

EUROMIL Wednesday Q&A series

Did the Strategic [Com]pass muster?



Michael Gahler, Member of the European Parliament, Member of the Foreign Affairs Committee (AFET)

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

For the time being, the biggest success of the Strategic Compass is still the Compass in itself as it provides us with a sense of direction for the further development of our Common Security and Defence Policy. As the implementation of the central initiatives of the Compass, most notably the Rapid Deployment Capacity (RDC), are still ongoing, it is difficult to clearly point out a concrete result or success yet. There is still much of work ahead of us and much will depend on how the initiative will evolve over time. For instance, the 360-degree threat analysis should gradually evolve towards a threat assessment in order to develop a common understanding what our priorities in security and defence should be. That is a crucial element to define what are the capabilities we need most in Europe. Looking at the RDC, we can observe that a declared ambition needs to translate into capabilities in different ways. While this force is intended to strengthen the EU's ability to act in crisis management, we still lack the sufficient command and communication capabilities on the European level. We will also need to improve European capabilities in the area of the so-called strategic enablers if the RDC is meant to meet the ambition. Furthermore, the RDC should only be a point of departure for a more capable European security and defence policy. To that end, the RDC should on the one hand evolve from Battlegroups 2.0 based on coalitions of the willing towards a standing force financed from the EU budget. On the other hand, the RDC should be gradually expanded by adding further brigades in order to finally achieve a European corps-size force as it has been already laid out in the Helsinki Headline Goal of 1999. To sum up, the Strategic Compass points in the right direction but its success will depend on defining priorities, its implementation and the development of the instruments in the long-run.

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In the annual CSDP report, which was adopted by the European Parliament at the January plenary session, it is stated that the European Parliament “urges the EU to provide personnel engaged in missions and operations with adequate equipment and training [...]and take into account the social and working rights of military personnel when they are trained and deployed together in an EU framework”. Do you think that the EU is moving towards a synchronization of the Member States Armed Forces and will the Strategic Compass be helpful in this field?

I think that joint participation in EU operations facilitates such a process, at least on the level of the troops deployed in the EU framework. However, on the level of Member States I still observe a strong reluctance towards synchronization on the European level. There are some elements of synchronisation between some Member States but not that much on the European level. Within the Strategic Compass, the RDC could function as a facilitator to that end if it were set-up as a standing force to which Member States would permanently assign troops. However, my impression is that the Member States are not yet willing to go that far. That is something I personally regret, especially in light of the historical threat to peace in Europe we are currently facing.

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?

I already elaborated on my wishes for the future evolution on the Strategic Compass above but there is an additional, crucial element for a capable European Defence Union: The strengthening of the so-called European Defence Technological and Industrial Base. We need to overcome the fragmentation of that industry which primarily results from the Member States' mentality to look at that industry from a national industry policy paradigm due to which Member States favour their national champions instead of a European approach. With the European Defence Fund, we already achieved some remedy to that situation by bringing companies and researchers from different Member States together in various projects that contribute to over-all European capabilities. However, the shift in mentality cannot be achieved by the industry alone. It is the Member States that need to change their way of thinking. That is why the Commission's initiative to facilitate joint procurement is so important. By procuring together, the demand would be consolidated which would in turn contribute to a consolidation of the industry and would facilitate economies of scale, thus achieving a better value for European tax payers' money, as well as improving interoperability of the armed forces in Europe. I know that might be a tough call on some Member States but the defence industry is not an industry like any other. Its purpose is to provide our armed forces with the equipment they need to fulfil their task: the protection of our European way of life. No Member State alone is capable to achieve that on its own. European security can only be achieved jointly, so let's finally do it!