MSC Agenda for Action
Moving Ahead: Strengthening EU Foreign, Security, and Defense Policy

Discussion Paper prepared for the Conference on the Future of Europe

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Disclaimer

The discussion paper at hand is not an official publication of the Munich Security Conference (MSC). The contents of this paper do not purport to reflect the opinions or views of the MSC. The paper mostly reflects discussions that occurred at MSC events – in particular at the MSC Workshops on EU Foreign Policy in November and December 2021 - or in background talks. It is meant to provide input to and stimulate the debate at MSC events and in the broader political and public sphere.

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Background

The Munich Security Conference (MSC) is the world's most prominent platform for the discussion of foreign and security policy. For nearly 60 years it has drawn attention to key challenges for the transatlantic alliance and global security. In this discussion paper, the MSC makes proposals for strengthening European Union (EU) foreign, security, and defense policy. While the EU has made considerable steps towards a stronger common foreign and security policy since the adoption of the Lisbon Treaty in 2009, these steps are by far not sufficient to address the multiple international challenges and the deteriorating security environment facing the EU. To provide input to and accompany the work of the Conference on the Future of Europe (CoFoE), the MSC hosted two workshops in November and December 2021, bringing together senior practitioners from EU institutions and member states as well as renowned experts from academia and think tanks from across Europe. This paper builds on their contributions and is a first attempt at outlining proposals and starting a debate.

Agenda for Action
Institutions and Processes

Top 1: Use the Existing Options in the EU Treaties to Expand Majority Voting

- To enhance the decision-making process in the EU's foreign, security, and defense policy and move towards more decisive joint action, member states have to make stronger use of the derogations from unanimity in the EU Treaties. A more effective common foreign policy would counteract tendencies of big member states to form coalitions outside the EU framework and would offer small member states the opportunity to initiate policy proposals and organize majorities around them. Thus, extending QMV could significantly strengthen rather than weaken the influence of small member states as sometimes claimed by critics of QMV.

- Options to extend majority voting include **constructive abstention** (Art. 31(1) Treaty of the European Union (TEU)) as well as the **gradual expansion of qualified majority voting** (QMV) to **sub-areas** (**"passarelle clause"**, Art. 31(3) TEU).

- Moreover, member states should apply the **"enabling clause"** that empowers the European Council to allow the Council to take decisions by QMV in predefined cases, namely the implementation of unanimous decisions by the European Council or the Council (Art. 31(2) TEU).

Top 2: Make Use of Enhanced Cooperation and Europeanize Ad Hoc Coalitions

- Further options to harness the **flexibility** of the Treaties include the provisions allowing for **enhanced cooperation** (Article 20(2) TEU), as well as **PESCO** (Art. 42(6) and Art. 46 TEU) and **Article 44** in the security and defense realm.

- To make the use of **Article 44 TEU**, which allows the Council to unanimously entrust a crisis management task to a group of member states, more attractive, member states have to agree on **more flexible modalities** for its implementation. Moreover, member states should discuss concrete scenarios and clarify open issues concerning the planning and conduct of Article 44 operations and include them in exercises. The Strategic Compass provides an important avenue to drive forward the implementation of Article 44.

- Beyond the EU framework, **minilateral sub-groups of member states** such as the Normandy Format will remain important and can improve Europe's foreign policy capacities. However, to increase their internal legitimacy, these formats **should always be joined by the HR/VP or another high-level EU representative** and must be accompanied by intense consultation with the other EU member states ("Ad hoc Coalitions +"). This should also apply to other bi- or multilateral high-level encounters of member states with third countries.

- To highlight the EU framework, agreements concluded in the context of diplomatic negotiations of a coalition of member states with third countries should be signed "in the name of the EU", if possible.

Top 3: Strengthen the Role of the High Representative/Vice President

- To be able to act as the EU's "voice and face" and ensure consistency of the EU's external action, the HR/VP depends on the **political backing** by member states and EU institutions. He/she **should be tasked with a clear mandate** of the member states to lead on important foreign policy issues and should initiate EU actions and decisions. He/she should use his/her role as Vice-President of the Commission in charge of coordinating all aspects of the EU's external action in a more active way, forging stronger cooperation and coordination with all Commissioners concerned.

- On part of the HR/VP, to get political support of member states, he/she needs to make use of his/her **right of initiative**, acting as a **driving force** in the European Council and the Foreign Affairs Council, building **on creative, pro-active proposals by the EEAS.** In advance of these initiatives, the HR/VP should **consult the European Parliament**, providing the opportunity to give input.

- To support the HR/VP, increase the buy-in of member states, and profit from their expertise, **deputizing the HR/VP** should be more often considered. In addition to diplomatic representation, this could include issue-specific reports, prepared by a group of member states, which could then be discussed at the EU27-level.

- Provided that efficient collaboration and institutional integration is ensured, **EU Special Representatives** can make an important contribution to the EU's common foreign policy and should be strengthened.

Top 4: Strengthen the EEAS

- The creation of the EEAS has been a central step for advancing the EU's common foreign policy. Yet, it still suffers from a lack of political buy-in of the member states and EU institutions as well as from considerable deficits of funding. Both **political and economic resources** need to be enhanced, as does the **exchange between the service and national foreign ministries.**

- To foster a European esprit de corps, there should be a joint **six-month diplomatic training program** for national diplomats and EEAS staff. The maximum period of secondment of national diplomats to the EEAS should be extended.

- To bring the EEAS closer to the public and ease the burden on large member states, c**onsular services** should be built up in the EEAS Delegations, starting with offering support for EU citizens in places where their state has no representation.

- Moreover, **cooperation, mobility, and information-sharing between the EEAS and other EU institutions** need to be improved to make full use of the in-house expertise, foster strategic analysis, and advance the **integrated approach** between foreign policies and internal policies with an external dimension.

- **EU Ambassadors** fulfil a key role for the EU's common foreign policy, including as coordinators of the member states' positions. Their role needs to be further strengthened, for example by **including them in meetings of member states' representatives** with the respective foreign governments.

Top 5: Have Annual European Council Meetings Dedicated to Strategic Priorities in Foreign and Security Policy and a Regular Review of the Strategic Compass and the EU Global Strategy

- Building a stronger common understanding among member states on the EU's strategic goals and the necessary instruments to reach them is crucial on the path towards a more powerful common foreign and security policy.

- To ensure the implementation of the Strategic Compass and set forward-looking strategic priorities, there should be an **annual meeting of the European Council dedicated to security.**

- In similar vein, there should be a **regular review of the European Global Strategy** of 2016, with the aim of strengthening its implementation.

- For both review processes, it must be ensured that the **input of the European Parliament and the EU citizens is included** from early on. Moreover, there needs to be an obligation for the HR/VP to report the results of the meetings to the European Parliament.

- Based on the strategic reviews, the European Council should adopt issue- or regional-specific strategies or positions that could be then implemented by QMV by the Council (via the enabling clause, as outlined in Top 1).

Top 6: Establish a Defense and Security Council Configuration

- To deepen cooperation in EU security and defense policies and foster a common strategic culture, including a common threat perception and a comprehensive definition of 'intervention', a regular EU Defense and Security Council should be established.

Top 7: Strengthen the Role of the European Parliament, Bring In National Parliaments, and Foster the Exchange with Citizens

- The consultation and cooperation with the **European Parliament** needs to be strengthened across the board of EU foreign policy. This has to include **stronger parliamentary oversight and scrutiny over EU security and defense** initiatives as well as a more active role of **national parliaments** in EU security and defense. The existing formats for **regular interparliamentary cooperation and discussions** between the European parliament and the national counterparts are crucial and should be further strengthened.

- To foster the support of the European public for EU foreign and security policy, a more **regular, broader, and more inclusive debate with EU citizens** is needed. This could include **townhall meetings** at the EU, national, and regional level as well as **citizens' panels** with participants from across Europe, debating issue- or regional-specific questions.

- Moreover, based on the HR/VP's reports about the European Council's strategic reviews, there should be broad debates **in both the European Parliament and in national parliaments** about the way forward for the EU's foreign, security, and defense policy, fostering an EU-wide discussion.

Capabilities and Instruments

Top 1: Pursue an Integrated Security Approach and Leverage the EU's Economic Weight

- To address today's security challenges, the EU needs to pursue an **integrated approach**, using the whole range of its foreign policy instruments.

- As major international players strongly interlink political and economic tools to project power internationally, one key component of such an integrated approach is to make greater use of the EU's **economic weight**. Recent initiatives like the Anti-Coercion Instrument or Global Gateway which **combine the EU's political, economic, and trade tools** are promising.

- To ensure the powerful implementation of these initiatives and build on them, **stronger interlinkages** between those units in the **Commission** responsible for policies with external dimensions are decisive, as is deeper cooperation between EU institutions and the EEAS.

- To strengthen the EU's economic and geopolitical role, better managing interdependence is key. In addition to enhancing resilience and competitiveness and enforcing rules-based cooperation, this includes reducing dependencies in key strategic areas such as in critical infrastructures and high-end technology. Yet, protectionist tendencies must be avoided.

Top 2: Build Up Stronger EU Defense Capabilities and Amplify Cooperation in Research, Development, and Procurement (European Defense Union)

- Despite the introduction of a number of EU defense initiatives since 2016/2017, the outcome is still weak and substantial shortfalls in the EU's security and defense capabilities persist (e.g. at the high-end of the spectrum and strategic enablers). At the same time, the need to invest in emerging technologies is increasing. Stronger EU security and defense capabilities and the realization of a European Defense Union would not weaken NATO but would on the contrary contribute to a stronger and more resilient Alliance. EU security and defense capabilities should always gear **towards coherence, complementary, and inter-operability with NATO**, as underlined in the EU-NATO Joint Declarations. NATO thereby remains the foundation for collective defense as also stipulated in the Lisbon Treaty.

- To reduce costs, enhance effectiveness, and foster synergies, member states have to **ramp up their efforts to build up integrated forces** and **further consolidate their defense industries** by making stronger use of initiatives like **PESCO, EDA, and EDF** as well as by implementing the 2009 EU Directive on Defense Procurement.

- Moreover, EU capability development processes need to be better streamlined, stronger embedded in national defense planning and better synchronized with NATO's Defense Planning Process (NDPP).

- For further defense industrial consolidation, a **more uniform implementation** of the 2008 Common Position on **Arms Control** needs to be included in the discussion. Moreover, arms exports should fall under the EU's commercial policy.

- To foster joint defense investment, research, development, and procurement, **additional fiscal and financial incentives** should be developed and the **obligation to cooperate strengthened**, in particular when participating in EU programs.

- As leadership in emerging and disruptive technologies increasingly forms an integral part of the global balance of power, the EU needs to urgently **scale up investments in defense-technological research, development, and innovation** and **reduce dependencies in critical technologies and supply chains**.

- Enhancing **synergies between the civil, space, and defense sectors,** fostering **public-private partnerships**, and **improving coordination of EU programs** can make an important contribution to promoting technology development and innovation.

Top 3: Enhance EU Security and Defense Partnerships

- To advance the EU's capability to act on the international scene and strengthen European security, deepening partnerships is essential. In addition to **closer cooperation with NATO** and other international and regional organizations like the **UN, AU, OSCE, and ASEAN,** the EU should enhance its **partnerships with like-minded third countries**.

- In the defense realm, the EU should make cooperation more attractive for third countries like Norway, the UK, and the US. This could include deeper cooperation and stronger involvement in PESCO projects and CSDP missions and operations, including earlier access to planning, as well as greater access to the EDF, based on the principle of reciprocity.

Top 4: Strengthen the EU's Role in Crisis Management

- To ensure that the Rapid Deployment Capacity, proposed in the Strategic Compass, provides an added value to the EU's crisis management capacities, the **operational scenarios** need to be clarified. As in CSDP missions and operations in general, **common financing** should be extended.

- To enhance concrete actions and results, EU crisis capacities should be shaped in a flexible manner, allowing tailer-made solutions.

- In order to strengthen the EU's crisis management capabilities, its **command and control capacities** need to be adapted and personnel and technical resources of the **Military Planning and Conduct Capability** (MPCC) be increased. Provided that an adequate level of capacities is dedicated to the MPCC, its mandate should be extended to all CSDP missions and operations as well as EU military exercises, making the MPCC a **fully-fledged permanent EU headquarter**, complementary to NATO.

- Strengthening the MPCC has to go hand in hand with **fostering the EU's Civilian Planning and Conduct Capability (CPCC)** as well as **improving MPCC-CPCC coordination.**

Top 5: Foster Resilience to Hybrid Threats Including Cyber

- As pointed out in the Strategic Compass, the EU needs to urgently **improve its capacities** to address the **multiplying threats in the cyber realm** and to counter **hybrid warfare. Deepening cooperation** among member states, including in **cyber defense research, innovation, and capability development** as well as improving **information- and intelligence sharing** will be decisive. Furthermore, **better coordinating and integrating** the work of the multitude of actors at the EU- and the national level will be key, as well will be enhancing **cooperation with NATO.**

- To address the rising threat of information manipulation and interference, the EU needs to improve **situational awareness** and media literacy, enhance **its foresight and resilience policies**, and build up **deterrence tools**, including through a **sanctions regime against disinformation**. Moreover, the EU has to **address critical loopholes** for example in the field of **social media regulation**, foreign direct investments, and **political party and campaign financing.**

- Efforts to address hybrid threats including cyber need to be embedded in the broader foreign policy approach. An **integrated approach** is necessary, ensuring resilience across the internal-external security nexus.

Top 6: Advance EU Intelligence Gathering and Sharing

- To better assess and prepare for international developments, the EU needs to scale up its intelligence capabilities. First, this includes **deeper cooperation and intelligence sharing between member states.** Just as the smaller ones, bigger member states have to fulfil the obligation to share intelligence.

- Second, the **information gathering capacities** of the EU itself need to be improved. One option would be to considerably **increase the resources** for the **EU's Intelligence and Situation Centre** (EU INTCEN), part of the EEAS, and the Single Intelligence Analysis Capacity (SIAC) which is run by the EU INTCEN and the Intelligence Directorate of the EU Military Staff (EUMS INT).

Top 7: Enhance EU Enlargement and Neighborhood Policies

- Europe must assume more responsibility in its eastern and southern neighborhood. This includes above all economic, diplomatic, and legal means, as well as taking a stronger role in supporting security and resilience of the neighboring countries.

- As the enlargement process currently faces significant obstacles, the EU should develop **credible interim goals pre-accession**, offering Western Balkan countries closer political ties and greater access to the Single Market, through a type of membership in the European Economic Area, as well as to other formats like the Schengen Agreement.

- For those countries without membership perspective, **different forms of partnerships and cooperation** have to be further developed, including energy and climate partnerships, free trade agreements, connectivity projects, education and training schemes, and entrepreneurial exchanges.

- At the same time, the EU needs to work on its **integration capacity**, including the strengthening of its institutional set-up and decision-making procedures. The Conference on the Future of Europe should provide a strong impetus leading into this direction.