



EU-AFRICA PARTNERSHIP ON PEACE AND SECURITY: A QUEST FOR A STRATEGIC CULTURE?

*Andreea DINCĂ**

Amidst the complex, dynamic and highly relevant landscape of the European Union (EU) - Africa relations, the partnership on peace and security constitutes a pivotal aspect, with the EU being an active supporter and substantial funder of national, regional and continental initiatives within this domain.

While the vast majority of current research and debates frame the EU-Africa partnership on peace and security within the context of global power competition, this article explores the potential explanatory role of the strategic culture approach on this topic. Therefore, it looks at the main events and trends influencing the partnership after 2022, assessing whether the EU's security actions in Africa reflect a coherent strategic culture.

The article concludes that the strategic culture framework helps understand European preferences, constraints and effectiveness regarding its security behaviour in Africa.

Keywords: *security; CSDP; EU-Africa relations; strategic culture; strategic compass; APSA.*

Introduction

Although the EU and the African continent have been historically connected since the establishment of the European Economic Community (EEC), the EU-Africa partnership on peace and security was formalised in 2002 with the establishment of the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA). Moreover, since 2003, when the first Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) mission was launched, a vast number of such missions and operations have been deployed in Africa. These work

** Andreea DINCĂ is a Doctoral Fellow within the European Security and Defence College, and a PhD Candidate at the West University of Timisoara, Romania.
E-mail: andreea11@gmail.com*



in close cooperation and coordination with a multitude of tools and instruments from the EU toolbox aimed at tackling conflicts and crises on the continent.

Given Africa's proximity, historical ties and particular significance for Europe, but also due to the fact that Africa persists as the continent most afflicted by conflicts, with approximately 30% of its population residing in areas affected by conflict, the EU has placed a strong emphasis on the peace and security dimension of its partnership with the continent (4 Sub-Saharan Africa: Regional Analysis, 2023).

In recent years, the global security architecture has encountered critical changes, being affected by a series of events and trends, impacting the security dynamics within the African continent and the overall EU-Africa partnership on peace and security. Globally, following the COVID-19 pandemic, with the war in Ukraine, and more recently, the war between Israel and Hamas, we have witnessed an intensification of global power competition. These events have had a global impact, explicitly affecting the security dynamics across various dimensions within the African continent.

Against this backdrop, characterised by a multiplication of international crises, another trend can be acknowledged when it comes to the African security landscape: the proliferation of international actors whose strategic interests converge towards a more pronounced involvement in managing the security dynamics within the African continent: China, Turkey, India or the Gulf countries (Ekman, 2023; Mishra, 2023; Yaşar, 2022). Moreover, from a regional perspective, the EU-Africa partnership on peace and security has been influenced during recent years by the broader dynamics of EU-Africa relations. These include how the COVID-19 pandemic was managed and the extended post-Cotonou negotiations. Furthermore, the EU-Africa partnership on peace and security has been influenced by internal dynamics. From a European perspective, adopting the Strategic Compass and establishing an innovative financial instrument, the European Peace Facility (EPF), has signalled a shift in the EU's overall approach to international security, influencing its security actions in Africa (Dincă 2023). From an African perspective, the series of coups that the continent has experienced during recent years have severely affected regional and continental dynamics, with Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger leaving the ECOWAS bloc (Obasi 2023).

In light of these multifaceted developments and their crucial implications on the EU-Africa partnership on peace and security, it becomes signally essential to delve more profoundly into these dynamics and assess them from various angles. While current research and debates acknowledge the significance of the topic of the EU-Africa partnership on peace and security, the vast majority of studies assess it from a global power competition perspective (Lanfranchi, 2023; Matissek, 2020; Tadesse Shiferaw & Di Ciommo, 2023). Moreover, a plethora of studies and policy briefs assess the topic while drawing attention to the internal security dimensions within the African continent and their impact on the EU-Africa partnership on peace



and security and the future of CSDP in Africa, pointing towards a crisis of EU's security actions in Africa (Wilén 2023). Therefore, the strategic culture approach is an innovative and comprehensive framework used to explain current and future dynamics beyond historical contingency.

The importance of the strategic culture framework becomes even more significant with the adoption of the Strategic Compass in 2022, whose aim was not only to operationalise the concepts and proposals from the previous EU strategic documents but also to foster the development of a European strategic culture (A Strategic Compass for Security and Defence 2022). Consequently, this paper aims at assessing the EU-Africa relations on peace and security from the perspective of the strategic culture approach. Thus, the article focuses on examining EU security initiatives in Africa from 2022 until the present to evidence whether EU security behaviour in Africa during this timeframe reveals the notion of strategic culture.

By deploying a qualitative design and using primary and secondary data, this study aims to answer the following questions: to what extent do external global events shape the strategic culture underpinning the EU-Africa partnership on peace and security; how do internal dynamics within the African continent affect the EU's strategic culture and security behaviour in Africa; how does the EU's adoption of the Strategic Compass in 2022 influence and foster its strategic culture in Africa; to what extent does the EU security behaviour towards the African continent reflect the emergence of a strategic culture; to what extent do CSDP missions and operations in Africa reveal a thematic consistency and behavioural patterns that are aligned with the EU strategic compass desideratum? Furthermore, this article is grounded in two primary arguments. Firstly, we acknowledge the emergence of a strategic culture guiding the EU-Africa partnership on peace and security. This emergence was catalysed by the adoption and implementation of the Strategic Compass. Secondly, the EU-Africa partnership on peace and security and the overall EU-Africa relations will benefit from an articulated EU strategic culture that arises from colonial approaches and fosters a renewed partnership.

Subsequently, this article comprises four main sections. The first one briefly sets the research context, highlighting the main aspects related to the EU-Africa partnership on peace and security, further highlighting the debate concerning the strategic culture approach and its interpretation in a European context after the adoption of the Strategic Compass. The second section delves into the empirical data, focusing on the EU security behaviour in Africa from 2022 until the present time. The third section discusses the findings, highlighting the main opportunities and challenges for the EU's security actions in Africa. Lastly, the article concludes by stressing the significance of the strategic culture framework in understanding the EU's security behaviour in Africa while suggesting areas for future research to enhance the EU-Africa partnership on peace and security.



1. EU-Africa Partnership on Peace and Security: Strategic Level

1.1. EU-Africa partnership on peace and security: context

When assessing the relationship between the EU and the African continent in terms of peace and security, it is imperative to adopt a comprehensive approach that encompasses multiple dimensions, thereby capturing the intricate nature of this interaction.

From an institutionalist perspective, the partnership reflects the institutional developments that the EU and the African Union (AU) have undergone. These became particularly pronounced starting in the early 2000s when APSA was established. However, the EU-Africa partnership on peace and security is connected to the overall EU-Africa relations framework. This framework has had an evolutionary character, being shaped not only by the EU-Africa agreements but also by the EU's and AU's internal institutional evolution.

The EU-Africa partnership was formally institutionalised in 2000 during the first Africa-EU Summit in Cairo, and it was guided by the Joint Africa-EU Strategy (JAES) signed in 2007 during the Lisbon Summit (Haastrup and Mah 2020). In 2022, during the EU-AU Summit in Brussels, the document A Joint Vision for 2030 is being adopted, a document in which “a renewed and enhanced cooperation on peace and security” is highly emphasised (6th European Union - African Union Summit: A Joint Vision for 2030. 2022).

By this partnership, the EU is mobilising a wide array of tools and instruments to manage the African continent's security dynamics. Acknowledging the security-development nexus, the climate-security nexus, and the challenges posed by illegal migration or disinformation campaigns, the EU employs an integrated approach to security issues in Africa, guided by the principles of human security (Staeger and Gwatiwa 2021). However, the EU's most notable contribution to managing the security dynamics and challenges in Africa is represented by the CSDP missions and operations. Currently, out of 24 CSDP missions and operations, 12 are being deployed in Africa. These will be further explored in the second section of the paper.

Having briefly introduced the context of the EU-Africa partnership on peace and security, the next subsection of the article introduces the overarching framework of the paper, namely the strategic culture one.

1.2. EU and Strategic Culture

Strategic culture is a framework that has been the topic of various debates, with a shared understanding of this approach highlighting its conceptual and theoretical elasticity (Schmidt and Zyla 2013, 2). Moreover, the same authors emphasise that because strategic culture is not strictly defined within any particular international relations theory, it has the potential to yield novel and interdisciplinary insights and results (Schmidt and Zyla 2013, 2).



Strategic culture first appeared as a concept within the context of the Cold War in the 70s, being used in order to explain states' behaviour and decision-making through the lens of culture (Biava, Drent and Herd 2011). In time, the concept evolved, being the subject of debates and even dichotomies about the relation between culture and political action. While recognising that some authors classify the development of this concept into three primary debates or "generations", this paper examines the concept of strategic culture within a European context, particularly concerning the evolution of the EU's security and defence policies, with a focus on the period following 2000 (Schmidt and Zyla 2013, 2). Furthermore, theoretical debates about the nature of the interplay between culture and political action were popular in the early 1990s, thus influencing the evolution of the concept within European milieu (Gray, 1999; Johnston, 1995). However, strategic culture as a framework transcends a mere causal relationship between culture and state decisions, offering the potential to explain state relationships more comprehensively.

Strategic culture can be defined in multiple ways. However, the common denominator of these definitions is that "traditions, values, attitudes, patterns of behaviour, habits, symbols, achievements and historical experiences shape strategic behaviour and actual policy-making" (Toje 2005). With a broad understanding of the concept, it becomes thus evident that the concept lacks certain analytical rigour, as noted by some authors (Biava, Drent and Herd 2011). However, with the appropriate delimitations, the strategic culture approach can offer essential insights, even more so in a European context.

In order to explore and understand the concept of strategic culture in a European context, we need to assess the evolution of this concept within EU milieu. Moreover, since the concept of strategic culture is explicitly mentioned in the Strategic Compass, it is necessary to assess the evolution of the EU's external identity before 2022.

Especially after the establishment of the CSDP and then after the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty, the European Union entered a new stage in which it became an essential player within the global security architecture by deploying a significant number of CSDP missions and operations. A vast majority of the authors who have approached this topic argue that the power that the European Union projects outside its borders has a soft character (Duchenne, 1972; Manners, 2002; Manners, 2015; Meyer, 2006). Ian Manners (2002; 2006; 2015) starts from the argumentation of Duchene (1972; 1973) and introduces the concept of "normative power Europe" in order to promote the idea of Europe as a normative power and not as a civilising one in world politics.

Monteleone (2016) discusses the emergence of a European strategic culture oriented towards *realpolitik* and able to define the Union's status as a global actor on the international stage. In his argument, the author uses the opinion of Rogers (2009), who posits the idea that the European Union has had a grand strategy since its



inception, first being oriented towards a civilian power of a soft type, later focusing on aspirations related to the hard power zone. Meyer (2006), in his turn, explores how the strategic cultures of four European countries at that time members of the EU - the United Kingdom, France, Germany, Poland - evolved in the period after the end of the Cold War. Although Member States have to harmonise their various strategic cultures, the conclusion reached is that there is a normative convergence regarding the European strategic culture, consequently witnessing the emergence of what Meyer (2006) calls “Humanitarian Power Europe”, in contradiction with the neutrality promoted by a possible “Helvetian Europe”, or the pursuit of a global agenda of “Global Power Europe”. The traits of the security culture of “Humanitarian Power Europe” are given by the convergence in terms of risk tolerance, resort to force, or support the adoption of missions/operations whose mandate does not go beyond the scope of humanitarian interventions (Meyer, 2006).

In a more recent article, Manners (2006) reconsidered the idea of “normative power Europe” in order to respond to new challenges and to mark a change in the security culture of the Union. Thus, starting from the idea of peace met in Duchene’s (1972) works, Manners (2006) advances the idea of “sustainable peace” that emphasises addressing the cause at the expense of symptoms. The author uses the definition given by Peck (1998, 15-16) for sustainable peace, which implies using both short-term problem-solving and long-term structural solutions to conflict prevention through integrating human security concerns and promoting good governance. Referring to the security culture of the EU, Manners (2006) concludes that it took a distinct turn with the adoption of the European Security Strategy (EES) in 2003, focusing now not only on the normative power but on an entire set of tools designed to provide the Union with the ability to act more robustly.

Although the European Union tended to be conceptualised by a vast majority of authors as a “normative power”, “quiet superpower”, “civilising power”, “humanitarian power”, or “civil power”, in the context of advancing the CSDP, more specifically after the adoption of the Strategic Compass and with the ongoing war in Ukraine, the EU’s level of ambition gains new momentum. Therefore, as mentioned explicitly within the text of the Strategic Compass, the concept of strategic culture has become increasingly significant.

Against this backdrop, some authors have explored the framework of strategic culture in relation to CSDP. The vast majority of research conducted before 2022 on the topic is mainly reserved when it comes to developing a military doctrine for the CSDP (Freedman, 2004; Rynning, 2003). Biava et al. (2011) explored the concept in relation to the EU and concluded that the EU’s strategic culture has a broad vision of security at its core, referring to the integrated approach to external conflicts and crises.



1.3. Strategic Compass and strategic culture

With the evolution of the global security environment, the European Union has focused on responding to new challenges in this field. Following the launch of the ESS in 2003, the European Union Global Strategy (EUGS) in 2016, in 2020, during the German presidency of the European Council, the *Strategic Compass* was launched.

Preceded by a threat analysis, the document was formally adopted one month after Russia's war against Ukraine started. This event catalysed the adoption of the strategic compass, significantly shaping its content (EEAS Press Team 2023). Essentially, its text focuses on four main pillars (act, secure, invest and partner) and advances over 80 concrete actions in these domains. Moreover, the overall goal of the Strategic Compass was that of fostering a European strategic culture. The path to achieving this objective was facilitated by the development of a comprehensive threat analysis and extensive debates among EU Member States. These discussions aimed at reaching a common understanding of threats and challenges and the strategies to address them (EEAS Press Team 2023).

While acknowledging the return of power politics and the danger that multilateralism might face in such a context, the Strategic Compass provides a common understanding of the strategic environment that the EU is facing. Furthermore, it assesses the current security environment as being “more volatile, complex and fragmented than ever, due to multi-layered threats”, identifying the following threats: “hybrid tactics, cyberattacks and foreign information manipulation and interference, economic and energy coercion, an aggressive nuclear rhetoric” as well as “terrorism, violent extremism, organised crime, instrumentalisation of irregular migration, arms proliferation and the progressive weakening of the arms control architecture” (A Strategic Compass for Security and Defence 2022). Thus, one can observe that the definition of security has significantly broadened, with an accent made on hybrid tactics.

The Strategic Compass highlights the players, interests and threats within the EU strategic environment. Concerning Africa, the Strategic Compass identifies ongoing conflicts, poor governance and terrorism as major threats to European security. At the same time, the document points explicitly to regions dealing with challenging security dynamics that need close attention: the Sahel, Central Africa, the Gulf of Guinea, the Horn of Africa and the Mozambique Channel (A Strategic Compass for Security and Defence 2022). A distinguished feature of the Strategic Compass concerning Africa is the emphasis on hybrid threats, namely the instrumentalisation of migrants, disinformation campaigns and the presence of mercenaries groups such as Wagner. Within all these areas, CSDP missions or operations are being deployed, and the Strategic Compass provides concrete measures and actions concerning crisis management.



The “act pillar” from the Strategic Compass focuses on crisis management missions and operations. Its main aim is reinforcing existing CSDP missions and operations by providing them with more robust and flexible mandates backed by a more rapid decision-making process and financial means. The emphasis is being placed on the effectiveness of CSDP missions and operations, and further cooperation with European-led ad hoc missions and operations serving the EU interests being advanced as a possibility. Furthermore, establishing the EPF is presented as an innovative financial framework aiming to bolster CSDP’s effectiveness.

Another distinctive feature of the EU security identity is its commitment to multilateralism. This feature is reinforced throughout the text of the Strategic Compass. However, the document places a strong emphasis on partnerships with like-minded actors. Besides reinforcing the already existing strategic partnerships with NATO or the partnerships with the UN, the OSCE, the AU, ASEAN, LAS or GCC, the EU seeks to engage in more robust security partnerships with African partners such as the Regional Economic Communities (RECs) (ECOWAS, SADC, and IGAD) (A Strategic Compass for Security and Defence 2022). Furthermore, tailored bilateral partnerships with some countries are prioritised based on shared values and common interests.

In order to assess the development of the EU strategic culture concerning the EU-Africa partnership on peace and security within the Strategic Compass, we can summarise its strategic goals and aims for the region in five significant dimensions. Firstly, hybrid threats are highlighted. Secondly, existing CSDP missions and operations mandates are subject to revision. Thirdly, the new financial instrument, the EPF, allows for more predictable and flexible financing, thus enhancing capacity building and effectiveness. Fourthly, closer operational ties with RECs are being developed, and security initiatives led by third countries are being financed. Lastly, the commitment to multilateralism in tackling security crises in complex operational environments is being reinforced.

After briefly introducing the context of the EU-Africa partnership on peace and security, conceptualising the strategic culture framework within the EU context and its operationalisation within the Strategic Compass, we will explore the EU-Africa security landscape after 2022 and until the present.

2. EU-Africa Partnership on Peace and Security 2022 - Present

The EU’s engagement in Africa within the security domain comprises several lines of action. CSDP missions and operations are the most notable ones. AU-led Peace Support Operations, including RECs peace operations represent the second line of action. The third line of action is represented by EPF assistance measures providing bilateral support to African partner countries. These three lines of action will be further explored in the current section of the article.



2.1. CSDP missions and operations in Africa 2022-present

Currently, out of 24 CSDP missions and operations, 12 are being deployed in Africa: five civilian missions, four military missions, two naval operations and one modular initiative under the CSDP framework that combines military and civilian components.

In order to strengthen the CSDP civilian missions, the EU has adopted in 2023 a new CSDP Compact, consisting of specific guidelines, commitments and lines of action grouped around four pillars, similar to the Strategic Compass ones (act, secure, invest, partner) (EUROPEAN UNION COMMON SECURITY AND DEFENCE POLICY CIVILIAN CSDP COMPACT. Towards more effective civilian missions 2023).

EUBAM Libya has undergone a two-year mandate extension in June 2023. At the same time, the mission's objective was amended from "supporting the Libyan authorities to develop capacity for enhancing the security of Libya's land, sea and air borders in the short term and to develop a broader IBM strategy in the long term" to "enhancing the capacity of the relevant Libyan authorities and agencies to manage Libya's borders, to fight cross-border crime, including human trafficking and migrant smuggling, and to counter terrorism" (Council of the European Union, 2013; Council of the European Union, 2023).

EUAM RCA has also undergone a two-year mandate extension in July 2022. The adopted Council decision introduces a new strategic objective of the mission, namely the support of the strategic communication aimed at promoting European values and exposing human rights violations by foreign forces (Council of the European Union 2022).

EUCAP Mali's mandate was extended for two years on January 10th, 2023, with an additional objective similar to that of EUAM RCA: the support of the strategic communication aimed at promoting European values and exposing human rights violations by foreign forces (Council of the European Union 2023).

EUCAP Niger has undergone a two-year mandate extension on September 9th 2022. While the budget allocated for this period was set to 72 million euros, an additional mission objective was added, namely the development and implementation of a communication strategy aimed at promoting European values in Niger (Council of the European Union 2022).

EUCAP Somalia's mandate was extended for two years on December 13, 2022, while the mission's objectives remained the same (Council of the European Union 2022).

Moving on to the other spectrum of CSDP action in Africa, military missions, three such missions are currently being deployed on the African continent.

EUTM Somalia's mandate has been extended in December 2022 for another two years. The added objective for the new mandate consists of "supporting the development of a Somali-owned Training System" with the final aim of handing over



the training activity to Somali National Army (SNA) by the end of 2024 (Council of the European Union 2022). However, in 2023, through the EPF, the SNA received non-lethal and lethal military equipment, a measure that further operationalises EUTM Somalia's mandate (European Commission 2023).

EUTM RCA was established in 2016 to address the security situation in the Central African Republic (CAR) (Council of the European Union 2020). In 2021, the mission suspended its training activities due to suspicions of trained Central African Armed Forces (FACA) members fighting alongside the Wagner group (Reuters 2021). The Council extended the mandate of EUTM RCA for two consecutive years in July 2022 and in 2023, adding an article according to which the mission will be terminated on September 19th, 2024, subject to a strategic assessment led by the Political Security Committee (Council of the European Union 2023). During this time, the mission has kept its strategic advice pillar to the Ministry of Defence of the CAR and to the FACA General Staff. It has restrained the training one to non-operational domains (European Union Training Mission in Central African Republic 2021).

EUTM Mozambique was established in 2021 with the aim of training and supporting the FADM (Mozambique Defence Armed Forces) in “protecting the civilian population and restoring safety and security in the Cabo Delgado province” (European Union Training Mission in Mozambique 2022). Its mandate was extended until 2026, and at the same time, it is pivoted towards an assistance and advisory mission, transforming itself into EU Military Assistance Mission Mozambique (EUMAM Mozambique) as of September 1st, 2024 (Council of the European Union 2024).

Furthermore, there are currently two ongoing naval operations, EUNAVFOR ATALANTA and EUNAVFOR MED IRINI.

In December 2008, the first, the EUNAVFOR Atlanta, was launched as part of a then comprehensive approach of the European Union to the Somali crisis in which piracy was also included. This operation was the Union's short-term response to the Somali crisis. At the same time, in addition to deterring, preventing and repressing acts of piracy, the operation aims to protect UN World Food Programme (WFP) ships delivering humanitarian aid to Somalia and ships transiting Somali territorial waters. At the end of 2022, the operation's mandate has been extended for a two-year time while keeping its central executive and non-executive tasks, and the area of operation has been changed from the “Somali coast” to the West Indian Ocean and the Red Sea (Council of the European Union 2022).

EUNAVFOR Med Irini was launched in March 2020, having as a primary task enforcing the UN arms embargo on Libya. The operation's mandate has been extended twice, the latest extension ending in 2025 (Council of the European Union, 2023).

The latest mission to be deployed within the African continent, EU SDI Gulf of Guinea, has a regional scope of improving stability and resilience of the northern borders of four countries: Cote d'Ivoire, Ghana, Togo and Benin. The



mission's mandate combines capacity building of security and defence forces tasks with operational training for the same forces and "support trust-building between civil society and defence forces" while having a modular and flexible approach in implementing these tasks (Council of the European Union 2023).

Although still ongoing at the time this article was written, the European Union Military Partnership Mission in Niger (EUMPM) Niger will end on June 30 2024. This decision was made by the Political and Security Committee due to the challenging political situation in the country (Council of the EU 2024).

2.2. AU-led Peace Support Operations

Currently, there are ten ongoing AU-led peace operations (PSOs), three of which are AU-mandated, while seven are led by RECs or other regional organisations (G5 Sahel, Lake Chad Basin Commission) and supported by the AU (Allen 2023). With the establishment of the EPF, the PSOs with a military component were financed through this new financial instrument.

During its first two years of implementation, there have been various assistance measures supporting the military components of four AU-led PSOs: 275 million euros for the African Union Transition Mission in Somalia (ATMIS), 20 million euros for the Multi-National Joint Task Force against Boko Haram, 35 million euros for the G5 Sahel Joint Force and 15 million euros for the Southern African Development Community Mission in Mozambique (SAMIM). Additionally, two assistance measures totalling 730 million euros as a general programme to support peace and defence initiatives led by the AU until 2024 (Timeline - European Peace Facility 2024).

Although in June 2023, the Council adopted the decision to extend with 3,5 billion euros the budget of the EPF, the vast majority of the funds (83%) went to supporting Ukraine, while both regional and national measures in Africa counted for 14% of the total budget (Council of the EU 2023) (Bergmann 2023).

Against this backdrop, the United Nations Security Council adopted in December 2023 the resolution 2719, through which it agreed to finance AU-led PSOs (United Nations Security Council 2023).

2.3. Bilateral support to African partner countries

One of the key innovations introduced by the establishment of the EPF is its second pillar, which offers flexibility in bilaterally funding national initiatives in the peace and security domain. Initially, the measure was implemented in Mozambique, the beneficiaries being the units trained by EUTM Mozambique. However, in July 2022, the Council approved an assistance measure worth 25 million euros to support the Nigerien Armed Forces in building a training centre and an operating base (Council of the EU 2022). Still in 2022, the Council has adopted a new decision to



grant assistance measures to the armed forces of the Islamic Republic of Mauritania and to Rwanda Defence Force in Mozambique (Council of the EU 2022).

In 2023, an assistance measure was granted to the 31st Rapid Reaction Brigade of the Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, implemented through the Belgian Ministry of Defence (Council of the EU 2023). From September 2023 – to April 2024, the vast majority of EPF bilateral assistance measures have been granted to countries in West Africa in support of the Beninese Armed Forces, navies of Ghana and Cameroon, Ghana Armed Forces and Armed Forces of Côte d'Ivoire (Timeline - European Peace Facility 2024).

This section of the article provided empirical data for the EU's actions in Africa within the peace and security domain after the Strategic Compass was adopted. The following section will discuss the findings against the strategic culture conceptualisation established in the first section of the article, backgrounded on the empirical data focused on the EU lines of action in Africa since 2022.

3. Discussion: EU-Africa Partnership on Peace and Security and EU Strategic Culture

The EU-Africa partnership on peace and security represents an issue of critical importance, especially in the context of global power competition, the rapidly changing international landscape, and the challenging dynamics of African security.

The Strategic Compass is a relevant strategic document whose aim is, among others, to foster a European strategic culture. Therefore, this article aimed to assess the EU's involvement in Africa within the peace and security domain after the adoption of the Strategic Compass. Moreover, this paper's hypothesis was that the EU security behaviour in Africa during this timeframe reflected common patterns, shared beliefs and strategic preferences that represent the features of a strategic culture. The findings of this article partially validate the hypothesis. Therefore, even if the strategic culture framework represents an analytical lens capable of producing innovative insights, some nuances and limitations have to be addressed concerning this approach. This will be further demonstrated.

Operationalising the main features of the EU security behaviour and aims within this domain as stated in the strategic compass text, we concluded that these could be categorised into five main sections.

The first feature, namely the critical importance of countering hybrid threats, has been addressed directly by the three civilian missions in the Sahel and Central Africa. Thus, these missions' mandates were added a new strategic objective of the mission, namely the support of the strategic communication aimed at promoting European values and exposing human rights violations by foreign forces. This



was the first step in counteracting disinformation campaigns in those operational environments. Moreover, on the websites of all CSDP missions and operations, an information factsheet about the EU Hybrid Toolbox is posted, thus mainstreaming the importance of countering hybrid threats.

During the analysed timeframe, all CSDP missions and operations have undergone mandate extensions. Analysing and comparing the previous mandates against the new ones, we can conclude that with a few exceptions, their revision does not reflect significant changes but mere duration extensions. However, one should stress that the operational environment's security and political contexts influence the mandate revisions, these being established on a case-by-case scenario. Therefore, EUBAM Libya's mandate has been more focused towards tackling security threats that affect the EU's interests, while the civilian missions' mandates from the Sahel and Central Africa have been adjusted so they can better answer to urgent threats in the form of disinformation campaigns against the EU's values and interests.

Another feature of the EU security behaviour is predictable and flexible financing that can enhance CSDP activities' effectiveness and capacity building. This is reflected by the establishment of the EPF, and the assistance measures channelled through it in support of troops trained by EUTM Mozambique and EUTM Somalia. Although through these assistance measures, some capabilities shortfalls of the EUTM missions have been mitigated, and the missions' mandates were operationalised, there is a question mark regarding the future of these missions on the African continent. While EUTM RCA has restrained the training to non-operational domains and the mission will end in 2024, EUTM Somalia envisages the handing over of the training activity to SNA by the end of 2024, and EUTM Mozambique will pivot towards an assistance mission in September 2024. These findings indicate that EUTM missions, once the flagship of CSDP, need a reassessment.

Fourthly, the Strategic Compass advances closer operational ties with RECs and the possibility of bilaterally financing security initiatives led by third countries. As the findings showed, this measure was implemented within the African continent in various contexts. Usually, the assistance measures follow the "train and equip" principle and are intended to enable these partners to autonomously manage their security challenges, thereby contributing to regional stability and reducing the necessity for direct EU intervention. Additionally, these initiatives are complemented by political, diplomatic, and development support and other instruments from the EU foreign policy toolbox. The EU has a broad understanding of security and thus ensures that security assistance is aligned with broader political and economic development strategies.

Lastly, the commitment to multilateralism in tackling security crises in complex operational environments is reinforced throughout the text of the Strategic Compass. In practice, all CSDP missions and operations deployed in Africa closely cooperate



with international partners, while a significant number of mission personnel come from third countries.

The findings further point to the fact that the EU has a distinct feature: a broad understanding of security, just as Biava (2011) rightly pointed out. Moreover, by breaking the barrier of providing assistance measures consisting of lethal equipment to African partner countries – Niger – followed by Somalia, the EU is gradually focusing its engagement within the security domain towards Africa on military capacity-building (Council of the EU 2023). This gradual securitisation of the EU action in Africa marks a shift from the EU's projected image as a signally soft power (Duchenne, 1972; Manners, 2002; Manners, 2015; Meyer, 2006). However, this clear orientation towards securitisation and hard power in Africa does not contradict the normative character of the EU's identity, as these measures are integrated into a broader framework that prioritises human rights, democratic governance, and sustainable development. By balancing hard power with normative principles, the EU continues to promote an integrated approach to peace and security that addresses both immediate and long-term challenges.

The Strategic Compass marks a shift in the development of an EU strategic culture; however, assessing its implementation in a complex environment like the African one is still premature, as only two years have passed since its adoption. This points to a limitation of the current article. Nevertheless, this framework can be further used for longitudinal studies in order to capture the evolution of the EU strategic culture in relation to the EU-Africa peace and security partnership over an extended time. Another direction worth exploring for future studies is a comparative analysis with other regions where the EU is engaged in similar activities.

Conclusion

This article has examined the EU-Africa partnership on peace and security through the lens of the strategic culture approach, assessing the evolution of EU security actions in Africa following the adoption of the Strategic Compass in 2022. The strategic culture framework represents an alternative lens that enables a deep understanding of the EU's security behaviour in Africa while pointing to the preferences, constraints and degree of effectiveness of its actions in the security domain in Africa.

The findings point out the fact that even if, with the adoption of the Strategic Compass, the EU has made a significant step towards aligning its security actions with a strategic culture, its implementation remains in an incipient stage. This is partially due to the short time since the Strategic Compass was adopted and partially due to the evolving yet challenging security dynamics in Africa.



Concerning its CSDP missions and operations in Africa, several conclusions can be drawn. Firstly, especially in the Sahel, civilian missions are mostly kept as “boots on the ground”, their main aims are maintaining a presence and a relationship with local authorities. Secondly, the future of EUTM missions in Africa is questionable, pointing to a shift towards an advisory direction or a modular one, as EUTM Mozambique and EU SDI Gulf of Guinea establishment reveal.

Concerning the development of bilateral partnerships in the security domain, funded through assistance measures by the EPF, one can conclude that this constitutes the most profound change in the EU’s security behaviour towards Africa. Although after assistance measures are granted to a partner, EEAS carefully monitors that partner’s compliance with human rights, international humanitarian and arms export laws, highlighting the measures’ normative component, this signals a substantial shift towards a gradual securitisation of the EU action in Africa.

While acknowledging the importance of global security dynamics in shaping the EU-Africa security partnership and the internal security challenges affecting the African continent, the adoption of the Strategic Compass and the establishment of the European Peace Facility mark a shift in the articulation of a European strategic culture, thus shaping the EU’s strategic approach to security in Africa.

Despite its limitations concerning this topic, the strategic culture approach offers a promising framework for analysis of the EU-Africa partnership on peace and security, capable of producing innovative insights. While the EU continues to refine and advance its strategic identity, it becomes signally essential to develop a coherent and articulated strategic culture that will contribute to overcoming potential challenges and enhance its partnership with Africa. Moreover, the findings highlight the need for a more nuanced understanding of the EU-Africa partnership. This study underscores the importance of ongoing research and dialogue to strengthen this vital relationship, ultimately contributing to a more secure and stable African continent.

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