union. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

could prove slow and ultimately costly. There must be greater means to assess appropriate foreign policy response and the EU should be prepared to act as needed.

6.2. Heightening Defensive Preparedness

The current HR/VP of the EU, Josep Borell, said²⁹ following a recent informal meeting of EU Defence Ministers that he and the Commission President, Ursula von der Leyen, have called upon EU Member States to increase joint procurement and support the defence industry to up their production capacities. This comes in a time of increased demand for defence capabilities, as well as a time when Member States are sending much of their own defence weapons and technology stockpiles to help supply the war effort in Ukraine. The EU too has set up a Task Force to help Member States in the short-term to restock their weapons. The Commission has also made 500 million euros available over the next two years to support Member States and their armies. But as Borell said³⁰, it is not only about more money, but spending that money better:

“In order to spend better, the best way is to spend more together. This means joint, collaborative spending, and that is why we started this system of joint procurement.”

The EU certainly has made strides in refining its defence capabilities into a more unified structure. Beyond the issue of spending and procurement, PESCO is a good example of the EU taking direct steps to homogenise and synchronise European defence capabilities in terms of joint military exercises, and better military readiness. But, according to an assessment by the European Council in 2021³¹, there are still gaps.

For instance, while PESCO concretises that signees should hold collaborative military exercises, a solid shared database, and providing direct support to CSDP

²⁹ https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/informal-meeting-eu-defence-ministers-press-remarks-high-representative-josep-borrell_en

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ COUNCIL RECOMMENDATION of 16 November 2021 assessing the progress made by the participating Member States to fulfil commitments undertaken in the framework of permanent structured cooperation (PESCO). (2021/C 464/02).

missions through Article 12, the assessment states³² that there are 'major shortfalls' in practical implementation, that are negatively affecting the EU's 'level of ambition'. On other issues such as improving capability shortcomings there has been progress, however the evaluation of PESCO so far generally demonstrates that even with hard-won binding commitments for Member States to act together in developing shared-defensive capacities, that the reality is often different.

Unfortunately, the current political climate does not allow for half-hearted attempts to refine and strengthen European defence. The threat assessment is dire, given the actions of neighbours, including significant powers. But there is a positive here insofar as the EU is yet to fully realise its own greatest power in this world. A much stronger defence unity will project the power of the Union in a much more successful way than it currently does, and there is clear incentive for this to happen. The question will be how quickly these ambitions can be realized before the political landscape worsens.

³² Ibid.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To the European Union:

- Be bolder in foreign policy implementation utilising autonomous assessments of conflict that goes beyond sole recourse to UN Security Council mandates. Fully implement recommended action plans for relevant crises without delay.
- Consider expanding the scope of PESCO, to develop a much more integrated defence cooperation by encouraging States to engage with more joint exercises and investment. Develop faster mechanisms for deployment of PESCO-related military capacity.
- Continue to increase the budget for defence spending and commit to an increase in defence beyond the two-year period already promised. Invest in greater cyber-defence and insist on the implementation of high-quality cyber-defence strategies in all Member States.
- Foster stronger relations with allies including NATO and the US, but particularly increase direct defence cooperation including live exercises with other allied non-EU European countries, notably the EEA countries as well as Switzerland and the UK, through an initiative such as the proposed 'European Political Community'.

To the EU Member States:

- Commit to greater defence integration by holding live exercises and making troops available for CSDP missions as per the obligations under PESCO. For Malta and Denmark, strongly consider joining PESCO to lend their weight to integrated European defence.
- Given the current threat of war and violence, increase defence spending for arms acquisition and defence technological research and development in line with the recommendations of the EU and to meet other obligations such as the spending target of 2% of GDP set by NATO.

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