EU STRATEGIC AUTONOMY: KEY CHALLENGES AND OBSTACLES TO ITS ACHIEVEMENT

Lesia Dorosh[1]
Yuliia Lemko[2]

   Abstract. Taking into consideration the altered security landscape in Europe and globally, notably due to the Russian Federation's full-scale aggression against Ukraine, state-sanctioned terrorism, humanitarian and natural disasters, and hybrid challenges, significant increases in security risks for the EU have occurred. As a result of these events, the primary obstacles impeding the EU's attainment of strategic independence have been identified. This article focuses on the European Union's security strategy, namely PESCO and the Strategic Compass, which is one of the main documents governing the security sector. The EU's global security strategy also stresses the importance of reinforcing its defense capabilities. The strategy states that only a strong and unified EU can effectively counter contemporary challenges. The adoption of the Strategic Compass followed comprehensive analyses in the domains of crisis management, resilience, capacity-building, and partnership. The application of the principle of subsidiarity is recommended within its limits. However, clear channels and methods for interaction between various levels, encompassing EU institutions, member states, public and private sectors, as well as civilian and military entities, the EU and NATO, are advised. From a capacity development perspective, there is an emphasis on expanding the complementary relationship between the EU and NATO. The paper aims to examine the effect of these challenges on the EU, as demonstrated in the Global Security Strategy and Strategic Compass of the EU, and the Strategic Concept of NATO. The study's *methodology* is grounded in the

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[1] PhD in Political Science, Associate Professor
of the Department of Political Science and International Relations,
Lviv Polytechnic National University, Ukraine
[2] PhD in Political Science, Senior Lecturer
of the Department of Political Science and International Relations,
Lviv Polytechnic National University, Ukraine

broad research methods of the neo-institutional approach and the analysis of security institutions within the European Union. The *results* of the research showed that the main challenges to the EU's strategic autonomy are: the difficulties of coordinating the security policies of individual EU members, the difficulties of bridging the gap between their rhetoric and actions, the difficulties of determining Brussels' security priorities and its key projects in this area, where the Union's financial and institutional efforts should be directed, the financial challenges it faces, etc. It is argued that today, given the common security challenges, the coordination of EU and NATO efforts in responding to them is particularly important.

1. Introduction

The President of the European Council, Charles Michel, stated that 2022 shall be regarded as the "year of European defence". The reason for this is the adoption of the Strategic Compass for Security and Defence of the European Union (EU), which aims to clarify and strengthen the Union's ambitions in the field of security and defence policy [7]. Although it is important to acknowledge that the issues formulated under the slogan of "strategic autonomy" of the EU have been on its agenda for a while. The focus is on how international conflicts, such as those in Ukraine since 2014 and in the Middle East, frequent terrorist attacks and other forms of external threats to the EU have become significant challenges to its security. Moreover, under the influence of Russia's aggressive and invasive policy, the disastrous consequences of Brexit for the Union, and former US President D. Trump's statement about the possibility of NATO's dissolution, discussions have arisen about whether a united Europe is capable of ensuring its own security. Against this backdrop, the Russian Federation's full-scale invasion of Ukraine on 24th February 2022 has highlighted the necessity of enhancing the EU's capacity to engage in strategic thinking and action within the sphere of security.

Already in 2016, at the European Council Summit "Shared Vision, Common Action: A Stronger Europe", the current High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy (2014–2019), Frederica Mogherini, presented the EU's Global Security Strategy, noting: "The purpose, even the existence of our Union is in doubt." This document defined the main priorities of the EU movement in the field of security,

taking into account the beginning of the war in Ukraine. Already this EU Global Security Strategy, not to mention its subsequent editions, went beyond the previous, narrow, paradigmatic standards of understanding the security of its members exclusively as a military phenomenon. However, since 2016, F. Mogherini stated: "The European Union can combine and connect trade policy, environmental policy, humanitarian aid, cooperation and assistance in the field of development, as well as security work." Indeed, this document has become programmatic, declaring and ensuring the integration of the foreign and security policies of the EU members into one whole [14].

The European Union's Global Security Strategy also emphasises the need to strengthen its defence capabilities. The Strategy states that only a strong, united EU can face the challenges of today. And it emphasises that the principle of pooling and sharing resources of all its members should be applied to all their defence spending. It can therefore be assumed that the period in which the European Union relied only on the use of its "soft" power abroad will be replaced by a period of more active use of its "hard" power, relying on the defence potential of the members of the Union as well as its partners in other regions. Such conclusions are based on the provisions of the Global Security Strategy, which defines the collective commitment of EU members to allocate 20% of their total defence budget to scientific and technological development and 35% of total defence spending to joint purchases of equipment. Thus, after coordinating the defence planning of its member states and eliminating the military backwardness of some of them, the European Union seeks to strengthen its own overall defence potential in order to neutralise its deficit.

On 30th November 2016, the European Commission sanctioned the European Defence Action Plan to facilitate the amalgamation of the military industries of EU member countries and the establishment of a shared arms market. On 17 February 2017, a resolution of the European Parliament supported increased centralisation in the European Union in military matters, including the appointment of a finance minister and the formation of a European army.

This occurred following the 2016 election of the new US President D. Trump, who, during the election campaign, declared that he would not automatically extend US security guarantees to European NATO members

if he were to become president. He also insisted that the allies pay for their support and protection from the US. Afterwards, the EU opted for insurance against comparable blackmail threats and security shortcomings, although later it was confirmed that the EU would continue cooperating militarily with the USA.

Against this background, on 13 November 2017, Germany and 22 other EU members established the basis for the European Defence Union. This supports the enlargement of the "Permanent Structured Cooperation" (PESCO) between the Union's members in the military and defence domain. The basis for the functioning of PESCO is Article 6. 42 of the 2007 Lisbon Treaty [18], which allows for the creation of structures within the EU that will be responsible for the formulation and implementation of its common defence policy.

This programme is seen both as a "cornerstone for building a more sustainable architecture of European security and as a complement to defence cooperation within NATO for those EU members that are also members of the Alliance" [4].

Researchers claim that the phrase "strategic autonomy" in the EU's Global Strategy most boldly expresses the Union's ambitions in the field of security. In this document, "strategic autonomy" means the EU's ability to defend itself without relying on the military capabilities and support of the United States of America. It is about official Brussels overcoming its excessive dependence on Washington's power structures in the field of security and defence.

The purpose of such actions by the EU is to acquire the ability to respond to international crises, to conduct operations to overcome them, in which "NATO generally does not participate". This goal of the Union determines its initiation and implementation of security projects such as PESCO and the European Defence Fund (EDF). Within the framework of these projects, the EU member states are increasing their own defence spending and at the same time want to benefit the owners of the European defence industry and develop continental research and technology in the field of the defence industrial complex [2]. David Macalister, chairman of the European Parliament's foreign affairs committee, called on the European Council to prepare for the EU's "strategic sovereignty", pointing out that the integration of member states' capabilities in this area is important to

achieve this goal of official Brussels. At the same time, European politicians are aware that Member States sometimes perceive external threats to their states in different ways, which complicates the solution of the Union's common security tasks [10].

Under the conditions of the recent challenges caused by Russia's full-scale aggression against Ukraine, the general deterioration of the international security situation and the increase in the level of external threats, EU member states better understand their common interests. These include territorial integrity, security of the Union's external borders, resilience to pandemics, food, water and energy security, environmental sustainability, the integrity and proper functioning of the internal market, secure communication networks, cybersecurity, the fight against organised crime, terrorism and extremism, etc.

All these common interests led to the initiation of new documents in the field of security and defence, the latest of which was the Strategic Compass, initiated at the end of 2020 and officially adopted by the EU foreign and defence ministers on 21 March 2022. This key document sets out the EU's security and defence policy for the rest of this decade and beyond. But the final version of the Strategic Compass promises a "quantum leap" in defence. Its immediate implementation is at stake.

Although the time horizon is 5-10 years, more than half of the Strategic Compass outcomes are due by 2022 and almost none after 2025 [9].

The aim of the Strategic Compass is to ensure that the Union and its Member States strengthen their security and defence by setting out in detail the instruments and initiatives that will ensure stronger, faster and more decisive external action. This initiative will include another initiative, also of a military nature, consisting in the creation of a rapid reaction force (around 5,000 military personnel) to which the participating countries will contribute various modules of capabilities and forces [11]. It is important to note that these are not the so-called Rapid Reaction Forces that have recently been deployed to protect NATO's eastern members who feel threatened by Russia. These forces are part of NATO, not the EU [13].

Currently, no one knows how and when Russia's war against Ukraine will end, or what its consequences for European security will be in the medium and long term (i.e., in the next 5-10 years). Thus, contemporary analytical discussions increasingly focus on how European countries

should support Ukraine, how Europe and the United States should perceive and interact with Russia during and after the conflict, and to what extent a united Europe should strengthen its own defences. Therefore, in the light of the above, it is appropriate to analyse the obstacles on the way to the EU's strategic autonomy, taking into account the significance and consequences of the Russian-Ukrainian war and its full-scale stage.

2. Key Challenges to the EU's Strategic Autonomy

The first and most important challenge for the establishment of the EU's strategic autonomy is the coordination of the formulation and implementation of the EU's and NATO's policies and actions in the field of security and defence. To meet this challenge, the EU Strategic Compass (24-25 March) and the NATO Strategic Concept (29-30 June) were adopted. Today, both the Compass and the Concept underpin the Union's and the Alliance's response to their shared changing and increasingly complex security environment. These documents assess the strategic environment in which both supranational organisations operate and set out the guiding principles for the future political and military development of the EU and NATO to meet the challenges of that environment. These documents offer possible responses to the challenges of the present and the future, including Russian aggression against Ukraine and the risks it poses to the European and Atlantic security architecture. The authors of both documents emphasise the need to develop concrete proposals on how to change the framework of international and European security and defence in a complex security environment that challenges European interests and values. At the same time, it is emphasised that the EU should become a more valuable and sustainable actor in the field of security and defence in the long term.

That is why it is important that 21 countries are members of both the Union and the Alliance at the same time, ensuring that the objectives set out in the Compass and the Concept are complementary. The point is that the successful simultaneous implementation of the EU Strategic Compass and the NATO Strategic Concept requires that these documents, and the processes and actions they provide for, do not contradict each other. The fact that these policies and processes are implemented in parallel provides the EU and NATO with a unique opportunity to jointly address today's new (geopolitical) problems. However, frequent consultations at the

highest political level are necessary to overcome inconsistencies in their activities, which contribute to better coordination of the actions of the Union and the Alliance.

The concept of the EU's "strategic autonomy" appears only once in the Strategic Compass. However, it raises the question of what the EU should be able to do autonomously when and if its partners (NATO in general and the US in particular) decide not to act (in a given international and/or humanitarian crisis). The Compass does not provide a clear answer to this question. It only emphasises the primacy of the Alliance in solving the problem of collective defence of the North Atlantic, and vaguely mentions the role of the EU in resolving international crises and protecting its citizens. The Compass outlines a "roadmap" for EU development: crisis management tools; EU Rapid Deployment Capacity (RDC), which "should initially focus on rescue and evacuation operations, as well as the initial phase of stabilisation operations". However, this document does not answer the question of what will happen after the initial phase and under what circumstances the EU will be ready to conduct/deploy more powerful military operations. In connection with the last thesis, it should be emphasised that against the background of the full-scale war on the EU-Ukraine border and Russia's repeated threats to the members of the Union (Poland and the Baltic states), the Compass does not in fact contain any assessment and/or specification of the provision on mutual assistance of the participating EU (Article 42.7 TEU).

It is well known that the procedures for the formation and implementation of the EU's intergovernmental policies (in the fields of diplomacy and defence of its members) are different from the procedures for the formation and implementation of supranational policies. In the latter case, decisions binding on the members of the Union are taken by their qualified majority, and those member states that do not comply with these decisions are referred to the European Court of Justice. In the first case, EU members take decisions unanimously, even if they do not intend to implement them. The question therefore arises as to how many member states actually intended to fulfil their obligations under PESCO. Finally, in some European countries, the defence establishment saw PESCO as a useful tool for convincing the national political elite of the importance of joint, serious defence efforts within the Union. But many governments

probably joined this EU programme more out of fear of being ignored than out of a sincere desire to cooperate on security at the European level. At best, nothing will happen if a member state fails to meet the EU's security requirements. Although the PESCO mechanism provides for the possibility of suspending a member state's participation, it is unlikely that this option will be used. In any case, many of the commitments made by EU members under this programme are formulated in such broad terms that their actual formal implementation is possible without the members of the Union taking any real measures that would go beyond their previous actions in the field of security within the EU.

The EU's ability to act militarily in the future will therefore depend on the political will of all its members. Moreover, its reaction to the events of the Russian-Ukrainian war shows that the members of the Union can quickly agree on joint military action. However, the reaction of official Brussels to the Russian-Ukrainian war seems to be a singular, if not unique case: it is a situation of clear aggression against an EU partner, its future member, which directly threatens its members with direct and indirect negative consequences (e.g., massive flows of refugees, energy crisis, etc.) and from which official Brussels simply cannot stand aside. Its "surroundings" are on fire, and if the EU does not step up its security efforts to "put it out" now, there is a danger that the fire will spread to the "main house" – the EU and European NATO members [15]. On the other hand, it is difficult to imagine a similar degree of unity in the response of the members of the Union to an international crisis in a region far from Europe, such as Africa, where their interests and perceptions differ, especially if the United States is not involved in its resolution. Conversely, the fatigue of the citizens of the EU member states over the war in Ukraine may reduce their willingness to support the Union's military operations far from its borders in the future [15].

The gap between rhetoric and practice in the field of security and defence is another challenge for the successful functioning of this area of the Union. Political leaders and EU officials have repeatedly stated that official Brussels wants to be more active in this area. This is evidenced by the launch of numerous and diverse foreign missions and operations, as well as defence initiatives.

However, despite supranational efforts in the field of defence, united Europe has still not been able to become a serious player in this field, and its

members, who are also members of the Alliance, do not bear a "fair" share of the costs of supporting the functioning of NATO [15].

At the same time, the researchers point out that the rhetoric of the EU Strategic Compass and the NATO Strategic Concept can only be implemented if these international organisations are able to specify the changing, complex challenges to their security (present and future) and successfully resolve them in an efficient and coordinated manner. For this, the political will of those European states that are at the same time members of the Union and the Alliance is important [15]. The first is the need for their substantial investment in the defence of the EU and the European component of NATO. It is well known, however, that most of these investments are made at the national level. Member states of both organisations have maintained a national focus in their defence planning and have shown little discipline in fulfilling their international commitments to the EU and NATO, significantly undermining the effectiveness of the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) [2]. The urgent task of EU and NATO governments today is therefore to increase their defence budgets. After all, the war in Ukraine reminds them that it is important and necessary for states to maintain significant defence spending and even investment in this area. Russia continues to pose a serious threat to European security, both in the traditional sense (through the mobilisation of its Armed Forces following the initial failure of its full-scale aggression in Ukraine) and in the "hybrid" sense (through cyber-attacks and disinformation campaigns). That is why the urgent task for EU and NATO governments today is to increase their defence budgets. After all, the war in Ukraine reminds them that it is important and necessary for states to maintain significant defence spending and even to invest in this area.

In addition to the 100 billion EUR investment, O. Scholz reiterated his country's pledge to spend at least 2% of its GDP on defence in order to meet the minimum financial standard for defence spending by NATO members. Other European members of the Alliance whose security spending does not meet the 2% of GDP norm will follow Germany's example. According to the researchers, this should become their priority [15] and contribute to strengthening Europe's role in the Alliance's security and defence and increasing its share of NATO funding.

Researchers consider the impossibility of building a strong common EU army to be a major challenge to the EU's common security [13]. However, as early as 1999, they set the following quantitative standards for the deployment of the armies of the EU member states for the implementation of its Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP): the ability to deploy an army corps (60,000 military personnel plus the necessary naval and air assets) to support its expeditionary operations for two months and to support its operations abroad for at least one year. The EU's 2016 Global Strategy expanded the CSDP's objectives by adding "defending Europe" to the existing tasks of crisis response and capacity building in "third" countries. However, the members of the Union refused to revise the main objective and gave the EU Military Staff (EUMS) the task of revising the requirements for their armies in order to ensure the joint military capability of the Union [2]. The term "European army" was not included in this document, instead it emphasised the need to strengthen the EU's "defence capabilities". On 16 September 2016, at an informal EU summit in Bratislava, France and Germany proposed a plan to create a "joint armed force" that "will compete with NATO in terms of military potential" [17].

Former German Chancellor Angela Merkel spoke most fully and frankly about strengthening the EU's independence from NATO in the military sphere. According to her, the time has come for Europeans to stop relying on those they have always relied on (i.e., the USA) and to rely only on their own strength. At the same time, A. Merkel added that the maintenance of European security should continue to be coordinated with the American ally, despite the clear cooling of its interest in European affairs [12]. France has sided with Germany on this issue. President E. Macron declared that in ten years' time Europe would have "a common military force, a common defence budget and a common doctrine for (defence) actions". Thus, officially, Paris supported the creation of a separate EU army as a joint military force for its members, rather than a local addition to NATO [8]. Former European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker also supported the creation of a single EU army, which should allow its members to formulate a common foreign and security policy and prevent the destruction of the international order established in Europe after the Second World War and the Cold War: "We have to give a new direction to the issue of a European defence union

and the creation of a European army. This is the music of the future, and it is already playing, but most Europeans do not hear it yet." [3]

The EU Strategic Compass 2022 has clearly captured these ideas and identified the steps needed to enhance the military cooperation of the members of the Union and to increase their investment in their security and defence. The Union's aim is to strengthen its civilian and military missions, enabling it to take decisions more quickly and flexibly, and to ensure solidarity among EU members in financing its operations. There are also plans to enhance the ability of EU Member States to rapidly deploy, on behalf of the EU, some 5,000 troops from their army units based on flexible and interoperable modules (including strategic assets) to deal with different types of crises. The Union is also seeking to strengthen command and control structures, both civilian (Civilian Planning and Conduct Capability) and military (Military Planning and Conduct Capability) [13].

However, some European bureaucrats and analysts reject the idea of a single European army. For example, Dick Zandi, a senior researcher at the Klingendahl Institute, cites the cultural differences of EU members and the communication problems of their militaries as too great an obstacle to the creation of a truly European army [13]. On the other hand, MEP Hilde Wotmans, foreign affairs coordinator of the European Parliament's Renewed Europe group, advocates progress towards the creation of a European army based on a common foreign policy. According to her, EU countries should get rid of the idea that the US will protect them in the future through NATO [2].

In this context, the following EU defence projects should not be forgotten PESCO, in particular the obligation under this programme for individual members of the Union to submit an annual National Implementation Plan (NIP); CARD, which assesses member states' defence spending and their future intentions, focusing on the extent of their multinational cooperation. However, researchers point to a deep inconsistency between all these EU instruments (PESCO, CARD, NIP) [2]. Moreover, their members often focus on their national security objectives. For example, instead of using PESCO as a tool to achieve a common EU (security) objective, its participants use the programme to promote their own defence projects within the Community. To paraphrase J. Kennedy, they are not asking what they can do for PESCO and for the

EU in general, but what PESCO can do for them. The expected answer to this question: an increase in funding, mainly through the European Defence Fund, since its resources are limited for co-financing major EU security investment projects. Brussels has also adopted a restrictive approach to the involvement in its security projects of non-member states and "third" parties in general (mainly Washington and London), which are perceived as competitors of the EU, even though, other things being equal, they could help official Brussels initiatives to succeed, to reach a "critical mass" that would make them economically viable.

Therefore, the most important issue in the debate on the EU's strategic autonomy is the definition of its precise objectives in the field of security and defence, including the objectives of PESCO. Achieving them will make it possible to move from a national to a European focus on security issues. The researchers argue that even without a consensus on the meaning of strategic autonomy for EU members, they could agree on the intermediate goal of PESCO – to provide the EU with some of its forces in order to achieve at least an initial degree of EU autonomy from the Alliance in its own expeditionary operations [2]. The choice of priority security projects is also important for the success of this Brussels initiative. The point is that the success of individual PESCO projects depends on their quality, not quantity. EU member states must submit projects for consideration under PESCO that aim to solve the Union's priority problems and, at the same time, require a large number ("critical mass") of participants to make them economically viable. Spreading its money around dozens of small projects every year will not deliver anything special for the Union or its members.

The purpose of the selected (strategically important) EU projects is to achieve high defence efficiency in the use of its financial potential, to increase the availability of its potential for all members of the Union through their unification, and to develop new potential. In addition, projects that depend on the development of the next generation of key defence platforms for the European armed forces should be transferred to PESCO: a main battle tank, a frigate, a combat jet, a missile system, and so on.

Conversely, if all these major projects, such as the Future Combat Air System (FCAS) and the Main Ground Combat System (MGCS), remain outside the scope of Union planning and funding under PESCO, they will have little impact on future European defence efforts [16].

The European Union therefore faces a number of challenges in the field of security and defence. Primarily, it is a question of coordinating the policies of its members in this field, bridging the gap between their words and their deeds, defining its priorities and key projects on which the Union will focus its financial and institutional efforts, overcoming its (and its members') financial challenges, etc. However, it is in the face of these major threats that the coordination of the EU's efforts with NATO becomes particularly important. The point is that without greater integration of European efforts with NATO, the latter will not achieve its goals, and European countries – without significant American support – will be unable both to project power beyond the continent's borders and to provide collective defence.

3. Strategic Compass Key Provisions

The first task in the formation of the aforementioned Strategic Compass was devoted to overcoming the above-mentioned problem of different visions of key threats and the need to form a common strategic culture – to ensure a common strategic culture within a set time and a detailed analysis of threats, which should enable the conceptualisation of the links between risks, security and related threats into a coherent whole at the EU level [16]. It is the strategic compass that should set (without confusion and without abuse by Member States that lack the determination to support the EU as an integrated security and defence union) an appropriate and defined level of ambition, as well as clearly defining the means and even the timeframe for achieving defined strategic goals. In a practical sense, the role of the Strategic Compass is to "nudge" member states towards a common understanding of the key threats to Europe and how to address them together.

The researchers believe that the Strategic Compass is a "mid-level strategy" that translates priorities into real objectives and identifies opportunities for the Union to develop. It is a continuation of the continuous update of the European Capability Development Plan launched in 2007 by the European Defence Agency, an evolving process based on needs analysis and designed to help member states rationalise resources and improve capabilities [9]. It is important to emphasise that the Strategic Compass reflects the full range of contributions and views on defence and security issues and explains how the EU should address complex challenges. Moreover, in the absence of a supra-national EU body

in the field of defence, such enhanced cooperation of national defence resources is currently the only option for European defence. It is the Strategic Compass that could recommend ways to better integrate existing tools or create a centralised hub capable of developing situational awareness covering maritime security, hybrid threats, climate-related crises, piracy and critical infrastructure protection, etc.

In total, the document proposes more than 50 deliverables with deadlines, most of them by 2025. Compass is the most concrete and realistic roadmap for the EU as a security provider seen in the history of the bloc. Faced with such a tectonic shift in the geopolitical landscape as Russia's invasion of Ukraine on 24 February 2022, member states and the European External Action Service (EEAS) adapted the document in a last-minute revision before the marathon negotiations [11].

The adoption of the Strategic Compass followed comprehensive analyses in the domains of crisis management, resilience, capacity-building, and partnership. Within its limits, the application of the principle of subsidiarity is recommended, but with clear channels and methods of interaction between different levels: EU institutions, Member States, public and private sectors, civilian and military entities, EU and NATO. From a capacity development perspective, the need to develop complementarity between the EU and NATO is emphasised.

The Strategic Compass sets out clear commitments to be achieved within a defined timeframe and is divided into four broad areas: action, security, investment and partnership. The aim of "action" is to be able to respond rapidly and reliably to any situation that might threaten European security or international peace and stability. To this end, there is a desire to act with partners where possible, but also alone where this is not possible, a clear indication of the lack of US interest in geographical scenarios where its interests are not at stake, but where European interests are.

The aim is to strengthen civilian and military missions by enabling them to take decisions more quickly and flexibly and by promoting greater solidarity in the financing of operations. It is also desirable to enhance the ability to deploy rapidly, on the basis of flexible and interoperable modules of military units made available by the Member States that have committed themselves to doing so, capable of deploying around 5 000 troops (including strategic assets) to deal with different types of crisis. There is

also a desire to strengthen command and control structures, both civilian (Civilian Planning and Conduct Capacity) and military (Military Planning and Conduct Capacity, a division of the EU Military Staff) [11].

In the area of "security", the objective is to improve the ability to anticipate threats, ensure access to strategic areas and protect European citizens. This will be achieved by strengthening intelligence capabilities to monitor the evolution of geographical scenarios deemed relevant and to provide strategic foresight. It will also create an "EU Hybrid Toolbox", bringing together various existing tools to detect and respond to a wide range of hybrid threats, in particular disinformation and interference from outside the Union. Particular attention will be paid to cyber defence and open access in the maritime and space domains.

As far as "investment" is concerned, the idea is to acquire the necessary skills to act autonomously and to reduce technological and industrial dependence, with particular emphasis on so-called strategic mechanisms. "Partnership" aims to strengthen and broaden cooperation with leading international institutions (NATO, UN, OSCE, African Union and ASEAN), as well as with third countries with which permanent cooperation relations already exist or which wish to develop them. The Union intends to practise, promote and protect multilateralism based on international law and to strengthen and develop multilateral and bilateral relations.

Particular attention will be paid to partners such as Great Britain, with which it is planned to conclude a global cooperation agreement, the USA, Norway, and Canada, as well as regions including the Western Balkans, Africa, Asia, and Latin America. The proposal is to create a security and defense partnership forum to discuss and address common challenges and threats with partners [9].

The Strategic Compass pays particular attention to creating opportunities to improve the European Union's response to hybrid threats. It sets out a number of proposals for ensuring protection against hybrid threats, stating that they should include "preventive, cooperative, stabilising, containment and recovery measures, as well as strengthening solidarity and mutual assistance" [7]. In particular, these include the creation of EU hybrid rapid response teams, the strengthening of the EU's cyber diplomacy toolkit and the further development of the EU Cyber Defence Policy Framework. In 2022, the Commission will also propose a

new European law on cyber resilience to strengthen the Union's response to cyber threats [6].

Following Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, European leaders met in Versailles on 10-11 March to discuss how best to respond to the Kremlin. A key element of the Versailles Declaration was the leaders' call for increased investment to fill critical gaps in the military capabilities of Europe's armed forces. The declaration calls on the European Commission to analyse the EU's defence investment gaps and to make recommendations for further strengthening Europe's defence technological and industrial base.

Naturally, any discussion regarding an increase in defence spending necessitates a consideration of which types of military capabilities Europe should acquire in the short-term (2022–2025), medium-term (2025–2030), and long-term (2030+), as outlined in reference [13]. The outcome of these discussions on potential military development and/or acquisition priorities will indisputably be influenced by the geographical, industrial, and cultural interests and priorities of EU member states.

4. Conclusions

"The war against Ukraine proves that Europe is in even greater danger than we thought only a few months ago, when the first draft of this Strategic Compass was presented," acknowledged Josep Borel in his foreword to the Strategic Compass [9]. Russia's war against Ukraine has undoubtedly changed the Compass in three ways: it has sharpened its focus, caused a surge in European defence spending, and increased the sense of urgency in its implementation [7]. Indeed, Russia's actions confirmed the European Defence Agency's assessment in November 2020, before the 2022 invasion, that European nations should urgently invest in main battle tanks, soldier protection systems/force protection technology, patrol surface ships, countering unmanned vehicles, air systems, developing defence and space capabilities, and military mobility. Each of these military capabilities could be useful to European militaries in deterring further Russian aggression, although progress in each of these capability areas will be relatively slow [2].

In conclusion, Russia's full-scale aggression in Ukraine has put the security of both the EU and the world at risk. The geopolitical and security picture of the continent and the planet is becoming more contentious and

unstable. The nature of modern security threats is changing: in addition to traditional instruments of destabilisation, hybrid threats are clearly emerging and intensifying, and the scale of disinformation and cyber-attacks is growing.

Under these conditions, the European Union, by adopting its documents such as the Strategic Compass, at least at the conceptual level, has demonstrated its desire to strengthen its strategic autonomy, to prepare for the threats identified and to fight them successfully. In practice, therefore, it is seeking to strengthen the stability of its defence through PESCO, which, unlike its previous (informal) defence initiatives, is an institutional, structural part of the Union and will thus not disappear, and which, if it is successful, will over time reduce the Union's dependence on the United States and enable Europe's rapid reaction forces to be deployed independently in a relatively short time. In this way, both Atlantic and global security will be strengthened by enhancing Europe's security and defence.

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