



*Executive summary*

# **Beyond pragmatism**

*Evaluation of Dutch policy on the  
Common Security and Defence Policy*

In recent years, the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) of the European Union (EU) has gained momentum. Increased threats around Europe, the imminent departure of the British from the EU and uncertainty about US security guarantees have led to growing awareness among EU Member States that Europe must take more responsibility for its own security. As a result, the importance of the EU as a player in security and defence has increased sharply. The EU Global Strategy of June 2016 resulted in the launch of various initiatives to strengthen European defence cooperation, in which the Netherlands is closely involved. The initiatives pushed to the fore strategic questions and discussions about the future of the CSDP, to which the Netherlands must formulate answers: What role should the EU play in the field of European security and defence? Where is the added value of the EU, and how does it relate to NATO? What civil and military capabilities are needed for these?

The Policy and Operations Evaluation Department (IOB) of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (BZ) has therefore carried out an evaluation of Dutch policy on the CSDP. The evaluation resulted in two reports:

1. The report *Pragmatisme voorbij* (Beyond pragmatism) examines the Dutch policy on the CSDP within the European security architecture. It focuses on four debates about: European strategic autonomy; 'A Europe that protects'; EU–NATO cooperation; and a European Military Headquarters/Military Planning and Conduct Capability (MPCC).
2. The report *De kloof gedicht?* (Has the gap been closed?) analyses Dutch policy on military and civilian capability development within the EU. It focuses on four instruments: the Coordinated Annual Defence Review (CARD), Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO), the European Defence Fund (EDF) and the Civilian Compact.

The main conclusions and recommendations of the evaluation are set out in this document. The rationale for these and more specific findings are set out in the individual reports, which are only in Dutch and can be found through the following link to the IOB-website:

<https://www.iob-evaluatie.nl/publicaties/rapporten/2020/07/16/evaluatie-gvdb-beleid>.

## 1. The Netherlands has not yet given substance to the role of the CSDP in the European security architecture and has left a number of strategic questions unanswered.

The Dutch Cabinet has left some key questions about the role and future of the CSDP largely unanswered. How autonomously should the EU be able to act and what type of missions and operations should it be able to carry out? How can the EU complement NATO? What collaboration should there be between the two organisations? What implications does this have for the management of EU missions and operations? The absence of answers to these strategic questions has negative consequences for internal policy development and external positioning, and thus for the influence of the Netherlands on the course of the CSDP, with the result that the Netherlands has placed itself in a reactive position. Moreover, because no agreement on a common vision of the CSDP has been reached at European level, it is not possible to translate political ambitions into the material and manpower required to achieve these ambitions. As a result, priorities for capability development are formulated generically and give too little direction.

### Recommendations for the Cabinet

- Make explicit the desired role of the EU in security and defence in relation to NATO. Give priority to the political discussion on this matter and define the tasks the EU should be able to perform (independently), including in relation to collective defence and deterrence. Define what the Netherlands means by European strategic autonomy and 'A Europe that protects'; make clear what consequences this interpretation has for EU–NATO cooperation and the management of EU missions and operations.

### Recommendations for the Ministries of Foreign Affairs and Defence

- Use the Strategic Compass to translate the political ambitions for the CSDP into concrete objectives for civilian and military capabilities (equipment, technology, manpower). Make explicit which steps must be taken in the medium term to achieve these objectives.

<sup>1</sup> Op Duits initiatief wordt gewerkt aan voorstellen voor een 'Strategisch Kompas', dat als doel heeft om het gat tussen de abstracte doelstellingen van de EU Global Strategy en concrete initiatieven zoals CARD, PESCO en het Europees Defensiefonds te overbruggen. De precieze invulling van dit kompas is nog onderwerp van discussie.

## 2. There is too little capacity for strategic reflection and for maintaining the leading role of the Netherlands in various CSDP dossiers.

The number of policymakers shaping Dutch CSDP policy is small, particularly at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Although the rapid development of the policy area means that the amount of work and the knowledge required for this work are constantly increasing, Foreign Affairs does not give priority to the CSDP in terms of staffing. The CSDP discussions in Brussels directly affect Dutch security interests. However, the number of FTEs available in the Ministry for the CSDP is insufficient to monitor rapid developments, fulfil a coordinating role and at the same time reflect on the strategic direction of the policy. The continuation of the pioneering role played by the Netherlands with regard to CARD, Pesco and the Civilian Compact is therefore at risk. There is also no high-level forum that explores strategic questions and scenarios and submits them to the Cabinet. The answers to these questions cannot be formulated solely by the policymakers directly involved. Instead, more involvement is required from both the Cabinet and Parliament.

### Recommendations for the Cabinet

- Ensure structural strategic discussions at high official level on security and defence issues. Use the Missions and Operations Steering Group for this discussion or create a new forum.
- Invest in the staffing capacity for the CSDP at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

### Recommendation for the Ministries of Foreign Affairs and Defence

- Invest in increasing knowledge of and debate on the development of the CSDP within ministries, Parliament and the wider public. The EU Days organised by the Ministry of Defence are a good example of such an investment.

## 3. The Netherlands is an influential player within the CSDP, but the implementation of initiatives in which it has played a pioneering role is not yet sufficiently on the political radar.

Despite limited staffing capacity and the strong international force field, the Netherlands has proved to be an enterprising player in the field of civil and military capability development. The Cabinet took the initiative in developing CARD, the Civilian Compact and the Pesco project to strengthen military mobility. This pioneering role has won the appreciation of international partners but has also raised expectations of a Dutch role in further developments. Both in the Netherlands and the EU, sustaining political interest in these initiatives is a challenge due to their specialist nature. However, without continued political pressure, implementation will grind to a halt. Therefore it is important for the Netherlands to continue to take the lead in the implementation phase too.

### Recommendations for the Ministries of Foreign Affairs and Defence

- Maintain the leading role of the Netherlands in the implementation of CARD, military mobility and the Civilian Compact. Map out how and when the Netherlands will be able to comply with the agreements made.
- Ensure that at political level, attention is paid to the implementation of the instruments. Ensure that in addition to technical experts, staff at senior official level from both ministries are involved, in order to safeguard political objectives and ensure political attention.

## 4. The Capability Development Plan, CARD, Pesco and the European Defence Fund are insufficiently harmonised.

Since the publication of the EU Global Strategy, initiatives to strengthen military capability development have followed in rapid succession. They do not always match each other well, which means that political objectives have not been logically translated into the human and material resources needed to achieve them. The EU Capability Development Plan gives too little direction, CARD presents an incomplete picture of national defence efforts, and political decision-making on these efforts is lacking. In addition, Pesco projects are still insufficiently focused on solving the biggest capacity shortfalls.

### Recommendations for the Cabinet

- Formulate cohesive Dutch policy on the CDP, CARD, Pesco and the European Defence Fund, using the Interdepartmental Coordination Group for European Defence Cooperation for this purpose.

### Recommendation for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs

- Increase the role of the Ministry in monitoring the coherence between the various initiatives and of Dutch policy on the initiatives.

