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EEAS SCOPING PAPER

COVID-19: implications for EU security and defence

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic, which is currently still unfolding, is bound to affect global and European security, potentially accelerating existing dynamics. The pandemic's profound societal and economic consequences can deepen existing conflicts and crises, and expose underlying fragilities. The resulting increase in overall global instability and insecurity risks triggering an aggravation of threats and challenges with direct impact on the Union's security (e.g. terrorism, irregular migration, organised crime, and malicious cyber activities). Some actors are already exploiting the situation, including with hybrid methods, to serve their political and economic objectives. The pandemic may also reinforce the trend of increasing competition and confrontation between global and regional powers, challenging rules-based multilateralism.

There is an urgency therefore to start thinking about the different lessons and implications that the COVID-19 crisis thus far presents for EU security and defence, while continuing to manage more immediate issues both nationally by Member States and in the CSDP operational context.

This paper puts forward five major initial lessons and implications for EU security and defence, and suggests concrete actions/work strands to be further pursued, for Member States' consideration.

- First, the primary political message is the need to preserve and demonstrate EU solidarity – a point clearly raised in the VTC of EU Defence Ministers for example. Militaries across the EU have been deployed to contribute to health protection, to patrol borders and even to deliver medical supplies to other Member States as an act of solidarity;
- Second, the Union also needs to be ready to address any further security fall-out of the current crisis, acting jointly through the integrated approach, including CFSP/CSDP instruments;
- Third, there is a need to identify initial lessons with a view to better anticipate and becoming better prepared for and resilient to *future* pandemics or similar disruptive crises;

- Fourth, we should consider the lessons and implications for EU capability development initiatives, both civilian and military;
- Fifth, the EU should consider the implications for the EU security and defence partnership policy, fostering international cooperation also in the context of the follow-up to the pandemic.

Overall, keeping the momentum on security and defence will require a strong concerted effort, especially given the potential contradiction between the security and the economic consequences of the pandemic for the EU. The *security* consequences of the COVID-19 crisis point in the direction of growing international competition, insecurity and instability, while putting an additional demand on both the rule of law/governance/law enforcement actors as well as on the military in view of their assistance to civilian authorities at home (which may also hamper CSDP force generation). The *economic* consequences of the pandemic, however, may make it challenging for the EU and its Member States to sustain, let alone increase, the financial resources that are necessary to address these growing security threats and challenges and to develop and make available the capabilities that the Union needs, especially now.

Clearly, such a mismatch scenario, in which the strategic and security needs are growing but the means and capabilities to address them are stagnant or even dwindling, would pose a serious challenge to our own security as well as our role as a global partner and security provider.

An ambitious and effective implementation of the full range of EU security and defence initiatives, underpinned by the necessary financial resources, has thus become even more necessary – while considering ways to adapt and reinforce relevant policies in light of this pandemic. Moreover, it is worth emphasising that defence-related instruments, such as the future EDF and Military Mobility, can play a key role in contributing to economic recovery in critical sectors in the EU. The adoption of the Council Decision on the EPF is critical to underpin the EU's role as a security provider beyond our borders.

In view of the urgency of the situation, the Council is invited to consider the possible measures and work strands to be further pursued based on this note. The Strategic Compass process will provide a suitable framework as well to integrate many of the issues more strategically in CSDP and EU initiatives related to security and defence.

Key initial lessons and implications

1. Solidarity

As part of the wider EU contribution addressing the multifaceted effects of the pandemic, there is a clear need for continued visible and clear EU-level action and coordination, also in the area of security and defence. This includes the need to act in solidarity when it comes to CSDP missions and operations as part of the EU's integrated approach, as well as the mutual support and cooperation between the Member States' armed forces in support of civilian authorities inside the Union. We should step up our strategic communication on the security and defence aspects of the crisis to demonstrate European unity and solidarity.

- The mitigating measures for the ongoing CSDP missions and operations, in light of the changing circumstances on the ground due to the pandemic, have been addressed in a separate EEAS paper in more detail.¹ Guiding principle, as discussed among Defence Ministers as regards the military side, is that Member States should consider the deployments or redeployment of non-essential staff in a coordinated manner, in accordance with a centralised plan provided by the respective command levels. Continued exchange with contributing third states remains important as well;
- The solidarity approach also applies to our cooperation with the host States; continued buy-in and trust of local counterparts should be promoted. Consistent public diplomacy and messaging is important to counter the increasing number of incidents of misinformation by actors that are seeking to profit from the current crisis and undermine the EU's image;
- There have also been many positive examples of mutual support and assistance between the Member States' armed forces supporting civilian authorities to cope with the pandemic within the EU itself as well as in handling the logistical aspects of external operational engagements and the repatriation of EU citizens. This contribution deserves to be highlighted to the public;

¹ WK 4071/2020 INIT, dated 22 April 2020

- In this context, the Taskforce put in place by the EEAS, based on the request of Defence Ministers and in order to implement the relevant provisions of Decision 1313/2013/EU on a Union civil protection mechanism and of Council Decision 2014/415/EU of 24 June 2014 on the arrangements for the implementation by the Union of the solidarity clause, has provided a centralised information-sharing platform for such military assistance and mutual support between the Member States. Moreover, the Taskforce has contributed to the identification of lessons and enhancing visibility and communication, while liaising with DG ECHO and the Emergency Response Coordination Centre (ERCC) as well as informally exchanging views with NATO;
- Looking to the future, there is scope to update and operationalise the modalities for the use of Member States' military capacities in support of the Union's Civil Protection Mechanism, while preserving the primary need for swift and effective coordination led by the ERCC and respecting relevant international guidelines² and the European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid³. These modalities, procedures and criteria for the use of military assets in support civil protection, referred to in recital 19 of Decision 1313/2013/EU on a Union civil protection mechanism⁴, have been set out by the Council in arrangements that highlight the role of the EU Military Staff and oversight by the PSC in this regard.⁵ Moreover, such operationalisation should also be consistent with the provisions for the use of military capabilities in the context of the implementation by the Union of the Solidarity Clause (Art. 222 TFEU).⁶ The High Representative, in consultation with the Commission, is ready to submit proposals in this regard to the Council.

² As referred to in recital 19 of Decision 1313/2013/EU on a Union Civil Protection Mechanism

³ Point 3.6 in particular on the 'Use of civil protection and military assets and capabilities'; available online here: https://ec.europa.eu/echo/files/media/publications/consensus_en.pdf

⁴ OJ L 347, 20.12.2013, p. 924

⁵ PSC Report to the Council on modalities, procedures and criteria for making available to the Community Civil Protection Mechanism the content of the database of military assets and capabilities relevant to the protection of civilian populations against the effects of terrorist attacks, including CBRN (Doc. 6644/4/04 REV 4)

⁶ Council Decision 2014/415/EU of 24 June 2014 on the arrangements for the implementation by the Union of the solidarity clause, in particular Article 5(2)(b) thereof ("The Commission and the HR shall [...] identify military capabilities that can contribute to the response to the crisis with the support of the EU military staff.") Likewise, Recital 11 of this Council Decision specifies that the EEAS "has at its disposal structures with intelligence and military expertise [...] that may also contribute in the response to threats or disasters in the territory of Member States [...]"

2. Responsiveness

In light of the possible security implications of the current pandemic, the Union needs to be able to respond quickly to any deterioration of the security situation, especially where CSDP missions and operations are deployed, and to address possible implications of higher threat levels to EU security. EU structures are already monitoring the situation continuously, keeping the Member States duly informed.

- Given the fluidity of the situation, the planning and conduct of CSDP Missions and Operations need to be more adaptable to changing circumstances while continuing to roll out agreed mandates and related planning. Most of the required adaptations could be done within the CSDP ongoing mandates or would only need minor amendments to be agreed by PSC. Relevant CSDP structures and Council bodies need to be prepared for fast track planning and mission set-up when required, either through existing actions or new ones, subject to Council decision-making, as appropriate. On the civilian side, the commitments under the Civilian CSDP Compact related to responsiveness (including access to readily available capabilities and assets), faster decision-making procedures and scalable and modular mandates, should be pursued. The EEAS Early Warning Mechanism as well as mediation and conflict prevention efforts also play a prominent role. The potential impact of the pandemic on force generation, in view of health concerns or critical assets, highlights the importance of Member States commitment to deliver the given mandates and well-structured force sensing;

- All related actions to be conducted by CSDP Missions to help partner countries cope with possible security related consequences of the spread of the virus, should be coordinated with EU delegations, relevant Commission services (notably DGs ECHO, DEVCO, FPI, HOME), Member States, and other partners on the ground. In that context, CSDP Missions and Operations could seek, to the extent possible within their mandate, to provide advice, training and support, to local counterparts on relevant health and sanitary measures. More broadly, to reinforce the host state capacity in its different sectors to respond to wide-scale crises, civilian CSDP missions could adapt their action with tailored activities such as in interoperability and within the framework of the Integrated Approach, if appropriate. Such aspects have been further set out in the separate EEAS paper referenced above;

- The security effects of the pandemic cut across internal and external dimensions of EU policies, enhancing the need for coordination and synergies across the internal/external nexus. Timely exchange of best practices and strategic information will be of outmost importance for awareness raising and preparedness. For example, Europol, in its monitoring of the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on serious and organised crime and terrorism and violent extremism in the EU, assesses an increase in specific forms of crime, including for example cybercrime and corruption, also originating in third States. This should also filter into the activities by CSDP missions where relevant and appropriate. Strengthening CSDP-JHA cooperation as called for in the civilian CSDP Compact would be one way of achieving this, including by strengthening the potential of the Mission Analytical Capability (MAC) reports, as well as strategic products produced by JHA agencies, with a view of enhanced situational awareness;
- Looking ahead, the EEAS is ready to evaluate the CSDP operational lessons from the pandemic, in terms of the resilience and capacity of CSDP planning and conduct structures, operational procedures, and civilian/military as well as inter-service coordination, with a view to suggesting concrete improvements to Member States as appropriate. Such aspects can also be reflected as part of the forthcoming review of the MPCC before the end of 2020. Moreover, the required medical and sanitary capabilities as well as transport capacities that have proven critical for CSDP during the pandemic should be taken into account in the EU's capability development initiatives (see below).

3. Preparedness and resilience

There is a need to identify and learn lessons and to develop a security and defence toolbox capable of addressing the wide-ranging security effects of such pandemics or similar disruptive crises in the future. This includes also drawing lessons on where to strengthen our resilience (cyber, hybrid, disinformation, supply chains, critical infrastructure, etc.) as well as better anticipating future disruptive crises.

- The Strategic Compass process provides a good framework to integrate such aspects into the further development of the Union's security and defence, starting by including health/security risks into the forthcoming threat analysis to be presented to Member States before the end of

2020 as a basis for dedicated policy discussions next year. In the follow-up, development of a permanent medium- to long-term strategic foresight function should be considered;

- Upcoming and future EU joint exercises should continue to be used to test and practice EU procedures and mechanism to react in case of pandemics and other scenarios with wide-ranging cross-border and cross-sectoral implications, in an adverse environment.⁷ The effects of an epidemic impacting the course of the EU external actions when facing a crisis could possibly be included in the scenario of the next exercise EU IR20, in December 2020. The EU could explore the development of a platform to train national military capabilities to support civilian authorities through national/international comprehensive dedicated exercises and vice versa. Such exercise planning and training should be done in close coordination with other EU stakeholders involved in the response to pandemics (incl. Commission services such as DG ECHO and DG SANTE);
- In light of the critical role of military assets in support of civil protection during the pandemic, alongside civilian capacities, the EEAS (incl. EU Military Staff) stands ready, in consultation with the Member States and relevant Commission services, to analyse the kind of military assets that could potentially be used in support of the EU's Civil Protection Mechanism in the future - without prejudice to national decision-making and command and control. Examples are set out in Annex A. In addition to existing agreements for the identification of potential military assets and coordinated civilian-military response, there is also room for exploring further ways to integrate civilian-military preparedness to increase overall European resilience;
- The effects of the COVID-19 pandemic in the area of hybrid threats will be taken into account in the ongoing work to map our policy documents and the available tools at hand. It is also key to identify major common vulnerabilities (so-called pan-European vulnerabilities) exposed by the pandemic (including supply chains, designated health institutions, network of research institutions and hubs that could quickly bring together pieces of ongoing research under one roof) and address them jointly. Such hybrid interference can only be addressed through a

⁷ EU HEX ML18 (PACE) had a very similar scenario to the covid-19 with a bacteria e-coli, spreading originally through Italy and Spain, requesting UCPM support to distribute specialized medical equipment that was lacking in affected countries (dialysis machines, not ventilators), only 8 MS played at some extent involving part of their Ministries of Health

coordinated approach by Member States and EU institutions, using and further adapting where necessary the established policy frameworks to counter hybrid threats and attacks;

- The COVID-19 crisis has also exposed vulnerabilities related to untested and unsecure technologies used for teleworking, as different actors, including State actors, are leveraging the pandemic for malicious cyber activities. The EU is carefully monitoring such activities, through the work of the EU's Intelligence and Situation Centre (EU INTCEN) as well as through the cooperation between EU agencies, bodies and institutions under the Blueprint for a coordinated response to large-scale cybersecurity incidents and crises at EU level. The EU continues to address cyber threats and malicious cyber activities, including by exchanging information, coordinating the law enforcement response (the Law Enforcement Response Protocol complements the Blueprint), improving public-private cooperation, strengthening cyber resilience, including of international partners, increasing awareness of businesses and citizens as well as by using the EU's Framework for a Joint EU Diplomatic Response to Malicious Cyber Activities ("cyber diplomacy toolbox"). Coherent implementation of the EU's policy and legislative agenda on cyber issues is critical, including by urgently improving the protection of the EU's information and communication networks;

- The COVID-19 crisis highlights the importance of the EU's strategy to increase resilience against Chemical, Biological, Radiological, and Nuclear (CBRN) threats as outlined in the 2017 Action Plan to enhance preparedness against chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear security risks⁸. Its external dimension is implemented through the EU CBRN risk mitigation Centres of Excellence Initiative. In light of the pandemic, further emphasis will be put on developing civilian-military synergies and organising exercises for both expert-level participants and decision-makers. Moreover, additional efforts should be made to enhance European biosecurity with a view to preventing similar crisis of intentional origin;

- The relative autonomy of Member States' naval assets has proven to be an advantage in the current pandemic, both in continuing CSDP maritime operations and in providing military assistance including medical support to civilian authorities. The EU Maritime Coordinated

⁸ COM(2017) 610 final

Presence concept could be considered as a possible instrument to this effect as well. Health and sanitary issues should be integrated in all maritime capacity-building programs with partners as well, while further lessons can be discussed as part of the further implementation of the EU's Maritime Security Strategy (progress report in June);

- The pandemic highlights the importance of the safe and fast movement of military personnel and their materiel and equipment, also in mutual support and civil protection scenarios. The EU's ongoing comprehensive work on Military Mobility therefore contributes to our resilience by ensuring that the necessary procedures for quick and seamless movements are in place and that the main transport infrastructure is capable of handling military equipment, thus providing key enablers to assist in managing future emergencies, including in the context of pandemics.

4. Capabilities

As the military assistance provided by the armed forces to civilian actors in the respective national frameworks has often been instrumental during the pandemic, there is a need to integrate such tasks as an additional driver for joint EU capability development and defence cooperation as well as the development. An innovative and capable European technological and defence industrial base has also gained importance in this context. Similarly, the impact of the equally growing demand for national security forces on civilian capability development should be further analysed as well.

- The uncertain security situation underscores that the EU's defence initiatives should urgently deliver tangible results in terms of collaborative military capability development, operational readiness and availability and related force packages including their interoperability. The growing demand for military assistance in support of civilian response within the Union should be taken into account as an additional requirement, while noting that medical capabilities able to help prevent or address an outbreak, strategic transport assets as well as capabilities supporting resilience (incl. cyber defence and strategic communication) are already identified in EU Requirements. The EEAS (incl. Military Staff) is ready to undertake a stocktaking analysis to evaluate what capabilities have been critical in the context of sanitarian crises/pandemics, what already exists and what capabilities should be developed further. The upcoming Council interim political guidance for the next phase of the ongoing Headline Goal process cycle (2020-2022)

could also be used to also provide orientations regarding the need to include the role of military assistance and mutual support (Illustrative Scenario);

- The PESCO framework can also help to further generate collaborative projects that enhance the Union's preparedness and resilience, also to mitigate the security effects of a pandemic as a supporting task. Different ongoing PESCO projects with specific relevance in this context could be enhanced in light of the current experience.⁹ PESCO projects could for example contribute to the EU's autonomy in case of pandemic (civil-military cooperation related to stockpiling or stock management), while Medical Deployable Outbreak Intervention Teams, High Mobility Role 2 and Preventive Medicine Teams are collaborative opportunities that could be explored by participating Member States as well. Also here synergies should be sought, as it is currently being done for ongoing relevant PESCO projects, with civilian capacities, in particular the Union Civil Protection Mechanism and rescEU. The need to address civil-military cooperation in the context a pandemic or major sanitary crises could be taken up in the ongoing PESCO strategic review as well, for example when identifying objectives for the next PESCO phase;
- It is important that the defence initiatives, notably the future EDF and military mobility, are adequately funded in terms of the budget, as this will make it possible to strengthen the capacities of the Member States and play a positive role in dealing with the economic and industrial consequences of a pandemic. The financing and development of innovative and disruptive technologies in the defence sector will also have a positive spin-off effect on the civil industry and will contribute to improving the resilience of economies. The current crisis reveals the need for Europe to reflect and act more than ever on its ability to rely on a strong and innovative industrial, technological and skills base in defence and other sectors, as an integral part of Europe's increased resilience and reactivity to disruptive challenges;
- Also for civilian CSDP, difficulties for EU Member States to force generate may arise as the pandemic may have negative consequences on the availability of capabilities for civilian CSDP. This highlights even more the importance of the Member States continuing their work, through National Implementation Plans, on reviewing their national procedures to be able to provide an

⁹ For example, Deployable Military Disaster Relief Capability Package, European Medical Command or Network of logistic Hubs in Europe and support to Operations, and possibly others

increased contribution to civilian CSDP under the civilian CSDP Compact. The EEAS is ready to prepare a specific mini-concept on the pandemic and civilian CSDP, in the framework of the civilian CSDP Compact, to develop further policy options.

5. Partnerships

As the global pandemic risks enhancing global competition, the EU should promote multilateral approaches, dialogue and cooperation in the area of security and defence as well, including by reinforcing practical coordination with core partners such as the UN and NATO but also expanding its bilateral relationships with key partners in the area of security and defence including third States contributing to CSDP missions and operations.

- We should use this crisis as an opportunity to review the mechanisms of coordination, exchange of information and cooperation at political and operational levels with our partners. It is crucial, especially in the security and defence domain, that we have the right operational framework to work together. Practical measures to support our ability to engage with partners should be further identified, for example through continuing the deployment of military advisors to EU Delegations as well as exploring the potential for funding of bilateral and regional projects in security and defence, building on the experience of the pilot project for security cooperation in and with Asia;
- The UN-EU strategic partnership on peacekeeping and crisis management provides a good platform for systematic exchanges in the field as well as between headquarters and we should make a good use of it in times of crisis. It is important to keep regular contacts on the situation in our CSDP missions and operations especially those deployed alongside in the same theatres, exchange on mitigation measures we take, possibilities to share assets (including logistic and medical evacuation) but also coordinate on political messaging towards partners and undertake joint actions i.e. in the area of strategic communication and countering disinformation. In a mid- and long-term perspective we should envisage a broader reflection with the UN on the impact of the pandemic on the role of our respective missions and operations, possibilities to provide support to partner countries to fight the pandemic;

- The EU and NATO are standing together in the fight against the pandemic as well as its medium to long-term implications, which demonstrates the relevance and the importance of the EU-NATO partnerships under the Joint Declarations and the transatlantic bond. With due respect to the agreed principles, the EU could signal its readiness to explore improvement in terms of crisis management, coordination mechanisms related to military assistance, exchange of information, communication channels, as well as on policy, including but not limited to areas such as countering disinformation/stratcom, hybrid and cyber threats, military mobility, parallel and coordinated exercises, civil protection and operational cooperation and mutual assistance on the ground;
- The expected increase in geopolitical competition underlines the importance of continuing our existing bilateral engagement with partners in our neighbourhood to the East and South: issues already on the agenda, such as resilience, crisis preparedness, hybrid threats, cyber security, the fight against disinformation will have even greater importance following the pandemic;
- More broadly, the EU needs to enhance its engagement with key regional partners, such as ASEAN, ASEM, African Union and Latin American interlocutors, on security and defence issues in view of addressing the vulnerabilities and new challenges exposed by the pandemic with concrete proposals. Stepping up cooperation on security and defence through existing regional frameworks, such as the Eastern Partnership and the European Neighbourhood Policy, should also be a priority as well. Cooperation within the framework of the G7 Rapid Response Mechanism and the Canberra Group on Disinformation are good examples as well and proven to be useful to share information, improve our situational awareness and thus increase our preparedness;
- Progress on implementing the strategic approach to partnerships, as proposed by the EEAS in 2018 and highlighted by the HR/VP in his letter to Ministers of Defence in January 2020, should be taken forward pro-actively. The EEAS was already planning to present new proposals to improve the modalities in which third countries can participate in CSDP missions and operations; further reflection on the experience of the pandemic at the operational level should be undertaken, in view of ensuring that contributing third States are properly informed of measures taken in response to crisis situations. Their lessons learned about pandemics and

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which enabling capacities they could provide in this context should be further explored. Moreover, we should aim to operationalise the concept of security and defence “packages” of cooperation with key partners, as proposed to Member States in summer 2018, which seeks to bring greater coherence and more strategic oversight to the EU’s overall engagement with partners in security and defence.

Annex A

Military assets that could potentially be used in support of the EU's civil protection authorities

As highlighted in the current crisis, these could include:

1. Logistic support, such as transport (road, sealift, airlift), including its organisation and coordination through multilateral engagement with MCCE and EATC, and warehousing and distribution services for critical stocks and equipment.
2. Medical support, Mobile Role 2 Medical Treatment Facility (MTF), deployable role 3 MTF, preventive medical teams including outbreak investigation teams, enhancing (National and International) civilian planning staff, supporting civilian hospitals with personnel and specific medical equipment.
3. Engineer support, well drilling and water purification, support with disinfection of materials and personnel.
4. Structures such as military crisis response cells could be used to reinforce the civilian crisis response system in order to become more robust, long-time sustainable and adding niche expertise.
5. The role of the military assistance could also include the establishment of dedicated contingents to support the civil authorities in ensuring security/protection of critical infrastructure, provide logistic and law enforcement / traffic control support.