

EU Civilian Crisis Management in 2030

A Test-Run of Scenario-Based Planning



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The EU's crisis management missions are currently assembled from national contributions on an ad hoc basis. While such reactivity may seem inherent to crisis response, better planning is both possible and necessary. Ideally, the EU should have a central body to define and organize the capabilities needed to address future conflicts. Strategic foresight offers a workable methodology to generate a capability profile over a ten-year horizon, as a DGAP test-run with experts showed.

- Scenario-based foresight offers a workable method for identifying the probable future demand for civilian crisis management capabilities and the required contributions from member states.
- On this basis, member states can then operationalize the desired level of ambition. Strategic capability planning should take place at the EEAS to establish and coordinate capability development in the member states.
- In a series of workshops, we tested the method and matched several crisis scenarios with capability areas for the EU in 2030. As the results were very promising, both the Compact and the Strategic Compass processes should consider incorporating this approach.

STRATEGIC PLANNING FOR CIVILIAN MISSIONS

20 years ago, at a summit in the Portuguese city of Feira, EU leaders first set clear benchmarks for national contributions to EU civilian crisis management. These benchmarks were defined by the member states' stated level of political ambition and then tested against several illustrative scenarios which envisioned actual deployments. This approach successfully married the two classic components of strategic planning: "supply" (based on the capabilities of member states and their political will) and "demand" (defined by the emerging conflict landscape and partner country requests).

That approach was revisited for the [Council Conclusions on the Implementation of the Global Strategy in 2016](#), which began the task of setting a level of ambition and calling for illustrative scenarios. Today, however, the demand side of capability-planning is much more complex than it was in 2000, raising the question of how to actually structure and use such scenario processes.

On the "supply side," the annex to the annex of the 2016 Council Conclusions defines a level of ambition. Not everything is spelled out – it remains open, for instance, why CSDP missions would be considered for some crises and not for others. The document also lacks criteria for defining regions of interest and crises of importance. Still, these are issues that member states are now addressing through the so-called Strategic Compass (SC) process, a dialogue which focuses on crisis management as one of its four baskets.¹

In contrast, the second part, the "demand side," remains underexplored and indeed neglected. What will be the nature of future crises, what kind of missions and mandates will be required, which capabilities will be needed – these questions remain open, and there is no set way of addressing them. Simply reviving the methodology used for generating the illustrative scenarios presented in Feira is not an option; the world today is even less predictable than in 2000.

SCENARIO-BASED STRATEGIC FORESIGHT

Methods such as trend analysis, horizon-scanning, and early warning systems can all help to improve the EU's readiness by presenting clear trajectories, trends, and threat analyses of the kind capability planners require. But scenario-based strategic foresight offers three crucial benefits: It makes it possible to anticipate future challenges, sound out possible policy responses, and derive a robust list of capability needs. Scenario-based strategic foresight is unique in linking the exploratory nature of future-oriented strategy processes with operative planning procedures.

The European External Action Service (EEAS) already uses scenario exercises for some CSDP planning purposes. In June 2019, for instance, it held a scenario-based workshop to envisage the possible deployment of a civilian mission to defuse a border crisis in the fictional "Levonto" region. But the aim of that exercise was to test-run plans for a specific kind of crisis already foreseen by EU governments. How can this exploratory way of thinking be applied to long-term speculative questions whilst generating the kind of certainty usually required by capability planners?

This is a methodological conundrum, and time for finding a solution is running out. The supply side, as noted, will soon be resolved by the EU and its member states through the adoption of the Strategic Compass in 2022. Given the eight- to ten-year planning horizon required to build up capabilities, a benchmark set by the SC today becomes operative only in 2030. As a result, the pressure is on to anticipate the demand side and create scenarios with the same ten-year horizon.²

This paper presents our test run of scenario-based strategic foresight and explains our attempts to build scenarios that are robust enough to anticipate variant pathways of possible futures. The purpose of the exercise was to gain information about the capabilities needed to meet tomorrow's crises. To get there, we had to overcome several methodological problems, and this paper details our process of trial and error.

1 The Strategic Compass is an initiative to have member states agree on clear objectives regarding their common security and defense. It addresses four baskets: crisis management, resilience, capability development, and partnerships. The interested reader is referred to [The EU's Strategic Compass and Its Four Baskets – Recommendations to Make the Most of It](#) by Christian Mölling and Torben Schütz, DGAP Report No 13, November 2020.

2 For more information on the importance of strategic planning for civilian capabilities, the advantages of such an approach, and what it can look like, please see [Upgrading Europe's Civilian Crisis Management – A Strategic Planning Process in Ten Steps](#) by Christian Mölling and Florence Schimmel, DGAP Policy Brief No 28, December 2020.

THE TEST RUN

For this trial run scenario exercise in September 2020, we brought together 20 international experts with thematic and regional expertise. In a guided process, we generated crisis scenarios for 2030 – scenarios which needed to be sufficiently plausible and detailed to guide planners, sufficiently structured and representative to generate variations, and ideally sufficiently arresting to influence the “supply” side. We built three different scenarios of future conflict which we presented to capability planners and other experts, who then defined the capability areas needed for civilian CSDP missions in simulated mission assessments.

The first step was to send out a questionnaire to a large group of experts to ask for their opinions on possible drivers and escalatory elements of future conflicts. We then took the methodological decision to narrow down the exercise to three scenarios to provide depth and clarity. Concerning conflict type (network, urban, regional) and theatre (to the EU's southeast, north and south), we aimed for diversity based on current trends.

Table 1: Steps of the test run and suggested amendments for future repetitions

Step	Test Run	Suggested Amendments
Preparations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Define the purpose of the exercise and criteria for scenarios, determine survey and workshop participants Consult research on relevant trends and compile information on possible future conflict Design a survey for selected experts to comment on the identified factors but also add their own ideas Draft raw scenarios based on the survey results and ask outside experts for external validation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consider a different focus: Depending on the level of ambition agreed by member states, scenarios could explore early warning mechanisms or not-yet violent conflicts
Scenario-Building	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Give participants access to draft scenarios and invite them to brainstorm before the workshop Form groups that are as diverse as possible and include representatives of every stakeholder group for each scenario; the groups should be moderated by skilled scenario-building experts Reorganize the groups at least once during the workshop to reduce group think and increase robustness of results; the moderator stays on Let participants explain their scenarios to the other participants to explore potential weak links and identify aspects that were either highly controversial or not controversial at all 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In parallel to the workshop, have regional experts (not CSDP experts with regional expertise) fact-check ideas from the group work and provide background if necessary Alternatively, use fictional settings by creating imaginary actors and regions – both similarities and differences to real circumstances can provide interesting learning experiences.
Refining the Scenario	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Compile generated material and draw up plausible narratives for the scenarios; check back with participants if needed Present to colleagues not involved with the workshop to detect blind spots or unconvincing elements 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Invite outside experts to review the scenarios
Derive Capability Profile	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Form groups that are as diverse as possible and include representatives of every stakeholder group for each scenario; the moderators should be experienced capability planners Reorganize groups at least once for immediate peer review and to add fresh ideas Discuss the results: What was surprising – what was not? Which issues came up in more than one scenario – and which ones didn't? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> As an alternative to the material we prepared for the groups to guide their discussions and document their results, forego the framing and allow for more self-management Include an analysis of other EU or member state instruments to determine the distinct value added by a civilian CSDP mission Exercise a scenario to discover weak links and blind spots as well as identify and train moderators and helpers.

THREE DIVERSE SCENARIOS

The scenarios we chose involved the following situations, with more information to be found in the detailed **Workshop Report**:

- A conflict in the Western Balkans triggered by a land swap between Kosovo and Serbia and a reunification referendum in Republika Srpska. The United States and Russia form a pragmatic alliance, sidelining the EU; Chinese “protection forces” are deployed to safeguard local infrastructure projects; and organized crime groups and Islamist fighters returning from the Middle East form fluid alliances.
- An urban conflict in Oran, Algeria, in which government abuse of Artificial Intelligence-guided surveillance technology plays a crucial role. Cascading crises involve outbreaks of cholera, a corruption scandal, and social media battles between opposition groups and the government propagating different narratives of the conflict.
- Clashes in the Arctic waters off the coast of Norway. A collision between submarines causes a radioactive spill which creates an ecological catastrophe for the homeland of the Northern Sami people. International factfinders and scientists perish under unclear circumstances, satellites come under attack, and both China and Russia move to defend their interests in trade, resource, and research.

METHODOLOGICAL ISSUES

We worked on the assumption that the EU of 2030 would choose to mandate civilian missions only in a nearby conflict theatre (this condition will likely be clarified by the Strategic Compass). More problematically, we assumed that the EU would respond to all the crises with a civilian CSDP mission. However, the EU currently champions an integrated approach to foreign policy which involves a range of tools besides crisis-management such as diplomacy, development support, trade, etc. Therefore, the EU may choose not to address the conflict via a civilian CSDP mission – and properly so, if it is not the most suitable instrument in the EU’s foreign policy toolbox for that particular crisis. A more comprehensive exercise could help explore the options by considering the entire range of possible responses.

Furthermore, the EU is theoretically able to deploy CSDP missions throughout all stages of the conflict cycle – “peace-keeping, conflict prevention, and strengthening international security in accor-

dance with the principles of the United Nations Charter” [TEU, Article 42 \(1\)](#). We made the choice to focus our scenarios on high-intensity conflicts, but what if the EU of 2030 were to use CSDP missions primarily to address low-intensity conflicts, which do not present immediate threats to security and stability? What if it deployed CSDP missions precisely in order to avoid the types of scenarios and costly interventions our experts foresaw? That would speak strongly in favor of guiding scenario participants toward a more preventive approach and extending the spectrum to non-violent conflicts. This appears advisable as basic trend analysis suggests that even the violent conflicts of the future are unlikely to involve a clear-cut war or peace situation.

Some of the other methodological issues that frequently occur with foresight exercises were, by contrast, comparatively easy, for instance the problem of a confirmation bias caused by working with a relatively small and cohesive group. While it is true that the scenarios were created by analysts with CSDP expertise, the exercise already assumed that a civilian CSDP mission would be the appropriate EU response. Besides, this use of a tight group of experts serves the goal of strengthening cohesion on the supply side of the EU. Finally, the list of capabilities resulting from the exercise provides an important signal about what external partners can expect and complement. Even if they are not fully on target initially, they can still be amended and repurposed. All the same, we would suggest that the scenarios should be externally validated and reviewed, thus introducing an intermediate step between planning the scenario and defining the required capabilities. This could also mark an occasion to contemplate non-findings, meaning issues that might have been expected to play a role but did not arise.

FIVE LESSONS FROM THE SCENARIO EXERCISE

Did we make the right choices? The proof is in the pudding – in the clarity and persuasiveness of the scenarios, and in the usefulness of the insight into the required capabilities. Table 2 contains a list of the capability areas which the participants derived from the three scenarios. Yet the real benefit of this approach was to establish a process that allowed us to think about variations and trends when we came together to discuss our findings across the three groups. What type of lessons were we able to generate? The answers go beyond classic mission

structure into the political-technical realm, drawing up connections between the underlying qualities of conflict and reflecting what they mean for possible EU responses. In its entirety, the exercise helped to comprehensively explore what future circumstances

may mean for conflict environments, mission mandates, and the capabilities required for civilian CS-DP. The following selection of lessons learnt aims to illustrate the ways this method can encourage creative thinking and provoke fresh insight.

Table 2: Capability areas identified by the test run

Category	Capability Areas
Feira- and Compact-Related Capabilities	Preventing and countering violent extremism, hybrid threats, protection of cultural heritage, cyber security and defence, combatting organized crime, civil-military cooperation (esp. in maritime sphere), civil administration
New Capabilities	Employing and protecting space-based technology, improving societal resilience and trust-building (esp. regarding disinformation campaigns and fake news, starting with digital literacy), deradicalizing and reintegrating returning foreign fighters, accommodating climate change-induced damage or resource shortages, health care capacity building and containing fast-spreading illness
Core Mission Functions	Reliable fact-finding, sensitive strategic communication with difficult host state, robust command structures, independent digital infrastructure, measures to protect mission personnel against health risks and surveillance, separate political steering cell to facilitate flow of information and provide targeted information about all relevant EU activities to decision-making bodies, investigation and knowledge management teams that rotate between missions and the EEAS to evaluate progress and shortfalls (to help inform mandate alterations and implement lessons learnt)

The most robust findings derive from trends which emerge from two or even all three scenarios. These reveal conflict characteristics which will likely play out in the future. As expected, one of the trends concerned cyber-related issues, which seems to underline the case for cyber security to be mandated to the EU as a specific new task, allowing it to establish stand-alone “CSDP cyber missions.” Threats to other infrastructures also occurred in all three scenarios, highlighting their vulnerability to disruption. In our scenario of urban conflict, the conflict parties manipulated the supply grids for electricity and water to apply pressure to parts of the city’s population. At the same time, activist hackers induced tactical black-outs across the whole city to disable the use of Chinese face-recognition software and make civil disobedience possible. In fact, cyber security also needs to be looked at as a cross-cutting issue for all CSDP missions. As a result, the scenarios provide an overall lesson about EU capabilities: In a crisis in the EU’s neighborhood, the power over public infrastructure is likely to be contested by citizens and outside powers alike. This can cause particular difficulties if the host state is collusive with actors who are hostile to the mission, for instance criminal organization or militias. CSDP missions therefore

will need infrastructure resources to make them independent of host state basic services.

A second theme was the need for reliable information about events in the conflict zone. For this, missions would have to rely heavily on unmanned aerial vehicles³ and satellites beyond the capabilities of SatCen, the EEAS’s agency which analyses aerial imagery. Missions would moreover need to protect and defend these drones and satellites against the growing reach of a potentially large number of conflict participants as personified by the crowded cast of actors in the Western Balkan scenario. When power is dispersed or distributed asymmetrically in this way, actors are unlikely to use the “weapons of the weak” (satellite jamming, cyber-attacks, or the use of ransom software) to try to win the war; they will instead attempt to drive up the costs for their adversaries by drawing out the hostilities. This underlines the need for mission leaders to not only monitor aerial shots, but also use the EU presence on the ground to gain relevant insights. At present, and even with support from Europol, few missions would be able to track movements of assets, money flows, and cross-border crime networks. Nor could they engage in forensic tasks.⁴

³ The [OSCE SMM Ukraine](#) was the first to employ such technology to improve monitoring capability.

⁴ This is where civilian crisis management missions could contribute to a truly integrated approach as mission staff can investigate whether it is necessary and feasible for other EU bodies to become engaged, recommend concrete actions, and monitor their success. Such an approach can help to avoid mission creep and respect the respective competencies, e.g., of the JHA or Frontex. In this particular scenario, the return of foreign fighters from Syria and Iraq complicated the situation further, which serves to illustrate the need for investigating all potential fields of action. This includes civil-military cooperation for instance in the area of deradicalization and reintegration.

A third theme was the political dimension of reliable information in a contested environment. Our scenario in the Arctic revealed the difficulties of relying on satellite information when other global players have an interest in obfuscating the facts: After a submarine collision leading to a radioactive spill, there is little reliable information on liability and ecological consequences. The conflict escalates from a discovery of illicitly stored nuclear waste to attempts to block access to satellites, transit routes, and fishing areas. Having independent and robust space-related capabilities then is key to the EU's information security. Information also played a crucial role in our urban conflict scenario, where opposing groups and the government disseminate propaganda and deep fakes online. The mission cannot rely on its host and partner for accurate information; it has to do its own fact-finding while respecting its role both as guest and as impartial outsider. The latter indicates the importance of a strategic communication capability when dealing with collusive states.

Resilience is also crucial; that was the fourth theme. To keep the conflict from spilling over – for instance from city to countryside – de-escalation in the hub(s) of the conflict is imperative. This illustrates how important reliable public services are for the host country's administration and wider population. At the same time, more resilience regarding disinformation campaigns, fake news, and propaganda is needed. To be able to identify trustworthy information is a core mission requirement; teaching this should be part of a mission's community outreach and capacity building program. Appointing disinformation specialists to each CSDP mission, as was just announced, makes for a good first step.

Selecting appropriate and robust technology for mission tasks is another challenge as it must fit the mandated tasks, adapt to the crisis environment (topography, climate, etc.), and allow interoperability between all EU components. On a side note, not all mission staff working this field need to be deployed to the host country. This fact may help recruitment and thereby mitigate a persistent problem plaguing civilian CSDP. It could even contribute to a mission's resilience to have personnel working from different networks and bases. In one of the scenarios, a conflict party committed a cyberattack inside the EU in an attempt to deter European action. With more decentralized resources, such a move would not have blindsided the mission.

Fifth, it does not matter if some details remain unplanned. In fact, learning to improvise when playing

out a scenario can help actors cope with unforeseen developments during a mission. Such an experience provides valuable training and helps reveal the strengths and weaknesses of the personnel involved.

CONCLUSIONS

With geopolitical players ready to fill any vacuum the EU may leave in future crises, host-countries will only accept and support EU missions which can offer appropriate and effective capabilities. These take years to build and test and must therefore be planned and ordered long in advance. Still, not all capability areas defined by our scenarios for 2030 are new. This shows how useful the Feira process continues to be and how important it is to implement the initiatives agreed in the Civilian CSDP Compact. Our test run yielded valuable insights and fresh perspectives into the capabilities envisioned by the compact and beyond. It also allowed us to recognize new requirements for core mission functions.

The scenario exercise outlined in this paper offers an opportunity to gain information about future demand and supply for EU civilian crisis management. It also helps to bring together different elements such as strategic guidance and operational implementation. The speculative nature of scenarios makes it possible to escape groupthink, learn from dry runs, and prepare for possible future events in an environment of uncertainty.

Given the challenges of planning for missions in 2030, the EU would be well advised to set up such a strategic capability planning division within the EE-AS. Based on the guidelines from the Strategic Compass, it could continually update the requirements for civilian capabilities, plan for different contingencies, and adjust to a plurality of trends. A proper monitoring scheme could ensure an overview of existing capabilities and gaps at any given time.

To further refine the method, scenarios should be revisited multiple times with experts from different capability areas, including, for instance, experts for emerging and disruptive technologies or issue areas from the mini-concepts. This would lead to more realism and add to the robustness of the results. Together with CSDP experts, these specialists can also assess which capabilities may be suitable for a CSDP mission and which should be assigned to different EU instruments. Civilian CSDP has its limits, and the EU should properly ascertain where they lie.

The reliance on speculative scenarios as opposed to trend analysis or horizon-scanning leaves certain questions unanswered. Capability planners need a high level of detail. What skill sets are needed for mission staff? Which technical equipment? How should member states coordinate their contributions? What is the attitude behind the mandate, and what does it mean for implementation? How can personnel be trained for cross-cutting capabilities or for capabilities outside a specific job description? How can member states be incentivized to make highly qualified personnel available for EU missions? How can the value added be measured and communicated to increase attractiveness? These questions, and others, mark the beginning of the next step: translating the lessons learnt from the use of speculative scenarios into tangible results for crisis management in 2030.

ABOUT THIS POLICY BRIEF

In autumn 2020, the DGAP and EUISS conducted expert workshops on the future of conflict for Europe. Participants from across the continent were invited to develop forward-looking scenarios for crises that have an impact on European security until 2030 and derive capabilities for civilian crisis management. The project was funded by the German Federal Foreign Office.

The organizers would like to thank all participants for bringing their expertise and experience to the table and engaging in this discussion. We extend our sincere gratitude for the time and energy invested throughout the workshop series and exploring this method with us.



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