

New European security strategy

Linda Tóthová, Members' Research Service

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This European Parliamentary Research Service paper aims to inform Members on issues related to a forthcoming Commission initiative. It highlights the main choices which may shape the initiative and which Members may wish to explore ahead of formal Commission adoption. Based on documentary and other sources, it reflects the information available at the time of writing.

For further information on this topic, Members and staff of the European Parliament may contact the author.

Issues at stake

- **A deteriorating European security environment:** As implementation of the Strategic Compass progresses, the EU faces growing pressure to translate existing commitments into operational capabilities and strengthen its ability to act in a more contested geopolitical context. Against this backdrop, the European Commission and the European External Action Service are developing a new security strategy, expected in Q3 2026.
- **Russia's aggression against Ukraine:** Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, coupled with continued hostile activities affecting Member States across multiple domains, have reinforced the need for greater European defence readiness, stronger defence industry capability, sustained support for Ukraine, and enhanced deterrence against both conventional and non-conventional threats.
- **Growing hybrid and technology-enabled threats:** Cyber-attacks, foreign information manipulation and interference, sabotage, attacks on critical infrastructure, drone incursions and the rapid proliferation of emerging technologies are blurring the boundary between internal and external security while placing sustained pressure on the Union's defence and resilience capacities.

- **An evolving transatlantic relationship:** Uncertainty over future United States (US) engagement in European security has intensified debate on burden-sharing and strategic autonomy. The 2026 US National Defense Strategy's vision of a 'critical but more limited' US role, combined with announced troop and equipment reductions and tensions over Greenland, may signal a shift from an indispensable ally to a more unpredictable partner, with implications for multilateral cooperation.
- **Economic security, strategic dependencies and 'de-risking':** Concerns over supply-chain disruption, energy security and market-stability following developments in the Strait of Hormuz, alongside strategic dependencies, particularly on China and other key suppliers of critical technologies and raw materials, have elevated de-risking to one of the central elements of the EU's security agenda.

Road to the 2026 European security strategy

Since the early 2000s, the EU has adopted strategic documents addressing an array of security challenges, including [internal EU security](#), [economic security](#), [space](#), [maritime security](#), [undersea cable security](#) and [preparedness](#). Their evolution reflects both changes in the external security environment and shifts in the Union's understanding of its role as a security actor.

European security strategy – A secure Europe in a better world

The EU's first overarching security document, the [European security strategy](#) (ESS), was adopted in 2003 under High Representative and Vice President (HR/VP) Javier Solana. It emerged at a pivotal moment, on the eve of the EU's 'big bang' [enlargement](#) and shortly after the introduction of the euro, shaping the strategy's opening statement that 'Europe has never been so prosperous, so secure, nor so free'. At the same time, the ESS sought to bridge divisions after the Iraq War, while responding to the US's 2002 National Security Strategy and its post-9/11 outlook. The ESS focused on threats involving **terrorism, organised crime, weapons of mass destruction, regional conflicts and state failure**. In 2008, an [implementation report](#) reinforced the ESS by broadening the range of threats facing Europe, while coinciding with the tenth anniversary of the European security and defence policy and discussions on institutional reform.

EU Global Strategy for the European Union's foreign and security policy

A more fundamental re-assessment came in 2015, when HR/VP Federica Mogherini's [strategic review](#), submitted to the European Council, acknowledged the EU's changed security environment since 2003. This paved way for the [EU Global Strategy](#) (EUGS), endorsed in 2016. The EUGS reflected a markedly different geopolitical context, shaped by Brexit, the annexation of Crimea, growing great-power competition and uncertainty regarding the transatlantic relationship after President Trump's first nomination. Central to the strategy was the concept of '**principled pragmatism**' – the idea that the EU should see the world as it is, rather than as it would like it to be, while pursuing its values through realistic and achievable goals. The EUGS outlined five priorities for EU external action: **the Union's security, state and societal resilience to the east and south, integrated approach to conflicts and crises, cooperative regional orders, and global governance**. The strategy was also complemented by the [implementation plan on security and defence](#).

In contrast to the 2003 ESS's aspiration to build a 'better world', the EUGS focused on navigating a 'fragile world' characterised by 'predictable unpredictability'. Reflecting a more adverse security environment, it acknowledged that 'our Union is under threat. Our European project, which has brought unprecedented peace, prosperity and democracy, is being questioned'. Rather than seeking to transform the international environment, the EUGS prioritised managing instability and reconciling the perceived tension between values- and interest-based foreign policy. The EUGS, while underscoring that 'a strong Union is one that thinks strategically', recognised the limits of soft power and that, in legitimate circumstances, the use of force and credible deterrence are necessary.

Strategic Compass for security and defence

In 2022, the EUGS was supplemented, though not formally replaced, by the [Strategic Compass for security and defence](#) under HR/VP Josep Borrell. Adopted shortly after Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, the Compass aimed to [strengthen](#) the EU's role as a security provider through four pillars: enhancing capacity to **act** autonomously; **securing** and strengthening the EU's ability to anticipate, deter and respond to challenges; **investing** to reduce critical military and civilian capability gaps; and deepening security and defence **partnerships**. Drawing on the **EU's first common threat assessment**, it set out **81 concrete actions to be delivered by 2030** with most actions due for completion by 2025. The document highlighted Europe's 'multi-layered threats' and the need to coordinate defence investment and capability at the European level. It also covered areas traditionally within the Commission's competences, such as the (defence) industry.

Published six years apart, the EUGS described Russia as both a 'strategic challenge' and a partner for 'selective engagement'. By contrast, the Compass – shaped by Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022 – identified Russia as 'a long-term and direct threat for European security'. The EU's approach to other actors also evolved. On China, the EUGS focused on exploring the partnership, whereas the Compass defined the relationship through the 'partner-competitor-rival' triad.

The strategic focus on defence readiness was reinforced in 2025 with the publication of the [white paper for European defence-readiness 2030](#). Building on the [ReArm Europe plan](#), the first-ever [European defence industrial strategy](#) and the [Versailles Summit](#), where leaders agreed on the urgent need to boost the European defence technological industrial base (EDTIB), the white paper set out measures **to bolster the EDTIB, accelerate military production and enable the rapid movement of troops and equipment**. However, neither the Strategic Compass nor the white paper replaced the EUGS. Instead, both were [viewed](#) as targeted responses to specific aspects of a deteriorating security environment: the Compass focusing mainly on defence and security cooperation (with some focus on the EDTIB through the 'invest' pillar), and the white paper on industrial and military preparedness.

In March 2026, the European Council [invited](#) the Council to 'update' the Compass' common understanding of threats, to be prepared by the HR/VP in cooperation with Member States. The Compass's 2026 [annual progress report](#) notes that 'many of the original objectives have been met' and that a 'revised threat analysis based on input from national intelligence services will guide a new European security strategy to address Europe's security needs today'. Against this backdrop, debate continues on whether the emerging strategy can offer:

- **a genuinely integrated vision of European security,**
- **consolidate a fragmented strategic landscape,**

- **respond to threats with sufficient adaptability**, and
- **align existing frameworks with evolving internal and external priorities.**

New security strategy in the making

In January 2026, Commission President Ursula von der Leyen [announced](#) plans for a new security strategy, [reaffirmed](#) later in her speech at the World Economic Forum, citing profound 'geopolitical changes' and the need for an 'appropriate response'. Following a meeting of EU foreign ministers in March 2026, HR/VP Kaja Kallas [noted](#) 'the security environment is changing fast, and we cannot respond with emergency summits alone', and called for a 'long-term policy'.

The upcoming strategy is [expected](#) to be based on a **comprehensive assessment of threats**, adopting a broad understanding of security. Reportedly [prepared](#) by the **EU Intelligence and Situation Centre (INTCEN)** of the EEAS, the threat assessment was [presented](#) to Member States' permanent representatives in March 2026, followed by a foreign and defence minister [discussion](#) in May 2026 and further [consideration](#) in the informal meeting of defence ministers in June. It was also the subject of an [informal exchange](#) among Member States' security policy directors in late June 2026.

According to [reports](#), the strategy will comprise three components: a **threat assessment**, a **joint communication**, and an **implementation roadmap**. On the basis of the threat assessment, the Commission is [reportedly](#) leading the drafting process of the remaining elements, marking a shift from the EUGS and the Strategic Compass, both of which were led by the HR/VP and the EEAS. The document is [expected](#) to be concise, potentially following the streamlined format of the 2003 ESS.

To support the drafting process, in March 2026 Member States were [invited](#) to provide input on the strategy's content through a scoping exercise aimed at **identifying national priorities and areas where EU instruments could be strengthened**. Although the underlying threat assessment remains classified, consultations suggest an effort to reconcile common European priorities with national security concerns. Early discussions, however, indicate divergent [views](#) among Member States: some favour a broad conception of security spanning multiple policy areas, while others advocate a more focused approach, warning that an overly expansive agenda could dilute priorities or duplicate existing frameworks.

Work on the strategy was launched following the College of Commissioners' visit to Cyprus at the start of their Council presidency in January 2026, during which the Commission President [announced](#) that 'it is time during the [Cyprus] Presidency to come with a new European security strategy'. As the strategy has not yet been released, the Irish Presidency is expected to [continue](#) advancing the file. This initiative is not included in the [Commission's 2026 work programme](#), which was published before the announcement of the new strategy.

What the strategy is expected to address

From the outset, **the strategy is expected to redefine the EU's role as a security actor**, moving beyond the notion of a 'better' (2003 ESS) or merely 'volatile' (2016 EUGS) world towards one characterised by sustained uncertainty. In March 2026, Member State ambassadors [emphasised](#) that it should reinforce European **strategic autonomy** and the **rules-based international order**, while calling for a comprehensive approach to security, including cybersecurity, hybrid threats, migration and

organised crime. Echoing the Compass progress report's [view](#) that 'more than ever, Europeans share a common threat assessment', the strategy is expected to forge a shared EU-27 narrative on key security priorities. After the March 2026 Foreign Affairs Council, the HR/VP declared it would take a 'broad view of security, linking defence, energy, supply chains, and other policy areas'.

The strategy is likely to address both **conventional and non-conventional threats**. On **defence readiness, deterrence and capability development**, it will reflect the broader defence-readiness agenda post-2022 as well as the recently [announced](#) US review of its military posture and bases in Europe. It is also expected to build on the latest Compass progress report, including measures to close critical capability gaps across the nine priority capability areas, mobilise additional defence funding and deepen mutually beneficial cooperation with Ukraine in defence, technology, innovation, resilience and industry. **Defence innovation** is likely to feature, drawing on the EU's [defence industry transformation roadmap](#), while [discussions](#) on operationalising **Article 42(7) TEU** (Treaty on European Union) may also [inform](#) the final document. Several Member States on the eastern flank have reportedly pushed for greater emphasis on resilience and territorial defence, informed by recent experiences of drone incursions, electronic warfare, GPS jamming and the instrumentalisation of migration.

Alongside traditional military threats, the strategy is expected to emphasise **hybrid threats, cyber-attacks, foreign information manipulation and interference, economic coercion, and vulnerabilities linked to emerging technologies**. **Energy and economic security, supply chain resilience, critical infrastructure protection, and nuclear security** are also expected to feature prominently. In doing so, the document will build on the '360-degree approach' to security advanced in the [defence readiness roadmap 2030](#), recognising that threats originate from multiple domains and require a coordinated response that integrates military, economic, technological, energy and societal security dimensions.

On **threat actors**, the strategy is expected to recalibrate **the EU's approach to actors demonstrating sustained malicious activity** toward the EU, particularly **Russia**. This would align with the European Parliament's [call](#) for 'an EU-wide Russia strategy that links deterrence, containment [and] accountability'.

The strategy is also likely to take stock of the EU's relationship with the **United States** in light of recent geopolitical developments, including [efforts](#) to assert control over Greenland, trade disputes and [calls](#) for Europe to assume more responsibility for conventional defence. The forthcoming strategy may also, once again, serve as a response to the US's [2025 National Security Strategy](#), which Parliament [viewed](#) as transactional and marking a shift from long-standing US foreign policy.

As in earlier strategic documents, the EU's **neighbourhood** is expected to remain central. Whereas the 2003 ESS advocated a 'ring of well-governed countries', the new strategy may reflect a more competitive geopolitical environment in which eastern and southern neighbours face growing external pressure. It may provide a strategic basis for initiatives such as the [Global Gateway](#), aimed at mitigating dependency risks and diversifying external alignments. **Ukraine** is likely to hold a pivotal place in this framework, especially given its growing integration into the defence technological and industrial base (EDTIB), with **Moldova** and the **Western Balkans** also likely accorded prominent attention. Building on tools developed under the Compass, including resilience [support](#) for Moldova, the strategy might call for stronger long-term engagement and tailored short-term assistance.

The strategy is expected to reaffirm the EU's [commitment](#) to 'effective multilateralism', while adapting it to present international environment. **EU-NATO cooperation** is likely to form a central pillar, building on the alignment of strategic documents in 2022, [contributions](#) to the 2025 [preparedness union strategy](#), and the strengthening of political dialogue, including the [resumption](#) of meetings between the Political and Security Committee and the North Atlantic Council. Priorities for NATO's 2026 Ankara Summit, including capability development, burden-sharing and support for Ukraine, may similarly shape EU planning. The strategy is expected to support deeper cooperation with selected partners, including through [security and defence partnerships](#).

Finally, the forthcoming strategy may further consolidate the EU's growing engagement in **conflict prevention, crisis management and peace mediation**. Recent initiatives with the **United Nations** and the **African Union** suggest an effort to strengthen the EU's role as a security provider through enhanced political dialogue, operational cooperation and targeted financial support. This includes the adoption of new [EU-UN Joint Priorities on Peace and Security](#) in September 2025, continued [support](#) for African-led Peace Support Operations through the European Peace Facility, and reinforced [cooperation](#) with the African Union on preventive diplomacy and peace mediation.

What experts expect from the strategy

From a **political and strategic perspective**, the [Egmont Institute](#) sees the strategy taking shape amid growing European convergence in response to geopolitical shocks, including tensions surrounding Greenland, and increased support for European strategic autonomy; trends also reflected in recent [European Council on Foreign Relations](#) polling. At the same time, the strategy must remain adaptable to unforeseen developments, noting that 'if Europe waits for the perfect conditions, the moment to act will have passed'. [Carnegie Europe](#) similarly argues that previous EU strategies have relied on an overly cautious reading of the geopolitical environment, often avoiding explicit identification of adversaries. Along with other [analysts](#), they warn that vague language risks undermining the strategy's operational objectives. The [Atlantic Council](#) likewise stresses the need to update the EU's strategic framework, while cautioning against treating the strategy as a cure-all for Europe's security challenges.

Several experts emphasise the **importance of implementation and political ownership**. Sven Biscop [links](#) the Commission's leading role in drafting the strategy to its expanding role in implementing EU security objectives beyond the EEAS's traditional foreign policy remit. He argues that the EU should move beyond a reactive posture and adopt a strategy that both defines Europe's place in the world and commits the Union to acting upon it. Others [see](#) merit in linking the new strategy to the next multiannual financial framework. The [European Centre for Development Policy Management](#) (ECDPM) warns against a declaratory exercise, calling for strong political buy-in, a clear implementation roadmap, coverage of security domains beyond defence and deeper cooperation with partners.

On **defence innovation**, [Carnegie Europe](#) expects the strategy to clarify how the EU intends to convert civilian technological advances into deployable military capabilities without unnecessarily securitising civilian life. It also calls for a stronger strategic rationale underpinning flagship projects under the defence readiness roadmap 2030, arguing that 'a shield is a posture, not a strategy' in reference to the European air shield and space shield initiatives, noting that such initiatives should be integrated into a broader strategic framework rather than treated as standalone strategies.

On **external relations**, the [Centre for Eastern Studies](#) (OSW) expects the strategy to identify Russia as the most immediate threat to the EU's territorial integrity, while prioritising support for the EDTIB, and assistance to Ukraine and its path towards EU membership. The OSW also anticipates a focus on partnerships with Canada, the United Kingdom, Norway, Japan and South Korea.

On **EU–NATO relations**, [ECDPM](#) argues that the strategy should 'affirm the EU as a peace actor' and 'embrace a multidimensional understanding of security', while clarifying the complementary roles of the EU, its Member States and NATO across defence, deterrence, resilience, human security, conflict prevention and peacebuilding. The OSW further suggests that a reduced US role in Europe could 'revive earlier proposals to develop EU command structures'.

European Parliament position

During the structured dialogue on the Commission work programme held in the Committee on Foreign Affairs on 17 March 2026, AFET Chair David McAllister [asked](#) HR/VP Kaja Kallas to involve the European Parliament prior to the finalisation of the strategy, while the HR/VP confirmed that the Parliament would be consulted.

Although drafted before the new strategy was announced, Parliament's January 2026 [resolution](#) on the implementation of the common security and defence policy (CSDP) already called for a revision of the Strategic Compass to strengthen the EU's civil and military preparedness. The 2026 [resolution](#) on the implementation of common foreign and security policy (CFSP) stated 'the EU needs to pursue a determined, disciplined and assertive foreign policy that fulfils the EU's own strategic objectives and continues to define, assert and defend its interests worldwide'.

In April 2016, ahead of the EUGS's adoption, Parliament adopted a [resolution](#) calling for greater coherence in EU foreign and security policy. It argued that 'European intelligence exchanges should be improved and a true European intelligence and forecasting capacity developed' and stressed the need for 'positive synergies ... between increasingly interlinked external action policies and internal policies at EU level, within Member States, and between the EEAS and the Commission'. It further recommended that the EUGS 'be revised every five years, in synchrony with the new European Parliament and the new Commission'. In 2004, Parliament also [expressed](#) its position on the European security strategy.

Main references

[European Security Strategy - A secure Europe in a better world](#), EEAS, December 2003.

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Contact

E-mail: ep@ep.europa.eu

Intranet: <https://ep.in.ep.europa.eu/>

Internet: <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank>

Blog: <https://epthinktank.eu>