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THE EU STRATEGIC COMPASS: CHARTING THE COURSE FOR EUROPEAN SECURITY AND DEFENSE AUTONOMY

ABSTRACT:

The article focuses on the development and implications of the European Union's Common Security and Defense Policy (CSDP), with a specific emphasis on the EU Strategic Compass adopted in 2022. The Lisbon Treaty in 2009 initiated the formal framework for the CSDP, which was further advanced by the EU Global Strategy in 2016. This strategy emerged in response to various geopolitical challenges, including the Russo-Georgian war, the economic crisis of 2007-2009, the Arab Spring, and Russia's annexation of Crimea. The Strategic Compass aims to address these threats through a structured plan centered around four pillars: Act, Secure, Invest, and Partner.

The article employs a comprehensive review methodology, examining formal documents, strategic frameworks, and scholarly analyses. The primary focus is on understanding the goals, proposed actions, and potential impacts of the Strategic Compass on EU security and defense policy.

The results indicate that the Strategic Compass is a significant step towards achieving EU strategic autonomy in defense, though its success hinges on effective implementation and the political will of member states. The document provides a detailed action plan but reveals gaps in addressing economic

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conditions, geographical focuses, and the synchronization of initiatives. The Ukrainian-Russian war has validated many initiatives of the Strategic Compass, highlighting the importance of swift troop deployment, effective cyber defense, and comprehensive intelligence. The conflict also revealed areas needing improvement, such as better coordination and financial mechanisms. The analysis also underscores the necessity for continuous adaptation. Although the Strategic Compass is a significant step towards the EU's strategic autonomy in defense, its success depends on the commitment of individual member states to actions supporting the EU's security and defense autonomy.

Keywords: *European Union, Common Security and Defense Policy (CSDP), Strategic Compass, Ukrainian-Russian war, defense capabilities, strategic autonomy*

1. INTRODUCTION

The European Union (EU) has continually evolved its security and defense strategy to respond to an ever-changing geopolitical landscape. The signing of the Lisbon Treaty in 2009 marked a significant milestone in the EU's commitment to a cohesive security and defense policy, establishing the Common Security and Defense Policy (CSDP). This policy aimed to enhance cooperation among member states and provide a structured framework for collective defense and crisis management. The Lisbon Treaty's introduction of new mechanisms and institutions laid the groundwork for further integration in security matters.

The real impetus for the development of the CSDP was the *EU Global Strategy* (hereinafter referred to as the *Strategy*) for foreign and security policy adopted by the European Council in June 2016. The adoption of the Strategy was primarily driven by the redefinition of threats, taking into account events such as: the Russo-Georgian war in 2008, the economic crisis of 2007-2009 with its long-term effects on security (including the reduction of defense spending), the negative aftermath of the Arab Spring (civil wars in Syria, Libya, Yemen), and, most notably, Russia's neo-imperial policy manifested in the annexation of Crimea in 2014 and the support of separatists in eastern Ukraine.

The *Strategy* serves as a fundamental guide for actions taken to develop capabilities in the field of security and defense in connection with identified threats. It indicates the necessity for the EU to pursue strategic autonomy in the field of security and defense (Tocci, 2017, p. 495). Despite the fact that this term was not defined, actions were taken to implement the *Strategy's* assumptions, which consequently aims to achieve strategic autonomy (Marinova, 2023, p. 131). Implementing the new strategy also requires defining a new level of EU military ambitions, which is directly related to the need for adequate civilian and

military capabilities in the field of security and defense. Until now, member states, despite taking actions to jointly acquire capabilities, have mainly focused on their individual development, securing the economic and military interests of their own state. Only actions taken in the last six years have led to the start of a period of strategic thinking in the EU, securing vital interests and external action priorities defined in the Strategy. Their visible dimension is programs and initiatives aimed at developing capabilities in the field of security and defense, such as permanent structured cooperation, the capability development plan, coordinated annual reviews on defense, and new funding opportunities for jointly undertaken activities in this area.

However, from a long-term perspective, the contents related to security and defense articulated in the *Strategy* proved to be insufficient. Emerging voices about "dead" provisions led Germany to propose (June 2020) the preparation of a document that would realistically contribute to strengthening the EU's capabilities in the area of security and defense. The proposal was accepted, and in November 2020, the first stage of work began, consisting of analyzing threats to the EU (classified part). After completing this stage, based on the conclusions and proposals submitted by member states, the second stage began the following year, related to the preparation of the document itself. Consequently, in March 2022, the European Council adopted the document referred to as the *EU Strategic Compass* (hereinafter referred to as the *Compass*) in the field of security and defense. It should be treated as a white paper and a starting point for transforming this area within the EU. Without a doubt, it organizes issues related to the EU's security and defense and is often referred to as the EU's security and defense strategy. In reality, it is more of an action plan based on four pillars: response, security, investment, and partnership (Witney, 2022). Open questions remain about its effective implementation as well as the response among member states, especially in the context of actions taken by the EU in relation to the war in Ukraine. It is likely that this document is the prelude to closer cooperation between member states in the field of security and defense and consequently the creation of a European Security and Defense Union.

The research question guiding this article is: How has the EU Strategic Compass addressed the challenges identified in the EU Global Strategy, and what lessons from the Ukrainian-Russian war can be integrated to enhance the EU's security and defense capabilities? The solution to the general research problem will occur as a result of finding answers to the following problems – specific questions:

1. What are the primary assumptions underlying the EU Strategic Compass, and how do they aim to address the key security and defense challenges faced by the EU?

2. How effectively do the key assumptions of the EU Strategic Compass align with the current security environment, and what are their strengths and weaknesses in enhancing the EU's defense capabilities?
3. How can the lessons learned from the Ukrainian-Russian war be integrated into the EU Strategic Compass to improve the EU's strategic and operational readiness in future conflicts?

By addressing these questions, the article aims to provide a comprehensive analysis of the EU's Strategic Compass as an element of defense strategy and the practical steps needed to ensure its successful implementation.

2. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

2.1. Assumptions of the EU Strategic Compass

The roadmap contained in the *Compass* refers to four key areas (pillars) in the field of EU security and defense: a) Act – rapid and decisive action in crisis situations; b) Secure – enhance ability to anticipate threats, guarantee secure access to strategic domains and protect citizens; c) Invest – invest in capabilities and technologies, reduce technological and industrial dependencies.; d) Partner – partnership in the face of common threats (A Strategic Compass, 2022).

The first pillar guarantees decisive action in the event of a crisis. Operational scenarios were defined, including the rapid deployment of 5,000 troops, and the necessity of organizing real joint training and exercises to increase readiness, as well as ways to strengthen military missions and operations within the CSDP (A Strategic Compass, 2022). This will be implemented through greater involvement of the EU Military Planning and Conduct Capability (MPCC), the creation of a rotation register of troops to increase predictability, and a reassessment of the scope and definition of the common costs of these efforts. It seems that these actions should be further strengthened by more flexible decision-making arrangements. Failure to quickly define these procedures and instruments may result in the proposed new concept of the EU battle group remaining on paper without specific application. Under this pillar, it is possible, based on Article 44 of the Treaty on European Union, to build coalitions of willing member states to carry out missions and operations under the EU flag resulting from the CSDP (Blockmans et al., 2022). Participation in tasks resulting from the concept of Coordinated Maritime Presences (CMP) is also possible. However, it is not specified how Article 44 can be applied in practice, including the flexibility of the mandate and the financial, material, and human resources available for such tasks. It also did not address ways to more effectively combine these initiatives. Therefore, there remains the necessity to rationalize and increase the political visibility and accountability of the CSDP, CMP, and other peace support operations by incorporating operations

into the EU framework through Article 44. These missions should be commanded by the MPCC, which will enable the increase of expert personnel seconded to command structures with operational experience in EU missions (Knezović & Duić, 2023, p. 225). Increased MPCC involvement in mission command will consolidate its role as a security provider.

Within this area, attention is also drawn to the necessity of fully utilizing the European Peace Facility (EPF) to support partners, including the provision of weapons and ammunition or the co-financing of military equipment for CSDP operations. The use of this instrument has significantly contributed to strengthening the EU's credibility in supporting Ukraine, but its implementation needs improvement. The unmet promise of delivering Soviet fighters to Ukrainian armed forces highlighted the EU's lack of preparedness for a conflict that Central and Eastern European countries have pointed to as a realistic scenario for years. Member states should develop an integrated inventory of resources to expedite the force generation process for their CSDP missions and operations. Positive experiences from the implementation of projects within Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) and crisis response operations should be utilized for this purpose (Santopinto, 2022). Member states should also have a flexible list of capabilities based on scenarios they are willing to provide to non-EU partners through the EPF. This should be accompanied by greater political accountability through the eventual inclusion of the EPF in the budget and subjecting it to the control of the European Parliament's Foreign Affairs Committee, as well as publishing criteria governing its activation.

The second pillar, initially referred to as "resilience," takes into account efforts to prepare for rapidly emerging challenges generated by the EU's strategic competitors, including, among others, the use of illegal migration or the use of energy resources as a weapon. Identified challenges include, among others, hybrid threats in all domains (land, sea, air, cyber, and space), terrorism, and arms proliferation (Mauro, 2023). Regarding the EU's operations – from humanitarian aid and disaster response to cybersecurity, hybrid activities, and space, to arms control and non-proliferation – it is necessary to strengthen the operational tools available to the EU and create new administrative frameworks (A Strategic Compass, 2022).

Within this pillar, defined as safeguarding against threats and protecting citizens, the key ambition of the EU remains strengthening situational awareness based on intelligence. To this end, the EU has a tool in the form of the Single Intelligence Analysis Capacity (SIAC), which is part of EU INTCEN, supported by member states' intelligence services and the EU Satellite Centre (SatCen) – all aimed at developing a common strategic culture. Further emphasis is placed on the need to improve secure communication by streamlining regulations, strengthening a common approach, and investing in state-of-the-art equipment. SIAC intends to increase capabilities in both forecasting and situational

awareness, particularly through the Hybrid Fusion Cell established in 2016, focusing exclusively on hybrid threats (Blockmans et al., 2022). Regarding potential synergies, this fits into the second goal of creating a toolkit to counter hybrid threats, encompassing existing and new instruments ensuring coordinated responses based on diverse civil and military competencies. In practice, this means the establishment of EU rapid response teams to assist member states, CSDP missions, and partners in countering hybrid threats. This will be accompanied by the enhancement of the EU's cyber diplomacy toolbox and the development of new tools to counter foreign information manipulation and interference. This directly relates to the postulate of strengthening the EU's "cyber posture" (based on the 2020 cybersecurity strategy), including through increased cyber intelligence capabilities (Simón, 2023). The second pillar also developed solutions for the EU's global secure space communications system to provide connectivity to security and defense entities. Another significant change is that the EU's civilian space program will be expanded to include a defense dimension through the development of an EU space strategy for security and defense. In the air domain, no significant new solutions emerged, aside from reflections on cooperation with NATO and civilian partners in this area. In the maritime domain, further investments are planned to ensure the EU's presence in this dimension worldwide. Consequently, the EU's maritime security strategy will be updated along with an action plan, and the development of the CMP mechanism, already operational since 2021 as a pilot program, will be proposed further. Issues related to countering terrorism were not extensively reflected in the contents of the *Compass*, likely due to the fact that Russia's war with Ukraine and intensified competition with China have drawn attention to threats posed by state actors. Nevertheless, the document reiterates the intention of the EU to enhance its response to better prevent and combat terrorism based on CSDP instruments and other available tools (Brânda, 2022).

Analyzing the content of the second pillar of the *Compass*, one can get the impression that the focus was primarily on improving the application of existing solutions and initiatives through a more integrated approach with few new initiatives. The various parts of the document formulate theses on different threats that refer to each other, thereby emphasizing interconnections and complexity.

Regarding the third pillar – investing in capabilities and technologies – member states emphasized the need for timely fulfillment of binding commitments within PESCO, including increasing defense investment spending to 20% of total defense spending and achieving a spending threshold of 2% of GDP (A Strategic Compass, 2022). Furthermore, the importance of reviewing capability planning scenarios based on the process contained in the European Capability Goal was emphasized. This aims to identify the types of operations that the EU and its member states are capable of conducting along with the

strategic capabilities each member state should invest in (Vimont, 2024). Due to significant financial investments, it is necessary to exempt from VAT, introduce premiums from the European Defence Fund (EDF), and new financial solutions introduced through the European Investment Bank (EIB). These measures aim to complement solutions within the EDF to ensure further progress in six areas identified in the capability development plan: the main battle tank, the European patrol-class surface ship, individual soldier protection systems, space defense capabilities, anti-access and counter-unmanned aerial systems, and enhanced military mobility (Gjoreski, 2022, p. 75). However, without additional financial resources, the assumptions contained in the *Compass* cannot be implemented, as the capabilities presented for achievement (development) have not been prioritized. A joint analysis of defense investment gaps by the Commission and EDA should determine how the EU intends to shape and consolidate the EU defense financing ecosystem. This requires answering several questions: Are financial and human resources being effectively utilized in the EU and member states? Are identified military requirements consistent with the state of research? Is national planning synchronized, and is synergy being utilized? How should the balance be maintained between modernizing armed forces with existing technologies for immediate use and addressing current shortages in relation to research on emerging and disruptive technologies for the future? Moreover, the analysis should also address cooperation: Which frameworks are most suitable and under what circumstances? Does the EU possess sufficient industrial potential, and where? What are the consequences of cooperation for non-EU countries and arms exports? These questions, which lack answers in the *Compass*, need to be answered to ensure end-users – national armed forces – achieve the best possible effectiveness on the battlefield and enable countries to decide on the acquisition of specific capabilities and generate economies of scale. Achieving operational readiness for actions by the 5,000-strong Rapid Deployment Capacity (RDC) will result in changes in the EU's crisis management operations, including primarily rescue and evacuation operations and stabilization operations. Implementing these operations will still be challenging without financial incentives, which could include, for example, a financial premium from the EDF and VAT exemption. This would apply to jointly developed, acquired, owned, and used capabilities made available to the RDC, as well as extending the scope of common CSDP funding within the EPF for all costs related to the RDC's functioning (Blockmans et al., 2022).

The fourth pillar of the *Compass* relates to the EU's strategic partnerships in the field of security and defense (A Strategic Compass, 2022). Despite the obvious need for the EU to cooperate with other entities in an increasingly multipolar world, this pillar is probably the least detailed. Moreover, three fundamental shortcomings can be highlighted. Firstly, the primary goal mentioned in this area is to maintain an international order based on rules, which

refers to issues on a global scale. However, the first partner mentioned in pursuing this endeavor is NATO, a regional organization. This is also evident in another part of the document concerning the EU's strategic environment, where the importance of the Western Balkans, eastern and southern neighborhoods, the eastern part of the Mediterranean, Africa, and the Middle East is emphasized, while the Indo-Pacific, currently seen as a global geopolitical and geo-economic center of gravity, is treated superficially. This indicates that despite articulated ambitions of remaining a global actor, the EU, in reality, remains more of a regional entity (Hartley, 2023). Secondly, the actions included in this pillar focus on slogans such as "strengthening cooperation," "enhancing dialogue," without specific linkages. Although more forward-looking and specific proposals were presented in the discussion on the EU's partnership with other international organizations such as NATO, the UN, OSCE, the African Union, and ASEAN, there is a lack of details regarding the EU's partnerships with individual countries and regions, as illustrated by the allocation of three paragraphs to NATO partnership and only one to the United States (Stone, 2023). Assuming the Europe-USA alliance is taken for granted despite key changes in American domestic policy and the international order promotes a more policy-implementation-focused stance among Brussels decision-makers rather than defining Europe's collective interests. Thirdly, the *Compass's* elements appear unsynchronized with current crisis situations. For example, the EU-OSCE partnership focuses on strengthening conflict prevention, crisis management, and post-conflict stabilization. Nothing is said about the need for a new pan-European security architecture or a new role for the OSCE in supporting (maintaining) regional order. It's true that Russia's invasion of Ukraine is still on the agenda, but the lack of a long-term perspective on developing existing partnerships may indicate the EU's inability to reach substantive agreements on key strategic issues (Celik, 2023).

2.2. Assessment of the Key Assumptions of the EU Strategic Compass

The opening chapter of the *Compass*, titled "The World We Face," presents a complex and troubling picture of Europe's security landscape; from war on its borders and natural disasters to terrorism and cyber conflicts. Unprovoked Russian aggression against Ukraine constitutes a brutal geopolitical wake-up call undermining many fundamental European values. The document ambitiously commits to defending European security. However, in practice, there is a significant gap between identified threats and proposed operational measures. What would be a bold effort in peaceful times to develop the CSDP now inevitably ends in failure (A Strategic Compass, 2022).

Arguments in favor of a positive assessment of the *Compass* include, above all, the first-ever joint threat assessment by member states, representing

an important step towards a common strategic culture. The *Compass*, not fully a strategy or an action plan, contains specific commitments to improve the rapid response ecosystem of the CSDP by 2025, from operational measures to the decision-making process. The role of the EU as a security provider and builder of collective resilience (e.g., against hybrid threats, disinformation, and cyberattacks) should be appreciated. On the other hand, the weaknesses of the *Compass* lie in the fact that it is not truly an EU security and defense strategy but rather a "white paper." Although the document addresses European security and defense, it does not consider the economic conditions that constitute a function of security. Issues related to energy, food, technology, forced displacements, or ways of securing resources in the face of shortages were omitted (Adolfson et al., 2022; Britz, 2023). Geography was also not sufficiently focused on, e.g., the three key maritime areas: the Baltic Sea, the Black Sea, and the Mediterranean Sea. It also assumes maintaining the *status quo* in relations with China (Orenstein, 2023). Additionally, the level of EU military ambition was diluted. How should the European Capability Goal of being able to deploy 60,000 troops in 60 days be treated now? Current decisions speak of the EU's ability to rapidly deploy up to 5,000 troops for various types of crises. Furthermore, the EU's framework for inter-institutional crisis management and integrated political response to crises has not been reviewed, which, as shown by the unforeseen evacuation from Kabul in Afghanistan, is a critical element of crisis response. In this context, establishing an EU Security Council and an EU defense commissioner seems justified (Sus, 2023).

Nevertheless, the *Compass* is ambitious and concrete. It defines actions along with deadlines to counteract identified shortcomings in capabilities, structures, decision-making processes, and financing that prevent quick and decisive action within the CSDP. However, the contents of the document alone do not guarantee successful implementation, and the EU cannot afford failure. The ability to quickly deploy identified strategic factors, command and control structures, and other initiatives are interconnected, and if one element is blocked, the system will not function properly. Questions about the EU's predisposition to achieve results remain in the background, especially regarding its rapid deployment capability. A clearly defined scope of EU missions based on sample scenarios complemented by the possibility of utilizing NATO capabilities is necessary (Constantinescu et al., 2022).

A positive assessment also deserves the proposal to integrate the digital domain into the European strategic culture (Giuashvili & Tassinari, 2024). In the *Compass*, current and emerging technological challenges are treated as factors spreading international uncertainty. At the same time, the EU sends an important message to potential adversaries: Europe is ready to take technology seriously. However, some aspects were overlooked or treated ambiguously. For example, the dynamics shaping cyberspace and space were not considered. Russia's

aggression against Ukraine shows that global cyberspace may fragment, with consequences for European security, including the reduction of member states' intelligence capabilities. Similarly, the document did not address the challenges posed by the growing role of powers like China in space, the weaponization of space, and the increasing threat of cyberattacks on space assets (Sweeney & Winn, 2022). The document also did not discuss in detail emerging and disruptive technologies. While artificial intelligence and biotechnology are mentioned, key technologies for Europe's security are not specified. References to quantum computing as a potential enhancement of European cyber capabilities are important but insufficient. Other technologies utilizing quantum technology, such as detection or advanced encryption, are also essential to enhance the EU's security and modernize European potential (Brânda, 2022).

The *Compass* presents an action plan for the European Union of Defense of tomorrow. It builds on the contents of the *EU Global Strategy* in the field of security and defense. The successful implementation of the *Compass* will depend on whether member states are willing to increase defense spending, including the development of necessary capabilities. The goal should be to meet the needs of national armed forces and strive for synergy and complementarity within the ever-evolving defense financing and cooperation ecosystem across the EU. Political will remains crucial in finding flexible decision-making procedures and financing instruments that enable the use of rapid deployment capabilities of 5,000 troops and transferring peace operations conducted by coalitions of member states to EU command structures under Article 44 TEU (Paul et al., 2022). EU member states must also increase their readiness to use a common pool of equipment for CSDP missions and operations and supply non-EU armed forces with equipment through the EPF. Assuming political will among member states, which can never be taken for granted, operational effectiveness will also be required to credibly achieve the level of ambition set out in the document. Within an integrated approach to external crises and conflicts, EU institutions and member states will need to be able to flexibly and effectively use the full range of tools at their disposal (Bosse, 2023). This includes the rapid and decisive use of force if necessary or the deployment of forces in accordance with the United Nations Charter and EU procedures, considering balanced dispute resolution at the local level.

2.3. Adaptation of the EU Strategic Compass in the Field of Security and Defense Concerning Experiences from the War in Ukraine

The ongoing war in Ukraine has provided key insights that can improve the *EU Strategic Compass*, particularly in strengthening NATO's eastern flank. The ability to quickly move troops and equipment proved crucial for Ukraine's defense. To

incorporate this lesson, the EU should invest in modernizing transport infrastructure, including railways, roads, and airports, to facilitate the rapid and efficient movement of military resources across Europe. Establishing equipment depots in strategic locations on the eastern flank can shorten response times during crises, and simplifying bureaucratic and legal procedures will further expedite force deployment.

One of the key aspects of the *Strategic Compass* is the emphasis on rapid deployment capabilities. The war in Ukraine has highlighted the critical need for rapid troop and equipment movements. The EU's focus on improving military mobility and logistics has become more urgent, with efforts to modernize transport infrastructure and streamline deployment procedures. Establishing equipment depots in strategic locations on NATO's eastern flank has demonstrated effectiveness in reducing response times and increasing readiness (Vohra, 2024).

Cyber defense and information warfare have also become crucial elements of modern conflicts, as evidenced by Ukraine's experience with major cyberattacks and disinformation campaigns. The *Strategic Compass* initiatives aimed at strengthening cyber defense capabilities, including developing joint EU-NATO cyber response teams and enhanced information sharing, are essential. These efforts aim to protect critical infrastructure and military operations from cyber threats that were prevalent in the Ukraine conflict. Enhancing public communication strategies to counter disinformation and regular cyber defense exercises further contribute to building resilience against such threats (Tardy, 2023).

The importance of timely and accurate intelligence was clearly illustrated by Ukraine's ability to anticipate and counter Russian military actions. The European Intelligence Fusion Centre plays a key role in ensuring real-time information sharing among EU member states and NATO allies. Advanced surveillance and reconnaissance technologies, such as UAVs and satellite imaging, are essential for maintaining situational awareness and early warning capabilities (Börzel, 2023). These tools enable the EU and NATO to respond swiftly to potential threats, a necessity underscored by the Ukraine conflict.

Effective defense of Ukraine relied not only on conventional military capabilities but also on asymmetric warfare tactics. The *Strategic Compass* addresses this by promoting a balanced force structure that includes both conventional forces and units trained in hybrid warfare tactics. Regular joint training exercises focusing on interoperability between EU and NATO forces ensure cohesive and coordinated defense operations (Heisbourg, 2024). Developing specialized rapid response units capable of countering hybrid threats, including cyberattacks and irregular warfare, is a key adaptation drawn from Ukraine's experiences.

Civil-military cooperation was crucial for maintaining Ukraine's resilience. The *Strategic Compass's* focus on strengthening civil defense programs ensures that civilian infrastructure and populations can support military operations during conflicts. Public-private partnerships are essential for protecting critical infrastructure, enhancing supply chain security, and ensuring the availability of essential services. Engaging local communities in resilience-building activities, such as emergency preparedness training, further strengthens regional stability and readiness (Ivančík, 2024).

Sustained investments in defense and innovation were the cornerstone of Ukraine's ability to adapt to the changing threat landscape. The *Strategic Compass* encourages EU member states to increase defense spending to meet NATO goals, ensuring adequate funding for modernization and capability development. Promoting research and development of advanced defense technologies, including artificial intelligence, autonomous systems, and next-generation weaponry, is crucial for maintaining a competitive edge. Joint procurement initiatives streamline acquisition processes, reduce costs, and ensure interoperability of equipment and systems among EU and NATO forces (Nones, 2024).

Strategic communication and unity of purpose were instrumental in garnering international support for Ukraine. The *Strategic Compass* advocates for a unified strategic communication strategy to present a cohesive and resolute stance against potential aggressors. Strengthening diplomatic engagement with global partners builds a broad coalition of support, deterring adversaries through international pressure and solidarity. Enhancing public diplomacy efforts to build resilience against propaganda and disinformation ensures public support for defense initiatives and policies (Alessandri, 2023).

The implementation of the *EU Strategic Compass* in the field of security and defense has been critically evaluated in light of the war in Ukraine and the need to defend NATO's eastern flank. Strengthening military mobility, cyber defense, intelligence sharing, defense capabilities, civil-military cooperation, defense investments, and strategic communication are key elements that have been validated by Ukrainian experiences. These efforts collectively reinforce the EU and NATO's defensive posture, ensuring robust and resilient defense frameworks capable of deterring and countering potential Russian aggression. The *Strategic Compass*, informed by lessons from Ukraine, provides a comprehensive and adaptive approach to contemporary security challenges, reinforcing the commitment to collective defense and regional stability.

3. CONCLUSIONS

Whether the actions taken by the EU will lead to a milestone in the CSDP entirely depends on their implementation. Over the past twenty years, there has been a

gap between ambition and implementation in this area. It can be assumed that clearly defined priorities, improved measures, and a greater sense of urgency can provide the necessary impetus to close the gap. It should be emphasized that the assumptions in the field of security and defense adopted in the EU Global Strategy have directed EU actions towards strengthening capabilities in this area. At the same time, the lack of a specific action plan in this area and the focus on undefined strategic autonomy have caused ambitious plans to remain theoretical considerations. Changes in the EU security environment have become an impetus for taking the field of security and defense seriously, hence the decision to develop the *EU Strategic Compass* – a white paper and action plan for building and developing defense capabilities. Russia's aggression against Ukraine has confirmed that the actions taken are appropriate and aimed at building European security and defense with the EU perceived as its guarantor.

The proposals contained in the *Compass* should be considered comprehensive and complementary to the Strategy. Both documents represent a milestone in the development of European security and defense. It can be expected that in the future, actions and reactions taken by the EU in the event of crises and potential aggression will be decisive and swift, and possessing adequate capabilities in the field of security and defense will ensure the protection of EU citizens and vital interests.

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