

Implementation of the common security and defence policy - annual report 2018

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The European Parliament adopted by 496 votes to 113 with 103 abstentions a resolution on the implementation of the Common Security and Defence Policy - annual report.

Deterioration in the EU's security situation

Parliament took note of the continuing deterioration of the security situation in the European Union, which faces a multitude of challenges affecting the security of its Member States and citizens.

Members stressed the EU's interest in being actively engaged in its neighbourhood, considering that instability at the Union's borders and in its immediate neighbourhood (North Africa, Middle East, Caucasus, Balkans, Eastern Mediterranean, Russian aggression against Ukraine and Georgia, etc.) as well as in its more distant neighbourhood (Sahel, Horn of Africa, etc.) represented a direct and indirect threat to the security of the continent.

Moreover, some global players (United States, China, Russia) but also a growing number of regional players (Turkey, Iran, Saudi Arabia, etc.) are seeking to assert power through a combination of unilateral diplomatic posturing, shifts in alliances, destabilising activities of a primarily hybrid nature and increasing military build-ups. Members deplored the fact that some of these actors deliberately circumvent, or even attempt to destroy, multilateral mechanisms, the principles of the UN Charter and the relevant provisions of international law, which are essential for peacekeeping.

Parliament took the view that the EU has been slow to react, politically, diplomatically and militarily, to new crises and to this new international situation. In the specific area of defence, insufficient investment, lack of capabilities and interoperability, as well as political reluctance to implement the provisions laid down in the European Treaties, have prevented the EU from playing a decisive role in external crises and from making full use of its potential.

Stressing that no country is in a position to face the security challenges facing the European continent and its immediate environment alone, Parliament called on the European Council to make the use of qualified majority voting in the Council in the field of the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) a political priority, where the Treaty on European Union (EU Treaty) so permits.

Need to develop and strengthen European strategic autonomy

Members reaffirmed that European strategic autonomy is a legitimate and necessary ambition and that it must remain a priority objective of the CFSP and European defence policy. The affirmation of European strategic autonomy depends on the establishment of a comprehensive CFSP supported by European defence cooperation in the technological, capability, industrial and operational fields.

According to Members, European strategic autonomy:

- is based first and foremost on the EU's ability to assess a crisis situation and take a decision autonomously, which necessarily implies an independent and effective decision-making process, means of assessment and freedom of analysis and action;

- is based on the Europe's capacity to act alone when its interests are at stake (theatres of operations regarded as priorities by the Member States of the Union) or within the framework of existing cooperation arrangements;
- forms part of a multilateral framework which respects commitments within the United Nations and complements and strengthens the alliances and partnerships to which most Member States have subscribed;
- does not mean that the Union will systematically act alone, everywhere and always.

In order to increase the EU's strategic autonomy, Member States should increase defence spending and aim for a target of 2% of GDP, invest more urgently in security and defence, and ensure that solidarity and cooperation in defence matters become the norm.

CSDP missions and operations

Members believe that the EU must become a more robust player in crisis management, conflict resolution and peacekeeping, if possible together with other regional and international organisations, such as the United Nations and the African Union, but also alone where necessary.

The EU is currently present on three continents, with 16 civilian and military missions deployed. While recognising the contribution of these missions to international peace, security and stability, Parliament wished to promote the objective of achieving a higher level of effectiveness of CSDP missions and called on the Member States to increase their contributions. It encouraged the European External Action Service (EEAS) to introduce a more forward-looking approach to capability planning and development and to anticipate future needs so that the Union can provide a strong response to crises and conflicts.

Member States and European bodies have been encouraged to maintain a high priority and commitment in Africa, in particular in the Sahel and the Horn of Africa through the commitment of six civilian and military missions. The strategic importance of Eastern Europe and the Western Balkans for the security and stability of the Union was reaffirmed.

Capability and industrial field

The resolution stressed that the realisation of European strategic autonomy was based on increasing Member States' capabilities and their defence budgets and on strengthening a European defence technological and industrial base.

Members welcomed the Commission's June 2017 proposal to create a European Defence Fund (EDF). They supported the effective implementation of permanent structured cooperation (PSC) as an essential step towards enhanced security and defence cooperation between Member States. They also underlined the strategic dimension of the space sector for Europe.

Defence cooperation and CSDP partnerships

Members considered that the EU and the United Kingdom will still share the same strategic environment and the same threats to their peace and security after Brexit.

Furthermore, recalling NATO's fundamental role in collective defence, Members are convinced that the EU-NATO strategic partnership is essential for addressing the security challenges facing Europe and its neighbourhood. EU-NATO cooperation should take full account of each of the two institutions' specific features and roles and continue with full respect for the principles of inclusiveness and reciprocity and the decision-making autonomy of both organisations.

Institutional framework

Parliament called for progressive steps towards a common defence policy and, ultimately, the establishment of a common defence. It also undertook to ensure close parliamentary scrutiny and control of European defence missions, instruments and initiatives. It called for the drafting of a European Defence Strategy and for the elaboration of a European Union White Paper on Security and Defence as an essential strategic tool to reinforce the governance of the Union's defence policy.