

“Finding Direction with a Strategic Compass? Reflections on the Future of EU Security and Defence”

The high-level conference on the topic “Finding Direction with a Strategic Compass? Reflections on the Future of EU Security and Defence” took place on 19 February 2021 under the auspices of the Portuguese Presidency of the Council of the European Union.

The Portuguese Defence Minister, João Gomes Cravinho, opened the conference, which was also addressed by the Deputy Secretary General for Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP), Charles Fries, and the Director of the European Defence Agency (EDA), Jiří Šedivý.

This event was part of the Portuguese Defence Ministry’s initiatives during the Portuguese Presidency and the semester of “strategic dialogue”, to prepare the Strategic Compass, the document providing the new CSDP guidelines. Wholly online, the proceedings attracted an audience of over 200 people from think tanks, academic circles, and the main institutions of the EU and the Member States.

The principal aim of the gathering was to contribute to the formulation of specific and innovative proposals for the Strategic Compass, on the basis of broad and open-minded reflection. This involved senior figures representing Member States (Portugal, Germany, Slovenia and France), the European External Action Service (including the EU Military Staff) and the European Commission, in addition to members of the academic community devoted to in-depth study of the issues of European defence and its future.

The gathering was structured around inaugural speeches and two panels for discussion and debate, the first on the topic “Defining a course; what are the national perspectives?” and the second “Finding a course: what is the direction for European security and defence?”

Answers were also sought to two basic questions: what priority objectives should European defence reflect? What should the profile of European defence be in order for these to be achieved?

There is a growing consensus in Europe over the need to re-think how current geopolitical challenges are addressed within the EU and the need to secure its global interests in a world of accelerated change. The Strategic Compass offers the EU, at a crucial time of change on a planetary scale, the chance for the Member States to reflect as a whole on their security and defence and to develop better ways to coordinate their efforts in this field. This is also an opportunity for the EU to show that it has both the capacity and the will to adapt and prosper in a geopolitically complex environment.

The EU Institute for Security Studies will be writing a summary report to provide support for the preparatory work involved in drafting the Strategic Compass.