

GEOPOLITICAL TRENDS IN EUROPE AND EU STRATEGIC COMPASS

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Abstract: In recent years, the EU has faced global security trends, and challenges from strategic political, economic, energy and other nature. That means using appropriate toolbox of political, security, economic and other mechanisms. If Europe wants to be ready to respond and deal in appropriate way with major geopolitical shifts and defend its interests as well as to promote its vision for the future, then EU has to find appropriate mechanisms and develop political, economic and other toolbox to deal effectively with them. From other hand, the geopolitical trends are closely related to the internal rhetoric and the division among the member states of the EU into “old and new”, ie “rich and poor”. The economic, infrastructure and energy stability gap between Western Europe on the one hand and Eastern and Central Europe on the other is estimated at over € 500 billion in favor of Western Europe. Most of the Eastern and Central European members are making efforts to overcome this gap through various forms of regionalization and cooperation with third countries outside the EU. Additionally, the differences in understanding between the “old and new” members in terms of cooperation with China and Russia, as well as in terms of EU enlargement with the countries of Southeast Europe, ie with the countries of the Western Balkans are also a security, defense and political challenges to EU. The geopolitical trends, challenges and threats facing the EU are not only from military or territorial nature. At the same time, they are closely related with interdependence which is becoming increasingly conflictual and soft power is weaponized. Dealing with such trends, challenges and threats requires a fundamental change in understanding of security. Europe cannot afford to treat its security as ‘business as usual’ by repeating the same slogans and sticking to the same mind-set. Europe cannot afford to be a bystander in a hyper-competitive world, and world order that is mainly shaped by others. In order to build a common approach to all open issues of mutual interest to all members, the EU has adopted the Strategic Compass. The Compass is a guide for action and sets policy orientations, specific goals and objectives in four work strands: act, secure invest and partnership. More specifically, with the four domains, the EU cover crisis management and the EU’s ability to respond as quickly as possible to civil emergencies, in building resilience and protection against hybrid warfare and cyber threats, to protect European interests on land, at sea and in space. It also focuses on strengthening European partnerships in security and defense, particularly with NATO, the OSCE, the African Union, the United States and Canada. With the Strategic Compass, Member States are making an effort to project itself as a respective force on the world stage through set out a common strategic vision for EU security and defence for the next decade. The idea is to determine the ambitions of European security and defense by 2030. The goal is Europe to be powerful in the world, fully sovereign, free to choose and control its own destiny. The Compass propose

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operational guidelines to enable the European Union to become a stronger security provider for its citizens, protecting its values and interests.

Keywords: EU, Challenges, Trends, Strategic Compass, Security.

Introduction

Discussions on contemporary security threats and challenges and the geostrategic and geopolitical trends on European soil, by sharing national views and views on these issues have been a very challenging issue in recent years. Such discussions increase its importance after February 24, 2022, i.e. after Russia's aggression on Ukraine. Today, the security challenges which affect Europe and the wider Euro-Atlantic area are very different from those of the 1990s. Dominant geopolitical trends are Euro-Atlantic and European integration on European soil, especially in the Western Balkans, as well as bridging the development gap between the old and new EU members. These trends seem to have received a new security challenge with Russia's unprovoked aggression against Ukraine. Trends along with threats and challenges have been given a proper place in the new EU Strategic Compass. One of the dilemmas in the past few years has been how Europe, and especially in Southeast Europe, can present changes in the security paradigm (Bazo, 2021) without causing greater security turbulence. The trends affecting the EU are more and more similar to those facing NATO, and the security threats and challenges are almost identical.

Namely, the NATO 2030 Reflection Process, emphasizes that the Euro-Atlantic areas and Europe face a set of challenges posed by the rule-based system of values. Europe's security challenges and threats come not only from authoritarian and undemocratic countries but also from terrorist groups, climate change, migration, geopolitical competition, hybrid threats, disinformation, fake news, critical infrastructure, cyber-attacks, internet, the uncontrolled introduction of 5G technology by third countries, unresolved disputes from the past and Russia which challenging traditional security on European soil (NATO 2030: United for a New Era, 2020).

In parallel, the EU in the Strategic Compass 2022 faces almost the same challenges and threats to the security as NATO within its Reflection process translated in the new Strategic Concept of the Alliance at the end of June at the Summit in Madrid. In addition to Russia's assertiveness, a special place is given to terrorism and violent extremism, which are considered to continue to be a serious threat to peace and stability. These groups of threats include a combination of home-grown terrorists, foreign fighter returnees, extreme action and attacks directed, encouraged or inspired from abroad, as well as "the propagation of ideologies and beliefs that lead to radicalization and violent extremism" (A Strategic Compass, 2022:22). Further increasing the danger also comes from the possibility of proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and the rhetoric generated by Russia and China, which contrary to international agreements are increasing their nuclear potential and developing new weapons systems (A Strategic Compass, 2022). Such trends lead to the erosion of arms control mechanisms, and thereby generate challenges and threats that can threaten the security of states. The Compass pays more attention to both cyber and hybrid threats. The need for a "hybrid toolbox" is emphasized as a set of tools that the EU as soon as possible should develop it, more concrete by the end of 2022. It is believed that this "hybrid toolbox

will provide the framework for a coordinated response to hybrid attacks in the EU and the Member States. This “hybrid toolbox” is expected to be composed of “preventive, cooperative, stabilizing and restrictive measures” (A Strategic Compass, 2022:34). Similar as NATO, the EU has recognized that cyberspace has become a field for strategic competition, at a time of growing dependence on digital technologies and offers proposed solutions on how to protect the EU from cyber threats.

Russia’s aggression against Ukraine has proven to us that Europe is equally vulnerable and perhaps in greater danger today than ever before. The war against Ukraine is making it more urgent to achieve a sea change in EU security and defence (Borrell, 2022a). The nature and emergence of security challenges suggests that “things have changed dramatically over the last 20 years and security challenges have diversified as never before” (Haibach, 2021). These are real security challenges is that “no country can face challenges alone” (Haibach, 2021) and cooperation between states is imperative to deal with them. Europe needs to ensure that the geopolitical awakening should result in strategic deterrence, but the question is how to do that?

One of the ways Europe to become more resilient to modern security challenges and threats only is through integration and strengthening regional security. For more efficient addressing of threats and challenges, it is necessary to ensure share of information and to encourage dialogue on important topics in order to find mechanisms for effective dealing with the full specter of challenges and threats. This is especially important in times of globalization, fake news and disinformation campaigns, where dialogue is a central element of security policy ever before. Both the EU and NATO are at a historic crossroads and are adapting their strategies, and within these processes they are not competing with each other. The EU adopted its Strategic Compass on March 21, 2022, and NATO will adopt its new Strategic Concept on June 29, 2022. They work together as never before, to address security challenges that may destabilize countries in Europe. However, this is not a competition between them, but one complements the other and an effort is made to avoid duplication in the development of needed capabilities. At the same time, both, the NATO and the EU are working on development of mechanisms for joint coordination and dealing with them.

The both NATO and EU are facing similar security challenges and threats. Today, they are viewed more coherently and they try to find a more appropriate and common way to adapt and deal with them. NATO is already in the process of adaptation driven by the 2030 Reflection process and adoption of the new Strategic Concept from June 2022. Adaptation plays a key role in NATO’s survival and the strengthening of its role as a security provider in the next decade and beyond. Adaptation is needed in terms of tackling climate change, the rule based international order, the threat from Russia and China, the influence of Emerging and Disruptive Technologies (EDTs), the Defence & Deterrence concept, and the establishment of a stronger link - synergy between the US and NATO in order to strengthen the transatlantic link. These elements need to be noted in the Alliance’s new strategic concept (Rademacher, 2021). It should be having in mind that both NATO and the EU are in the process of adaptation and it is more than necessary that in the EU Strategic Compass and in the New NATO Strategic Concept these challenges and threats are properly noted. Complementarily, both NATO and the EU should prepare and act, that is, build a common approach and appropriate tools to deal with those challenges and threats.

European and Euro-Atlantic Integrations

In addition to the basic challenges, threats and trends, the EU needs also to work on regaining its attractiveness in the countries that are not yet close to membership in the Union. The EU integration of the Western Balkan countries faces serious contemporary challenges that, among other, are intertwined with historical elements. There is generally a lack of dynamics in the European integration of the WB countries and there is still some resistance to enlargement among certain members. To overcome these challenges, the EU has to invest more in their integrations and security in order to better understand and transform the process of association and enlargement and bring the Western Balkans as a strategic region closer to the EU. The EU is not good at answering strategic questions by strategic means, but responds to strategic questions by tactical means (Grk, 2021).

In the Strategic Compass only one paragraph is dedicated to the strategically important Western Balkans. The states of this region are treated as partners with whom the EU will build cooperation on a regional basis, especially by strengthening the resilience of their societies to deal with threats and challenges. If the EU wants to help these countries on the way towards European integration, and thereby help itself, then it should take more decisive steps. One of the measures is for the EU as soon as possible to invest more in the economies, and through that help in building resilience and security in these countries, because such investments will have a positive impact not only on the economies of the countries of the Western Balkans, but also on security and the EU economy as a whole. The EU's strategic distancing from the Western Balkans will negatively affect geopolitical stability and the EU's enlargement process. Despite the apparent start of negotiations with North Macedonia and Albania, the EU enlargement process is "slow". The EU must give it an additional impetus to it because it depends only by the Union. The existing vacuum in EU enlargement can be overcome through a mutual agreement of all 27 EU member states dedicated on the future of the WB (Grk, 2021). The WB countries urgently need stimulated internal reforms to become EU members under the Thessaloniki Agenda from June 2003. The stimulus must be clear and precise. More than clear is that reforms are an ongoing process and they are demanding and has to be implemented in timely manner. The help and incentive from Many EU members for the Western Balkan to join in the EU must be more specific. Germany is one of the countries that is actively struggling to find mechanisms for the inclusion of these countries in the EU despite Macron's attempts to redefine EU accession policy. It is in the strategic interest of the EU to include the countries of the WB as soon as possible into the Union (Schmunk, 2021).

The EU has to work harder and act more courageously. It is inadmissible bilateral disputes between countries to become as EU disputes. The French proposal to overcome the open issues between North Macedonia and Bulgaria, supplemented at the last moment with the Protocols by the Parliament of Bulgaria, proved to be unconstructive by favoring the position of its member and its interests at the expense of EU principles relevant to all others, including North Macedonia. This proposal led to political turbulence in both countries, with the government in Bulgaria being voted no-confidence, the government in North Macedonia managed to survive thanks to the inertia of the EU institutions. It is undeniable that North Macedonia needs to overcome the dispute with Bulgaria as soon as possible. It would be a positive story if the two countries reconciled their views on the open issues as soon as possible. Both countries must take care that the historical past does not stand in the way

of dialogue. The main challenge should be the European future of all countries from the Western Balkans. The European perspective gained importance with Russia's aggression against Ukraine, which is why it must be closed as soon as possible. If it is not closed very soon, there is a real possibility that Russia will use that vacuum and permanently destabilize the countries of the region and hinder the European future of North Macedonia.

The promotion of regional cooperation has several aspects. One refers above all to the continuation of the dialogue between Belgrade and Pristina, and in this case the EU should be more active, that is, it must work on the recognition of Kosovo. In terms of BiH functionality and sovereignty, the EU needs do more because this is the deepest "frozen conflict" face the region since Dayton Agreement. The situation in BiH is "a battle between secularism and unitarism" (Matušić, 2021). Things need to be directed in the right direction and this is possible only with the enhanced engagement of the EU. If this not happen, then, any attempt to open the already closed issues in this part of Europe, ie the Western Balkans, can open the "Pandora's box". Therefore, deeper cooperation between countries is needed with a focus on strengthening regional cooperation and continuity in the European integration of countries, especially those in the Western Balkans (Matušić, 2021).

In the EU Strategic Compass is stated that "security and stability throughout the Western Balkans is still not a given, also due to increasing foreign interferences, including information manipulation campaigns, as well as through potential spill over from the current deterioration of the European security situation. It is of particular interest of EU to support the sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity of Bosnia and Herzegovina, based on the principles of equality and non-discrimination of all citizens and constituent peoples as enshrined in the Bosnia and Herzegovina constitution. Tangible progress on the rule of law and reforms based on European values, rules and standards needs to continue and the European perspective is a strategic choice, essential for all partners aspiring to EU membership" (A Strategic Compass, 2022:9).

Euro-Atlantic integration in the Western Balkans is not over yet, and it will not be completed so quickly in the near future. Going in reality the NATO has invested more than the EU in Western Balkans. NATO is aware that neither Serbia nor Kosovo will become members without Moscow's consent. Serbia has no ambition to become a NATO member, but it is seriously obstructing Kosovo, and to some extent BiH's aspirations for NATO membership. Kosovo's European and Euro-Atlantic integration is close related with finding common solution for the dispute between Kosovo and Serbia. BiH's membership in NATO is caused by the internal situation in the country and the misunderstanding between BiH Government from one side and Republika Srpska from other side (Borrell, 2022c). However, there should be a positive approach to the current situation, because the mutual cooperation between NATO and the EU on the one hand and the Western Balkan countries on the other hand is a great combination for the promotion of shared values, ideas and policies in order to develop an appropriate platform for regional security cooperation, as well as for reviewing the national strategies of the countries. NATO and the EU have invested heavily in the Western Balkans and there is new synergy in the EU and NATO engagement in the WB countries. The future of these countries is in European and Euro-Atlantic integration with the family of democratic values.

The Economic Development Gap between “The Old and New Europe”

Thirty years after the collapse of Berlin Wall and the beginning of a long process of European reunification, Europe has arrived at a historic inflection point. The European Union faces multiple external threats, including a resurgent Russia, growing global economic competition, and geopolitical upheaval. More than two decades ago, former communist nations have joined the EU to the benefit of the whole continent and the transatlantic alliance. Yet Europe’s economic and infrastructure integration remains incomplete. Gas pipelines, power lines, roads, railroads, and communications links remain patchy in Central and Eastern Europe (Koranyi and Brzezinski, 2015).

It is a notorious fact that there is a serious disproportion in the economic, energy, infrastructure, trade, transport and other sectors between Western Europe on the one hand and Eastern and Central Europe on the other hand. This imbalance poses a serious challenge to Europe’s resilience to new security challenges. The EU’s resilience is at stake, threatening the transatlantic community. Economic growth and energy security are backbones of that resilience, but both are weak spots in the chainmail of Europe (Koranyi and Brzezinski, 2015). To overcome this gap Europe needs to invest more in economic resilience as a whole, not only in individual regions. Such a policy would contribute to strengthening cooperation in Europe. The new EU members from Eastern and Central Europe have set up various cooperation initiatives to reduce this development gap (Brzezinski, 2021). One step taken by these countries is the Three Seas and 16+1 Initiative which is close related and indivisible from Europe. This initiative, together with the North – South Corridor, are a tool in preventing Russia’s economic and energy expansion. The purpose of this Initiative is to encourage and increase economic competition between countries.

The North-South Corridor of energy, transportation, and telecommunications will connect the economies of Central Europe and link the region with Western Europe. This Corridor would provide the infrastructural foundation necessary for a single European market and would reduce energy dependence by Russia. By diversifying sources of energy, it would enhance the continent’s energy security. By increasing the efficiency of cross-border transactions, the corridor would strengthen global competitiveness and the economic resilience of Europe as a whole, and contribute as well to the achievement of Europe’s climate goals (Koranyi and Brzezinski, 2015).

It is expected that initiative for this corridor will contribute to strengthening cooperation within the economy, infrastructure, energy between Eastern, Central and Western Europe, but it does not mean strengthening trust with private investors and partners. Such a possibility is real because the private sector is involved in this initiative through investment funds and financial structures. The countries of this initiative make up 28% of the EU territory and 22% of its population. The first challenge is the economic, infrastructure and energy stability gap between Western Europe on the one hand and Eastern and Central Europe on the other which is estimated at over € 500 billion in favor of Western Europe. In order to reduce this gap, the priority of this initiative is to build strong economies and increase the GDP of 12 member countries of this initiative. Gas and oil pipelines from Russia to Europe transit through the territory of the countries of this initiative. Energy stability is very important for the economic stability of these countries. This is reason why investing

in this part of Europe is a very important strategic tool and is in line with the geostrategic interests of the EU (Grabar-Kitarovic, 2021).

The next challenge for the EU is China's growing economic power and its expansion across Europe. This influence of China on European countries is manifested through its direct investments in various fields. Starting in about the middle of 2017 there were many discussions of growing Chinese influence and potential challenges, and even security threats associated with it. These discussions included accusations of protectionism, crony capitalism, and attempts to create geopolitical spheres of China's influence. The geopolitical threats connected to increasing Chinese influence in the region are also perceived in a negative light but attracted only limited attention from the media. There were also some points of view painting the China's "soft power" as a positive development which could address some security problems by providing for much-needed economic development (Turcsányi and Kachlíková, 2020). Today, China is a global player with significant investments in Africa and South America and is now trying to enter as much as possible in the European countries. The greater China's investment in Europe, the more Europe becomes dependent on China. China's influence in Serbia and Montenegro is strongest, but some EU countries are also included. China is trying to forge a partnership with the EU, and NATO does not want to strain relations with Beijing over China's investment in Europe. This makes China an important economic, security and political actor in the Western Balkans region. However, it is estimated that China's foreign direct investment in the WB countries is about 20% of the total foreign direct investment in these countries. Montenegro is the most dependent country facing a serious challenge to service its debts to China (Turcsányi, 2021).

EU Strategic Compass

On 21 March 2022, the EU adopted the long-awaited Strategic Compass, which outlines the strategic vision for the EU's adaptation to the next decade and beyond, outlines the mechanisms for responding to the growing security challenges and threats to the EU security. In the past seven decades, and now the EU with its 27 members and over 450 million inhabitants has played a significant role in the protection and promotion of shared values on European soil. The Union is the largest market and investor and trading partner with many countries in the immediate neighborhood (A Strategic Compass, 2022:14). Although in the past period the EU has confirmed itself as an economic and political power, the EU intention is to have an adequate reflection in the construction of a consistent defense and security policy. It does not mean complete autonomy and independence of Europe in defense from transatlantic partners. The return of war to the soil of Europe with Russia's aggression against Ukraine is a serious challenge for the EU. It accelerated the adoption of the Strategic Compass. However, it should not be understood that the Compass is a legitimate response to the war in Ukraine. The Compass is as answer to the moment has finally come when the EU must face a whole spectrum of threats to its survival. The provisions of the Compass are not only a guide for protection, preparation and capability, but also contain guidelines for the development of the EU's security and defense agenda in the next decade and beyond (A Strategic Compass, 2022). One of the conditions for the successful implementation of what was expressed in the Compass and in order for the EU to grow into a strong Transatlantic partner is the appropriate operationalization of cooperation with NATO. Among other things, it must be

able to share the burden in creating international peace and security and invest in it both financially and in terms of developing military and civilian security and defense capabilities. Recent developments and the war in Ukraine have shown how important collective defense is in the EU or NATO context, especially when the war is fought on European soil. "Russia was a wake-up call for the EU" (Macron, 2022) and showed how important the role of the EU is in the modern security context.

The projections in the Compass and their implementation should strengthen the EU and make it a greater driver and provider of security. The EU goals and areas of defense and security stated in the Compass, as well as the means and instruments for their achievement and the time limits for measuring the achievements are clearly identified. In fact, the EU through Compass, establishes a high level of ambition for security and defence agenda by providing shared assessments of the strategic environment, the threats and challenges faced by the members and the implications they would have on the EU. The intention is to enable greater coherence and a common "sense" for the current goals of action in security and defense, but also to establish new ways and means to improve the collective ability for defense and security of the citizens of the Union.

The Compass actually represents turning point for the European Union as a security provider and a platform for effecting the European security and defense policy. As Isabella Antinozzi stated in Euronews "For the very first time, and at the highest level, Europeans collectively released a joint threat assessment, a common vision and detailed objectives on EU security and defence" (Tidey, 2022).

The Compass provides political guidelines and specific goals for action in crisis management, ways to strengthen resilience, develop capabilities and strengthen partnerships. That is, the political directions and specific goals have been elaborated through four priority areas of action essential for the adaptation of the Union in the next decade as follows:

1. Action
2. Security
3. Investment
4. Partners.

Assessment of challenges and threats facing the EU

"The return of war in Europe, with Russia's unjustified and unprovoked aggression against Ukraine, as well as major geopolitical shifts" (A Strategic Compass, 2022:10) has been challenging the EU ability to adapt and demonstrate its ability to promote its vision and defend values, and interests on which is based on. It is believed that in an era of growing geostrategic competition and complex security threats followed by military aggression, the security of EU borders and citizens is in question. The range of threats is more unpredictable and complex than ever in the past. It is compounded by hybrid warfare, cyber threats, the struggle for control of outer space, contested access to sea lanes, challenges related to new opportunities in the Far North, increasing demand for resources, instability in the neighborhood, uncontrolled migration, pandemic events create new difficulties in dealing with them. The threats, together with the political instruments of coercion, contributed to the increase of dependence and weaponization of the "soft power" of the states. On the other hand, traditional threats and terrorism are still a serious "threat to the security and

stability of many countries and continues to challenge national security systems worldwide”(A Strategic Compass, 2022:14). Threats, both traditional and contemporary, gain further significance with the effects of “climate change being treated as multipliers” (A Strategic Compass, 2022:10) and affecting everyone by playing the role of enablers and instigators of conflicts. European security is indivisible and any challenge to it affects the security of the EU and its members. “The return to power politics on the scene leads some states to act in terms of historical rights and zones of influence” (A Strategic Compass, 2022:14) without adhering to internationally agreed norms and principles for the protection of international peace and security points to vigilance and readiness. All of this contributes states being subject to “a competition of governance systems accompanied by a real battle of narratives” (A Strategic Compass, 2022:15).

The overall range of threats and challenges contributed the EU to act more united and more determined than ever, in restoring peace on European soil, in cooperation with partners, as well as in defense of democratic values and guaranteeing the sovereignty and territorial integrity of states. To achieve this, the EU need to strengthen its defense component. Following NATO’s example, the EU should strongly support the rules-based international order promoted by the UN, strengthen the transatlantic relationship and cooperation with strategic partners, deepen cooperation with states, border regions and other regional and international partners such as ASEAN , the African Union and the OSCE. It will help the EU grow into a global security provider (A Strategic Compass, 2022).

Today, in an order rife with confrontations, “the EU and its Member States must invest more in their security and defense “(A Strategic Compass, 2022:15) to be collectively relied upon as a strong political and security actor. This will allow the EU to strengthen its role in geopolitical posture. In order to achieve what was set out, the EU, above all, needs to strengthen its capacities, resilience, internal cohesion and ensure solidarity and mutual cooperation between the member states. The ability to act decisively must be supported by an increased presence and visibility not only in the neighborhood but also globally, above all, through increased investments.

The Compass clearly and unequivocally represents the level of EU ambitions in security and defense to be achieved through:

1. “Providing a shared assessment of the strategic environment, the threats and challenges it faces and their implications for the Union.
2. Greater ongoing coherence and common sense of purpose to actions for security and defense objectives.
3. Establishing new directions and means of action in order to improve the collective ability to defend citizens and the Union itself and to enable quick and decisive action when faced with a crisis, to secure interests and protect citizens by strengthening capacities for anticipating and mitigating threats, stimulating investments and innovations for the joint development of the necessary technologies and capabilities and deepening cooperation with partners, especially with NATO and the UN, to achieve common.
4. Specifies clear targets and milestones to measure progress.” (A Strategic Compass, 2022:15)

The EU plans to achieve this level of ambition by urgently implementing the provisions of the Strategic Compass through an integrated approach to dealing with threats.

Conclusion

The global security and geopolitical trends, within the framework of contemporary social life, bring with them appropriate challenges and threats to the security of countries that require the building of appropriate mechanisms to deal with them. The changing and evolving nature of threats requires more comprehensive action by security stakeholders in dealing with them. The security environment changes do not allow threats to be understood as usual and separately, but rather require capacity upgrades and determination to act. In this more hostile security environment, we cannot afford to treat our security as "business as usual" (Borrell, 2021). It requires to increase our capacity and willingness to act.

The war in Ukraine has prompted Europe to act swiftly and decisively to protect the peace, freedom and security of its citizens. It encouraged the EU to strengthen its security and defense capabilities, but at the same time establish mechanisms to deal with other complementary threats such as hybrid warfare and cyber threats, disinformation, terrorism and violent extremism, and other contemporary threats.

Geopolitical trends also require coordinated and joint action. European integrations are the key to EU values. They are a bit slower and additional stimulus from the EU to accelerate them is needed. Only the EU and no one else decides on the European integration of the Western Balkan countries. The EU must not allow bilateral disputes between countries to rise to EU level. It only hinders European integration and can seriously undermine security on European soil. The war in Ukraine should be a lesson that the protection of the security of European countries is possible only through joint and collective action. All those outside the collective defense mechanism may be a subject to aggression, as is the case with Ukraine. The EU has to be able to accept the countries of the Western Balkans as full flagged members and strengthen security in Europe and close European integration once and for all on European soil.

The EU should find appropriate mechanisms to reduce the economic and development gap between the so-called "old and new" members of the Union. The facts show that this development gap in all areas is continuously deepening and it is necessary to act quickly. Inertia in action forces the less developed members of the Union to establish closer cooperation internally by creating mechanisms for regional co-operation in order to accelerate their development. It could be used by Russia and China as an opportunity and influence their development through increased investment in critical areas. The war in Ukraine, simultaneously with the conventional threat, has imposed the challenge of energy dependences with increased market prices, which further affects the development of countries and deepens the gap. China also sees an opportunity in this situation and wants to use it to its advantage. China's investments in the Western Balkans have made some of them dependent and unable to service their debts on time. Montenegro is currently facing such a challenge, but other countries are not far away. In order to reduce China's influence, the EU needs to increase investment in the new members, but also to lend a hand to the Western Balkan countries by opening up its development and investment funds to accelerate economic and other development.

To respond to such geostrategic trends and challenges and threats to the security of its members, the EU has initiated the process of preparing the Strategic Compass in 2021. The Compass is a counterpart to NATO's Strategic Concept. The symbolism says that the Compass was initiated under the presidency of Germany in 2020, and under the presidency of France was adopted by the European Council on March 21, 2022. The basic idea of this Document is to provide a comprehensive impetus not only to the efforts of the Union but also to other European countries (21 EU member states are also members of NATO) to build European capacities that will be more independent and capable of the United States, and to promote the EU as a significant power and security provider on the world. Similar to the NATO reflection process and the Strategic Compass aims to outline the high expectations of European security and defense by 2030 and beyond. In the next decade, the EU needs to be more powerful globally, completely independent and free to choose and shape its own destiny. The Compass also includes areas of crisis management, resilience building, investment in key military industries, strengthening partnerships, protecting the union's values and interests on land, sea, air and in space. The implementation of the Strategic Compass will help the EU reduce its dependence on NATO. Also, it will ensure EU's security and defense, and enable the accelerated development of its military capabilities and make it a reliable security provider across the globe.

The visions, goals and directions given in the Compass for the development of crisis and conflict response capabilities, investments in the development of critical specialties and reducing the technology development gap, as well as strengthening the Union's resilience in dealing with changing and emerging threats of a hybrid nature requires a comprehensive and joint approach from all member states of the Union. All this must be implemented step by step and become a reality. The implementation of the Compass will enable the EU to become more independent from NATO and the USA, to independently decide on its future and to act more decisively as a provider of security in global frameworks. The compass is an operational document with 80 concrete actions and a time frame by which they must be delivered. From its content, 51 projects should be implemented by the end of 2022. The EU has no time to waste when the security of its citizens is at stake. The EU must act quickly if it is to be a reliable promoter of security.

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