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Background Note

Session 2

"Considering major international challenges, what strategic autonomy for the European Union?"

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Considering major international challenges, what strategic autonomy for the European Union

In the summer of 2021, the United States' decision to evacuate its troops from Afghanistan and then the announcement on 15 September, on the eve of the presentation by the Commission and the High Representative of the European Union's strategy in the Indo-Pacific, of the AUKUS pact between Australia, the United Kingdom and the United States, illustrated the instability of our geopolitical environment and the importance for EU countries of endowing themselves with common instruments that serve their shared vision of international relations and security on the continent. The significance of the emergence of these new means is made all the greater by the overall deterioration of the global geostrategic environment, as illustrated by the emergence of new risks, such as the terrorist threat that France is fighting in the Sahel alongside its European partners in the "Takuba" force, or hybrid threats, such as Alexander Lukashenko's attempt to destabilise the Schengen area in the summer and autumn of 2021.

The need for Member States to give themselves the means for their own autonomy has long been recognised. One year after the start of the wars in Yugoslavia, the foreign and defence ministers laid out the "Petersberg tasks" on 19 June 1992, which are now codified in Article 43 of the Treaty on European Union (TEU). Under these, the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) exists to allow the Union to use civilian and military assets to carry out disarmament, humanitarian, military advice and assistance, conflict prevention and peacekeeping, crisis management and post-conflict stabilisation missions. Since the first civilian operational deployment in the framework of the European Union Police Mission (EUPM) in Bosnia and Herzegovina on 1 January 2003, the European Union has conducted several civilian and military missions abroad and is currently coordinating seven military operations in Bosnia and Herzegovina (EUFOR "Althea"), Mali (EUTM), Central African Republic (EUTM), Mozambique (EUTM), Somalia (EUTM), off the coast of Somalia (EUNAVFOR "Atalanta"), and in the Mediterranean Sea (EUNAVFOR MED "Irinì").

Outside the legal framework of the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP), France has also participated in structuring cooperation initiatives at the European level in the field of defence as coordinator of the Takuba force or within the framework of the Agenor mission, the aim of which is to guarantee freedom of movement in the Persian Gulf and the Strait of Hormuz.

The European Defence Agency (EDA) was established in 2004 with a mandate to foster cooperation between Member States in the area of capabilities. To this end, the European Defence Agency regularly draws up a Capability Development Plan (CDP) based on the Capability Development Mechanism to which the European Union Military Staff (EUMS) contributes. The European Defence Agency is also responsible for presenting the Coordinated Annual Review on Defence (CARD).

Since 2017, the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) has been revived, firstly as a result of the Council decision of 11 December 2017 creating the Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) in the field of defence as provided for in the Treaties since the Lisbon Treaty of 2007, and secondly with the creation on 1 January 2021 of the European Defence Fund (EDF) with a budget of €8 billion for the period 2021-2027.

This is the context in which it was decided under the German presidency to draw up a "Strategic Compass" for the European Union. After the classified common threat assessment document was adopted on 26 November 2020, the adoption of the Strategic Compass is scheduled for the French presidency. The plan currently under discussion, which was first presented to Member States by High Representative Josep Borrell in November 2021, is structured along the four lines of crisis management, resilience, military capabilities and partnerships.

In the initial version of the Strategic Compass presented by the High Representative to EU defence ministers in November 2021, the document proposes the establishment of an EU Rapid Deployment Capacity so that the EU has autonomous crisis management capabilities.

France is actively participating in European defence initiatives. It is present in 50 of the 60 common projects under way as part of the Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO).

In this respect, the French Presidency of the Council of the European Union (FPEU) has identified several priorities organised around five themes:

- a faster reacting operational Europe,
- a Europe that contributes to respecting international law and access to contested spaces (sea, air, space and cyberspace),
- a Europe that is resilient in the face of outside influence,
- a Europe that is sovereign in industry and technology:
- a global Europe that builds equitable partnerships.

Questions

What should be the outline of the rapid reaction capacity of 5,000 troops included in the Strategic Compass project? How should it interact with the EU battlegroups?

What instruments does the EU need to secure contested spaces more effectively, especially cyberspace and outer space?

What should be the priorities of the EU space strategy for security and defence that the EU must adopt before 2023?

What are the priority capability projects within the EU, and what assets does the EU have to find common funding for them?

How should the EU's Strategic Compass interact with the new Strategic Concept that NATO is expected to adopt in June 2022? More generally, how should NATO operations interact with the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP)?

What lessons can we learn from the establishment of bilateral and multilateral cooperation outside the EU legal framework in the fields of operations and capabilities? What can we draw from the European Intervention Initiative (EI2) that France launched in 2018 to encourage the emergence of a common European strategic culture?