THE STRATEGIC COMPASS FOR SECURITY AND DEFENSE OF THE EUROPEAN UNION: A PLATFORM FOR GLOBAL ACTION WITHIN THE COMMON SECURITY AND DEFENSE POLICY?

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Abstract: Within a theoretical framework of international relations and using selected scientific methods, such as content analysis, inductive, deductive, and comparative methods, this paper analyzes the content and reach of the Strategic Compass for Security and Defense of the European Union as a broader strategic platform through which the European Union, under continuous and complex security circumstances, achieved one of the key and long-proclaimed ambitions, namely the essential strategic autonomy of its policies concerning security and defense and, subsequently, its position as an autonomous, indispensable security actor at the global level. The analysis conducted leads to the conclusion that, regardless of the circumstances of its preparation and adoption, the Strategic Compass definitely does not have the capacity to enable the European Union to act in this way, which, basically, represents a highly bureaucratized list of goals and objectives with a number of shortcomings, which has almost no new strategic value and limits the European Union in the geopolitical sense, verifying it as a regional security actor of secondary importance in relation to NATO.

Keywords: European Union, common security and defense policy, strategic compass, strategic autonomy.

INTRODUCTION

Very slow, and then increasingly rapid development of the European Union's security policies in the last twenty years implied the idea of securing the strategic autonomy of the organization and its position as an independent security actor that would determine key processes at the global level using its capacity and instruments. In this regard, different strategic documents had been produced over time at the European level, which defined the frameworks

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for the development of the Union's security policies; however, none of them fully succeeded in putting the political idea of the strategic autonomy of the European Union as a security actor into action. Under the circumstances of the threat to regional and global security caused by the Ukrainian conflict as a manifestation of a broader process of redefining the balance of power between the main centers of power, ideas about the strategic autonomy of the Union have been revitalized, while the Strategic Compass for Security and Defense, as the latest documented emanation of the need for its security repositioning, was announced as a strategic framework to ensure the conditions for the final realization of this goal. In order to see the potential of the Strategic Compass as a platform that would ensure the strategic autonomy of the Union, this paper analyzes its content, focusing on the four thematic pillars upon which this document rests – "act", "secure", "invest", and "partnership", and identifies the key goals and objectives set forth in them. Analysis of each mentioned segment of the document structurally represents a separate sub-unit of the paper, while concluding observations are presented in the conclusion section.

THE STRATEGIC COMPASS AS A SECURITY PLATFORM

In the circumstances of the degradation of relations between Brussels and Washington during Trump's time in office, but also as a consequence of BREX-IT and, finally, the security context in the wider European area which grows more complex, including the conflict in Ukraine, ideas about the need for the Union's "independence" as an actor that will effectively protect its own values, interests and goals at the global level have gained importance again. The implementation of such an idea was set forth in the Strategic Compass for Security and Defense of the European Union, which was finally unanimously adopted by the European Council on March 21, 2022, based on a detailed analysis of the implementation of the security and defense component of the Global Strategy of the European Union from 2016 (European Union EEAS, 2016), which was conducted by experts of the European External Action Service (EEAS). According to the original idea, the main goal of the Strategic Compass was to enable operational guidelines for the development and improvement of certain segments of the European Union's security policies so that the organization would finally manifest itself as a "full-fladged" security actor in its immediate, but also wider and highly unstable environment (Blockmans et al., 2022: 2). In this regard, the central part of the Strategic Compass, as a document about sixty pages long, following the example of some previous relevant documents of the European Union, such as the European Agenda for Security (European Commission, 2015), structurally rests on four thematic pillars: crisis management, that is, as formally means in the document, "act", resistance to security challenges, risks and threats, that is, "secure", capacity development, that is, "invest", and international co-operation, that is, "partner" (European Union EEAS, 2022). Regardless of the progress made, in the sense that it identifies directions

for further strengthening the European Union's capacity concerning security and defense, on which 27 member states reached a consensus, the Strategic Compass is still only a reflection of the bureaucratized efforts of the European Union's services to implement the assigned task and does not offer answers to some key, primarily strategic issues. Among other things, the Strategic Compass pays little attention to the concept of security strategic autonomy of the European Union, which was emphasized in previous similar documents and which has represented the conceptual basis for the development of the Union's security policies in the past twenty years, while the foreseen directions for the development of the European Union's capacity concerning security and defense clearly indicate that the document recognizes the European Union primarily as a regional rather than a global security actor. In other words, the Strategic Compass, regardless of the initial ambitions, is only a list of concrete administrative, legal and operational measures, some of which are new, while others are just an upgrade to existing ones, through which the Union's capacity to act, secure, invest and achieves co-operation in the area of security and defense in significantly changed security circumstances. Additionally, this document is criticized for having "succumbed" to the events in Ukraine, focusing primarily on the Russian Federation as a security threat, while little attention is paid to the actions taken by China in the context of the alleged violation of the basic postulates of international order and international law supported by the European Union, or, on the other hand, the Indo-Pacific region as the "center" of the balance of power of the key international actors in the future (Blockmans et al., 2022: 3). Based on such findings, including the aforementioned treatment of the Union primarily as a regional security actor, conclusions were drawn about the "geographical narrowness", that is, the limited geographical or geostrategic reach of the document (Gnessotto, 2022).

"Act"

The part of the document entitled "Act" envisages, as a key direction of strengthening the potential of the European Union, especially in regard to the implementation of military missions within the Common Security and Defense Policy, the development of Rapid Deployment Capacity (RDC) consisting of 5,000 people, which would represent an improved format of the earlier battle groups of the European Union, which, as is known, were never operationally activated. The basic task of the Rapid Deployment Capacity would include urgent preventive, that is, deployment and action for the purpose of crisis management in the wider European area. This kind of operation of the Rapid Deployment Capacity would also mean the improvement of the Military Planning and Conduct Capability – MPCC, as a structure that is currently coordinating the planning and implementation of several non-executive military missions of the European Union, such as the EU Training Mission – EUTM, which are carried out in Mali, Somalia, the Central African Republic or Mozambique, including

the EU Military Assistance Mission – EUMAM. Additionally, the successful use of the RDC means appropriate rotations of military personnel in order to strengthen the predictability of the situation and availability of the RDC at any time, as well as finding a stable solution regarding the financing of this military capacity. However, the key prerequisite for the effective operation of the RDC, which is specifically highlighted in the Strategic Compass, refers to the provision of a more flexible approach in the decision-making process itself, taking into account not only the Common Security and Defense Policy *stricto sensu*, but also the Common Foreign and Security Policy of the European Union, as a wider political framework to which it belongs, which is contractually still quite firmly positioned on the principles of intergovernmental co-operation, which means unanimity in the decision-making process. As past experiences show, it is precisely failure to fulfill this prerequisite, that is, the unwillingness of individual members of the European Union to additionally limit their sovereignty in a politically very sensitive area, that could manifest as one of the key obstacles to the effective use of the RDC. Additional focus on the solutions contained in Article 44 of the Treaty on the European Union can be identified as a novelty in this section of the Strategic Compass, which enables a number of interested member states to act with joint forces in order to carry out certain missions and operations within the Common Security and Defense Policy, develop the concept of Coordinated Maritime Presences – CMP and highlight the need to ensure better synergy between the activities to be carried out by the aforementioned *ad hoc* coalitions made up of a number of the member states and "traditional" missions and operations carried out by the European Union within the Common Security and Defense Policy. At the same time, it should be noted that the Strategic Compass does not, among other things, regulate in detail some of the key issues in this regard, such as the nature and framework of mission and operation mandates that should be implemented in accordance with Article 44 of the Treaty on the European Union or modalities of securing stable and permanent financial, technical and human resources for their implementation.

The key objectives identified in the Act section may be summarized as follows:

– By 2022, an agreement on a troop rotation schedule during the implementation of civil and military missions should be reached;

– By mid-2022, the EU military missions should be adapted in order to increase their effectivenesson the ground;

– By end of 2022, establishing and strengthening the link between EU-NAVFOR Atalanta and the European Maritime Awareness Mission in the Strait of Hormuz, as well as in the Sahel;

– By the second half of 2022, other maritime areas of interest will be considered, building on the experience of the Coordinated Maritime Presences concept in the Gulf of Guinea and its expansion in the North-West of the Indian Ocean;

- By 2023, decisions on the implementation of Article 44 of the Treaty on European Union will be reached, to allow a group of willing and able Member States to plan and conduct a mission or operation within the EU framework and under the political oversight of the Council;
- By 2023, a military concept for air security operations will be agreed on;
- By mid-2023, a new Civilian CSDP Compact that would enable the deployment of a civilian CSDP mission of 200 fully equipped experts within 30 days, including in complex environments will be adopted;
- By 2023, a network of human rights and gender advisers in the EU's missions and operations will be strengthened;
- By 2023, the scope and definition of common costs to stimulate participation in military missions and operations will be re-assessed;
- By 2025, full operability of the Rapid Deployment Capability will be achieved, with the prior preparation and adoption of operational "scenarios" in 2022, that is, the implementation of exercises in 2023;
- By 2025, the Military Planning and Conduct Capability will be able to plan and conduct all nonexecutive military missions and two small-scale or one medium-scale executive operation;
- By 2025, the improvement and harmonization of cross-border procedures will be completed.

"Secure"

The Security section focuses on strengthening the Union's resilience concerning various security challenges, risks and threats in a more complex security environment, with special reference to hybrid threats; an emphasis is placed on strengthening situational awareness based on available intelligence data which, again, primarily depends on Member States and their competent agencies, which contains another potential aggravating circumstance for the effective operation of the organization in this domain, taking into account that not only adequate coordination of national agencies, which should be ensured at the European level, is imposed as a basic prerequisite for the fulfillment of this objective, but also readiness of Member States to exchange relevant intelligence at any time and on any issue between one other and certain EU specialized agencies. Additionally, it is evident that an emphasis is placed on strengthening the Single Intelligence Analysis Capacity – SIAC, ensuring secure communication, including the implementation of the European Union Satellite Center and building a common European strategic culture, which would rest on unique rules and modern information technology. In dealing with hybrid security threats, a central role is envisaged for the Hybrid Fusion Cell – HFC, which was established in 2016 at the proposal of the European Commission and the High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Policy and Security as a unique framework for dealing with this form of security threats, which

should operationally contribute to the implementation of relevant elements of the European Agenda for Security (European Commission, 2015) and individual, more specific strategic documents, such as the European Union Cybersecurity Strategy (European Commission, 2013), the Strategy for Energy Security (European Commission, 2014) or the Maritime Security Strategy (Council of the European Union, 2014). An additional instrument to counter hybrid security threats is the creation of EU Hybrid Rapid Response Teams (HRRT), which have found their place in cyber operations and through the involvement of the Union in the framework of the Ukrainian conflict. An interesting moment in this segment also refers to the decision that, in order to strengthen secure communication within the European Union, its existing civil space program will be extended to the domain of defense in the coming period, primarily through the preparation of a separate strategic document that is, the EU Space Strategy for Security and Defense – EU SSSD, and close co-operation with NATO and civilian partners in this context. The Strategic Compass is mainly focused on the Ukrainian conflict, that is, the Russian Federation as a "source" of security threats to the European continent, neglecting the fight against terrorism, with an emphasis on the need to further improve the existing instruments for the prevention and fight against this form of security threats within the framework of the Common Security and Defense Policy, insisting on the link between political radicalism and the fight against terrorism, while no attention is paid to very causes and "roots" of the phenomenon in question. The situation is similar in the fight against the proliferation of nuclear weapons. In this regard, the Strategic Compass seeks to reaffirm Article VI of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (United Nation, 1995), which entered into force on March 5, 1970, of indefinite term, owing to the amendments to Article V of the 1995 Treaty, under which the signatory parties undertake to, in good faith, as soon as possible initiate negotiations on stopping the nuclear arms race and act in the direction of its gradual reduction to complete elimination, with appropriate international control under the auspices of the United Nations. At the same time, in this segment as well, there is fear of possible deployment of Russian nuclear potential in the context of the Ukrainian conflict, as well as readiness to further strengthen co-operation with NATO and the USA and to launch appropriate initiatives to establish "post New – Start" contractual arrangements, admittedly, without concretizing the measures that would be necessary to implement in this regard.

The key objectives identified in the Security section may be summarized as follows:

– In 2022, additional rules and standards to strengthen the cyber security of the Union will be adopted, and Hybrid Threat Response Teams will be further developed to provide a framework for a coordinated response to all cyber campaigns affecting the European Union;

– In 2022, the Cyber Diplomacy Toolbox will be further strengthened by exploring additional response measures;

- In 2022, the EU's Cyber Defense Policy to protect, detect, defend and deter against cyberattacks will be further developed;
- By the end of 2022, the EU Threat Analysis will be reviewed and reviews will be conducted every 3 years;
- By the end of 2023, an EU Space Strategy for security and defense will be adopted;
- In 2023, concrete EU actions in support of disarmament, nonproliferation and arms control goals will be reinforced;
- In 2023, the EEAS Crisis Response structures, including the Situation Room, will be strengthened;
- By the end of 2023, national strategies to prepare the armed forces for climate change will be developed;
- By 2024, all CSDP missions and operations will be fully equipped with capabilities and resources to deploy relevant instruments of this toolbox;
- By 2025, the EU Satellite Centre to boost the EU's autonomous geo-spatial intelligence capacity will be strengthened;
- By 2025, the EU's maritime security awareness mechanisms will be further developed and strengthened;
- By 2025, all EU missions and operations will have an environmental advisor.

"Invest"

Certain intentions regarding the financial and organizational strengthening of the security and defense of the European Union can be identified in the Invest section, such as the decision to involve member states more strongly in activities that are implemented through the Permanent Structured Cooperation – PESCO within the Common Foreign and Security Policy and commitment of member state to spending 2% of their GDP on defense, which would potentially, or at least partially, solve the problem of non-budgetary financing of EU military missions and operations under the auspices of the Common Security and Defense Policy. On the other hand, it is also planned to strengthen the European Defense Fund – EDF through the inclusion of the European Investment Bank as a support instrument, especially in the implementation of joint activities in the following areas: developing battle tanks, improving European patrol boats, strengthening defense in space, developing soldier systems, border protection, enhancing military mobility capabilities, and countering unmanned aerial systems. In order to ensure a more coherent approach to the development of European defense technology, an increased financial co-operation on defense innovations among member states is foreseen, including the NATO Investment Fund or the Defense Innovation Hub within the European Defense Agency. However, the fact remains that the Strategic Compass, regardless of

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the expressed ambitions, in this part does not offer appropriate answers to the key questions related to the stability of the financial and operational capacities necessary for the implementation of military operations and missions of the European Union within its Common Security and Defense Policy and ensuring "transparency", that is, public control, including parliamentary supervision over budget expenditure in this regard.

Some key objectives identified in the Invest section may be summarized as follows:

– As of 2022, defense ministerial meetings on EU defense initiatives addressing capability development will be organized and chaired by the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs;
– By mid-2022, defense spending will be increased and improved;
– By the end of 2022, a Defense Innovation Hub will be established within the European Defense Agency;
– In 2022, strategic dependencies in the defense sector will be further identified;
– By the end of 2022, research, technology development and innovation to reduce our strategic dependencies in technologies and value chains in the defense sector will be further boosted;
– By early 2023, work on upcoming proposals for new financing solutions to facilitate Member States' joint procurement of EU strategic defense capabilities;
– By 2023, measures will be taken to promote and facilitate the access to private funding for the defense industry;
– By the end of 2022, the process of directing defense capabilities to certain security "targets" will be reviewed.
– By 2024, a civilian capability development process will be set-up to assess the capability needs;
– By 2025, critical gaps on strategic enablers will be substantially reduced;
– Work on a possible amendment to the European Defense Fund regulation.

"Partners"

Although the need for increased co-operation between the European Union and other relevant security actors in the modern, complicating world is obvious, the document's section on partners seems to be the least elaborated. Or, as Isabella Antinozzi says, this section is long on rhetoric but short on content (Antinozzi, 2022). Additionally, an analysis of the section points to several obvious weaknesses. For example, NATO is mentioned as a key security partner in the document, which, regardless of its *modus operandi* in the post-Cold War era, still represents an organization of regional character. Also, the

document mainly pays attention to the need to increase co-operation with the Western Balkan region, the countries in the eastern and southern neighborhood of the European Union, the Eastern Mediterranean or the Middle East, while, as already mentioned, the Indo-Pacific region, as an area identified by many as a key scene in the power relations between the central global political and security actors in the future, remained completely undeveloped regarding strategy and content. In other words, it seems that the creators of the Strategic Compass, regardless of their expressed determination to impose the Union as an indispensable global security actor, have firmly positioned the organization within regional frameworks. Secondly, in addition to insistence on the abstract phrases "strengthening co-operation" or "strengthening dialogue' throughout the entire document, there is also a noticeable disproportion in the commitment to further strengthen co-operation with international organizations such as NATO, the UN, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe – OSCE, the African Union or the Association of Southeast Asian Nations – ASE-AN, on the one hand, compared to co-operation with individual countries such as the USA, Norway, Canada, and Turkey, on the other. This means that, despite the fact that the European Union, with its internal structure, policies, and its way of acting, is undoubtedly more than a mare international organization, it is not perceived in the document as a security entity that would be equal to the states that still represent central security actors at the international or global level. Further, it can be noticed that the document, regardless of the key motives for its creation and adoption, does not even in principle deal with the key issues regarding European security in the future, such as possible outlines of a new European security architecture that will respect changes in the international order induced by the Ukrainian conflict and processes directly related to it. As an argument in favor of the fact that the creators of the document "missed the target" in terms of content and functionality is the fact that the document focuses on hybrid threats and hybrid tactics, even though the reason for probably the biggest security crisis faced by the post-Cold War world, which is symbolically embodied in the Ukrainian conflict, is primarily military power and the implications of its application (Blockmans et al., 2022: 8).

The most important objectives in this section may be summarized as follows:

– As of 2022, strategic partnership, political dialogue and cooperation with NATO will further be strengthened, deepened and expanded;
– As of 2022, the new joint set of priorities for EU-UN cooperation will be implemented;
– In 2022, the first biennial Security and Defense Partnerships Forum will be held;
– As of 2022, political dialogue and strengthen cooperation with the OSCE, African Union and ASEAN resilience will be deepened and a joint dedicated roadmap with the OSCE on conflict prevention and crisis management with concrete regional and thematic actions will be developed.

CONCLUSION

Regardless of the initial optimism of Brussels officials, the analysis of the Strategic Compass indicates that, in terms of content, functionality, and geopolitics, the scope of this document is small, which cannot be identified as a broader strategic platform for developing common policies in the field of security and defense at the European level. With relatively few novelties offered by the document, such as the Defense Innovation Center, the Defense Partnership Forum chaired by the High Representative, the improved civilian package within the Common Security and Defense Policy, or the new format of rapid deployment forces, the Strategic Compass primarily manifests itself as a list of objectives in the field of security and defense, most of which represent only an upgrade or the reformulation of the ambition contained in other strategic documents, lacking necessary guidelines for their realization. For example, the document envisages the establishment of Rapid Deployment Capacity, as an improved form of the existing combat groups of the European Union, but it does not eliminate the basic obstacles due to which the combat groups of the Union have remained mare "ink on paper" until today, which primarily reflect the lack of the political will of Member States to actively participate in such a cooperation.

The bureaucratic approach to key issues is also reflected in the lack of courage for the Union, in accordance with the proclaimed decisions, to position itself as a global actor with expressed autonomy in the security and defense domain, which is particularly evident in terms of overemphasized reliance of the Union on, and even hiding behind, NATO as its key strategic partner in numerous domains. According to Pontijas Calderon, the Union is therefore intended to play a secondary role in relation to NATO, and European interests in the field of security and defense are directly subordinated to the interests of the USA (Calderon, 2022: 20).

Or, as Gnessoto puts it, the Strategic Compass is not yet a "White Paper" on common defense at the level of the European Union because it only sets industrial direction within the European Union, but not a strategic direction for the development of common defense policy (Gnessotto, 2022: 3). In the best case scenario, taking into account the circumstances and efforts put into the drafting of the document, including the negotiation process at the expert and political levels that lasted almost a year and a half, the Strategic Compass for Security and Defense of the European Union could be described as an intermediate step towards a new strategic framework which can be expected in the forthcoming years, which will offer answers to all key questions related to the Union's security and defense policies, including its position and role in the changed global security circumstances as, we hope, essentially autonomous and, accordingly, an adequately capacitated actor (Bargues, 2022).

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