

EUROMIL Wednesday Q&A series

Did the Strategic [Com]pass muster?



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What has been for you the biggest success of the Compass so far?

With the Russian war on Ukraine, the implementation of the Strategic Compass has gained a new level of importance. The biggest success of the Strategic Compass has been that Member States feel a sense of accountability and urgency when it comes to implementing the over 80 concrete deliverables and have up to now shown the political will supported by the necessary funds (through significantly increased defence budgets). The 'roadmap' nature of the Compass and the commitment to deliver and report on these deliveries, with political endorsement, is possibly a first in EU defence policy. The most important thing is for this momentum to continue.

The adoption of the Strategic Compass and the -for the first time- common threat analysis signified strong unity between EU Member States and the necessary will to move towards further defence integration. Now, one year later, is there still strong political will among the Member States to take the next steps and fully implement the Strategic Compass?

Yes, it would seem so for two reasons. The first is that Russia's war on Ukraine has made the necessity for more progress in EU defence policy more evident than ever before. And secondly, just by looking at recent months there has been more progress in defence integration in the last year than there has been in the last decade. A number of examples:

- EU military support to Ukraine of EUR 3.6bn to date, which represents the breaking of a real taboo in that the EU for the first time in its history delivered military equipment including lethal weapons to a country at war.
- Joint Defence Procurement: The EU broke another taboo when the Commission proposed a short term procurement instrument for defence products in July 2022. This is taboo breaking, as the TEU bans arms procurement from the common budget. The legal basis used is Art. 173 on the competitiveness of European industry.
- Member State changes: Member States not only significantly increased their defence budget, which is a sign of political will to do more in defence, but have also changed their strategic orientation (Sweden and Finland applied to join NATO, Denmark voted to get rid of its Defence Opt Out, German 'Zeitenwende' to name just some examples)

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Real signs of political will are there but of course only time will tell whether the over 80 concrete deliverables will really be implemented, which is above all dependent on sustained political will and substantial funds. The discussion on the first annual implementation report of the Compass is also coming up this month and will be a good opportunity to assess Member State attitudes and positions.

How would you like to see the Strategic Compass evolve and what do you wish to be the outcome of the closer defence cooperation between the Member States?

There are so many benefits to closer cooperation in the area of defence such as inter alia increased interoperability, cost efficiency, increased strategic autonomy and of course security - which is one of the most important public goods. The Strategic Compass provides a roadmap for the EU to increase its credibility as a security and defence actor. It should give the EU the ability to act and respond to crises with the necessary defence capabilities and investments in defence. It should also create a resilient EU that is able to protect itself against and respond to the whole spectrum of threats identified in the threat analysis (e.g. hybrid and cyber threats). Moreover, it should achieve all of this with strong security and defence partnerships and above all ensuring it is coherent with NATO. Finally, the outcome of the Strategic Compass should be a common strategic culture to ensure a common vision for the EU's future in security and defence.