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EUROPEAN STRATEGIC AUTONOMY AND SMALL STATES' SECURITY

IN THE SHADOW OF POWER

Edited by
Giedrius Česnakas and Justinas Juozaitis



“In a world that is too often preoccupied with great power politics, this book is a much needed and timely contribution for understanding the other side of international relations, small states. It should be required reading for anyone wishing to examine contemporary European politics and security.”

Marc Ozawa, *NATO Defense College, Rome*

“By bringing together for the first time scholars from small states to write about European small states’ perceptions of, and engagements with, European strategic autonomy, this book addresses an important gap in the academic literature on European defence. It is a crucial introduction for those interested in the subject.”

Lukas Milevski, *Institute of History, Leiden University, the Netherlands*

“This monograph, in arguing that the concept of European strategic autonomy is both a challenge to and an opportunity for the national security interests of the small states of the EU, presents vital lessons for all small states facing the vicissitudes of Great Power assertiveness and aggression.”

Bernard Loo Fook Weng, *S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies, Nanyang Technological University, Singapore*



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European Strategic Autonomy and Small States' Security

This book analyses whether the EU's drift towards European strategic autonomy presents a challenge or a window of opportunity for its small member states to advance their security interests.

The volume presents small states' perceptions of European strategic autonomy, highlighting their expectations and concerns. The chapters focus on the depth and breadth of European strategic autonomy, national security considerations, assessment of the impact on transatlantic relations, the expected outputs, and its potential impact on the EU's institutional structure. It also shows how systemic circumstances and the interests of powerful states, either belonging to the EU (France, Germany, and Poland) or having a significant say in European security architecture (the US), establish opportunities and constraints for the small states to shape European strategic autonomy. In particular, the study focuses on the diverging interests of the Baltic states (Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania), Belgium, Denmark, Greece, Hungary, and the Netherlands. It demonstrates that, in most cases, European strategic autonomy is perceived not as an alternative to NATO but as a supplementary element that could facilitate the development of national military capabilities, indigenous defence industries and resilience to non-military threats. Ultimately, the book suggests that national approaches towards European strategic autonomy mainly stem from pragmatic national security and foreign policy considerations while largely ignoring grand strategic ideas.

This book will be of much interest to the students of European politics, security studies, and international relations.

Giedrius Česnakas is Professor at the General Jonas Žemaitis Military Academy of Lithuania, heading undergraduate and graduate political studies programmes.

Justinas Juozaitis is Policy Analyst at the Centre for Defence Analysis at the General Jonas Žemaitis Military Academy of Lithuania and a lecturer at the Faculty of Political Science and Diplomacy at the Vytautas Magnus University, Lithuania.

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European Strategic Autonomy and Small States' Security

In the Shadow of Power

**Edited by Giedrius Česnakas and
Justinas Juozaitis**



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“We must, indeed, all hang together, or assuredly we shall all hang separately”

Benjamin Franklin, 4 July 1776



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Contributors

Andris Banka is a postdoctoral researcher at the Interdisciplinary Centre for Baltic Sea Region Research (IFZO) in Greifswald, Germany. He holds a PhD in Politics and International Relations from the University of Birmingham, UK. He has taught international relations classes in Germany, Turkey, and the UK.

Giedrius Česnakas is a General Jonas Žemaitis Military Academy of Lithuania professor. He holds a PhD in Political Science from the Vytautas Magnus University (Lithuania). He heads two study programmes: International Relations and Military Diplomacy. His research interests cover processes in the contemporary international order, geopolitics, and Russian foreign policy.

Ieva Gajauskaitė is Assistant Professor at General Jonas Žemaitis Military Academy of Lithuania. She holds a PhD in Political Science from Vytautas Magnus University (Lithuania). For the last ten years, she has specialised in the analysis of strategic partnerships. Her research interests are defence politics, strategic partnerships, and democratic resilience.

Gerda Jakštaitė-Confortola, PhD, is a senior researcher at General Jonas Žemaitis Military Academy of Lithuania. Her research focuses on the US foreign policy and transatlantic relations. She is the recipient of a USA Department of State fellowship on USA Grand Strategy.

Justinas Juozaitis, PhD, is a policy analyst at General Jonas Žemaitis Military Academy of Lithuania. He focuses on small states, German security policy, and energy security. He is a recipient of scholarships for academic achievements. Justinas has written papers for the Atlantic Council, Royal United Services Institute, International Centre for Defence and Security, and others.

Ieva Karpavičiūtė, PhD, is Associate Professor at General Jonas Žemaitis Military Academy of Lithuania and at Vytautas Magnus University. She focuses on regional security studies, foreign policy analysis, theories of international relations, defence, deterrence, and arms control.

Vicky Karyoti is the Transatlantic Special Research Program scholar at the Swedish Institute of International Affairs (UI). She holds a PhD in Political Science and a MSc in International Security and Law from the University of Southern Denmark.

Ringailė Kuokštytė is a researcher at General Jonas Žemaitis Military Academy of Lithuania. She has obtained her PhD in Political Science at the University of Sorbonne–Panthéon. Her research has appeared in *European Security*, *Revue internationale des études du développement*, and other peer-reviewed journals.

Sabine Mengelberg, PhD, is Assistant Professor of International Security Studies at the War Studies Department, Netherlands Defence Academy. She studied Political Science at the University of Amsterdam and obtained her master's degree in 1995. Mengelberg obtained her PhD degree in 2021.

Alain De Neve is Senior Researcher at the Royal Higher Institute for Defence Studies, Belgium, and the author of several reports on European security affairs and military technology issues. His last publication is *Crowded and Dangerous Orbits: European Space Governance at a Time of Potentially Saturating Programs* (2022).

Jörg Noll holds a doctorate from Leiden University. Since 2007, he is Associate Professor of International Conflict Studies at the Netherlands Defence Academy. Jörg Noll is also lieutenant colonel of the German Army reserve, currently assigned to the German MoD.

Illimar Ploom is a researcher at the Department of Strategic Studies, National Defence Academy of Estonia, and Tallinn University of Technology. He holds a PhD in political science from University of Oxford St. Hugh's College. His main research interests include resilience and comprehensive defence approach, European security, and defence initiatives.

Toms Rostoks, PhD, is the Director of the Centre for Security and Strategic Research at the National Defence Academy of Latvia. He has authored the edited volume *Deterring Russia in Europe* (Routledge 2018) and articles in *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies*, *Journal of Baltic Studies*, and *Journal on Baltic Security*.

Viljar Veebel is researcher of the Department of Political and Strategic Studies at the Baltic Defence College in Estonia. He holds a PhD in Political Science from the University of Tartu. His main research interests include European security and defence initiatives, use of economic sanctions in foreign policy, and EU–Russia relations.

Amelie Theussen, PhD, is a senior researcher at the Danish Institute for International Studies in Copenhagen. She researches the changing character of war and its effects on political and legal norms relating to the use of force.

Additionally, she writes about German and Danish foreign and security policy.

Tamás Csiki Varga, PhD, is a senior research fellow at the Institute for Strategic and Defence Studies at the University of Public Service in Budapest, Hungary. His research is focused on European security and defence, including Central European defence cooperation, as well as Hungarian security and defence policy.

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Abbreviations

| | |
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| AA | Administrative Agreement |
| ACCaP | Air Combat Capability Successor Program in Belgium |
| ASWF | Anti-submarine warfare frigates |
| AUKUS | Trilateral security pact between Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States of America |
| CARD | Coordinated Annual Review on Defence |
| CFSP | Common Foreign and Security Policy |
| CHOD | Chief of Defence |
| CRRTs | Cyber Rapid Response Teams |
| CSDP | Common Security and Defence Policy |
| DCA | Dual-capable aircraft |
| DG DEFIS | Directorate-General for Defence Industry and Space |
| DIIS | Danish Institute for International Studies |
| DTIB | Defence Technological and Industrial Base |
| EATC | European Air Transport Command |
| ECSC | European Coal and Steel Community |
| EDA | European Defence Agency |
| EDC | European Defence Community |
| EDCC | European Defence Capability Consortia |
| EDF | European Defence Fund |
| EDTIB | European Defence Technological and Industrial Base |
| EEC | European Economic Community |
| eFP | Enhanced Forward Presence |
| EI2 | European Intervention Initiative |
| EP | European Parliament |
| EPAF | European Participating Air Force |
| EPF | European Peace Facility |
| ESA | European Strategic Autonomy |
| ESPD | European Security and Defence Policy |
| EU | European Union |
| EUFOR | European Union Force in Bosnia and Herzegovina |
| EUGS | A Global Strategy for the European Union's Foreign and Security Policy |

| | |
|------------|--|
| Eurocorps | European Corps |
| EUROMARFOR | European Maritime Force |
| FCAS | Future Combat Air System |
| FNC | Framework Nation Concept |
| GDP | Gross domestic product |
| HDF | Hungarian Defence Forces |
| INF | Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty |
| ISIS | Islamic State of Iraq and Syria |
| JEF | Joint Expeditionary Force |
| MCMV | Mine Counter Measure Vessels |
| MEP | Member of European Parliament |
| MFA | Ministry of Foreign Affairs |
| MGCS | Main Ground Combat System |
| MOD | Ministry of Defence |
| MPCC | Military Planning and Conduct Capability |
| MRTT | Multinational tanker-transport fleet |
| MS | European Union member states |
| NATO | North Atlantic Treaty Organization |
| NGRC | Next Generation Rotorcraft Capability |
| NMS | National Military Strategy |
| NORDEFECO | Nordic Defence Cooperation |
| NSS | National security strategy |
| OSA | Open strategic autonomy |
| OSCE | Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe |
| PESCO | Permanent Structured Cooperation |
| POTUS | President of the United States of America |
| PRC | People's Republic of China |
| QMV | Qualified majority voting |
| UK | United Kingdom |
| UN | United Nations |
| USA | United States of America |
| VJTF | Very High Readiness Joint Task Force |
| WEU | Western European Union |
| WTO | World Trade Organization |
| WU | Western Union |
| WUDO | Western Union Defence Organization |

1 Introduction

Small States, International Institutions, and European Strategic Autonomy

Justinas Juozaitis

This volume discusses small states' perspectives on European strategic autonomy, loosely defined as the European Union's "capacity to act autonomously when and where necessary and with partners wherever possible" (The Council, 2016). In particular, it raises the question of whether the contemporary debate on the meaning, objectives, and scope of European strategic autonomy and its compatibility with the roles of the US and NATO in the European security architecture presents a strategic challenge or a window of opportunity for small states to advance their national security interests in the EU? If European strategic autonomy is a strategic challenge, how precisely does it contradict the small EU members' national security policy objectives? On the contrary, if the EU "Lilliputians" perceive European strategic autonomy as an opportunity to advance their national security interests, how this concept might help them strengthen their security or implement other national objectives?

The relevance of the questions presented above stems both from national security considerations of EU's small member states and broader theoretical debates about small states in international institutions. Starting from the former question, small European states generally perceive the partnership with the US and memberships in NATO and the EU as their primary security providers. Even though some exceptions exist because not all small states have simultaneous memberships in NATO and the EU, one can observe a clear division of labour in their national security strategies. They generally position the US and NATO as hard (military) security providers while perceiving the EU as a source of soft security (Bladaitė & Šešelgytė, 2020). The problem here is that potential EU's drift towards strategic autonomy might alter the distribution of roles among the US, NATO, and the EU in the European security architecture (Haugevik & Rieker, 2017; Meijer & Brooks, 2021; Retter et al., 2021).

On the one side of the debate are the classic sceptics, who fear that the European pursuit of autonomy will damage the transatlantic relations by establishing a cleavage between the European Union and the US. On the other side stand the proponents, who maintain that the EU need to account for the allegedly growing isolationism in the US and its increasing reorientation towards the Pacific. Due to these reasons, they say that the EU needs to develop its own instruments to project power and protect its member states. Finally,

some try to reconcile these approaches by dividing NATO and the EU responsibilities. They argue that NATO and the EU should keep their traditional hard/soft security roles but cooperate more closely as particular policy objectives could be achieved only by working together. For example, NATO lacks proper political, legal, and financial instruments to enhance military mobility in Europe, but the EU has all the required instruments (Hodges, Lawrence, & Wojcik, 2020). Which perspectives appeal to the European small states? What are the underlying reasons, shaping their position?

On the theoretical level, the book's questions resemble debates about the roles of international institutions and their members. The realists conceptualise international institutions as multilateral constructs created and maintained by the great powers pursuing their national interests (Mearsheimer, 1995; Waltz, 2000). Such a position is increasingly challenged by other theoretical approaches (Haas & Haas, 2002; Keohane, 2020; Onuf, 2002), especially those of the small state studies. The latter questions the primacy of power in institutionalised environments by arguing that small states can exert their influence in international affairs through active participation in the decision-making processes within international institutions (Wivel, Bailes & Archer, 2015; Thorhallsson, 2019). Hence, how one should theorise small states' perspectives towards European strategic autonomy? Can small states influence the debates on European strategic autonomy, or will the powerful EU members ultimately determine its development?

In contrast to the conventional research approaches generally focusing on small states' behaviour in international institutions and its subsequent outcomes (Panke, 2010a, offers an excellent example), the volume approaches these questions from a broader perspective that combines both theoretical assumptions presented above. The book argues that small states' ability to implement their interests regarding the development of the European strategic autonomy in the EU cannot be adequately understood without simultaneously analysing the respective goals of great powers and underlying systemic pressures. The book perceives these variables as enablers or constraints, empowering or hindering the implementation of small states' objectives regarding European strategic autonomy within the EU. In particular, one can assume that the more small states' national interests towards European strategic autonomy coincide with the respective objectives of great powers and the nature of systemic pressures, the higher the probability of implementing them. On the opposite, the less small states' preferences correspond to the systemic conditions and the objectives of powerful member states, the slimmer are their chances of achieving them.

To be clear, the book does not assume a one-sided position by conceptualising small states' behaviour as completely irrelevant to the decision-making outcomes in international institutions. Among other things, it does study how small states represent their interests regarding European strategic autonomy. However, it maintains that small states' success is mainly conditional to the extent that their objectives correspond to circumstances beyond their control (systemic pressures and respective interests of powerful member states).

Given the assumptions presented above, the volume proceeds in three interconnected research areas. First, it provides a broad historical overview of European strategic autonomy, tracking its evolution from the beginning of the Cold War to the present day. In doing so, the study shows how the systemic pressures influenced the EU-level debates about its capacity to act autonomously. At the same time, it explores how the changing behaviour of Germany, France, and the United Kingdom and their interactions with the US, a fundamental security provider for Europe, shaped the development of the European strategic autonomy.

Secondly, the work focuses on contemporary French and German approaches towards European strategic autonomy (the United Kingdom is excluded from the analysis due to its withdrawal from the EU) and compares them with the one of the US. The book also presents the Polish perspective. Although neither a small state nor a great power, Poland plays an important role in shaping EU's decisions *vis-à-vis* European strategic autonomy by building a coalition with like-minded small states.

Finally, the book presents the small states' perspectives, compares their interests with those of Germany, France, the US, and Poland, and contrasts them with the contemporary systemic pressures. Specifically, it focuses on the interests of the Baltic (Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia), Scandinavian (Denmark), Benelux (Belgium and the Netherlands), Visegrád (Hungary), and Mediterranean (Greece) small states. The chapters analyse their positions by discussing the wishful depth and width of the European strategic autonomy, national security considerations, assessment of its impact on transatlantic relations, expected outputs of the European strategic autonomy (ESA), and perceptions of its potential impact on the EU's institutional structure.

In the end, the book provides a reference point for the decision-makers and academics about the national perspectives towards European strategic autonomy. In turn, it indicates potential coalition-building opportunities for small states within the EU. By comparing small states' perspectives with those of great powers and contrasting them with the systemic pressures, the book also provides a range of possibilities for small states to advance their security interests regarding the European strategic autonomy within the EU.

Establishing a theoretical framework

At first glance, the questions raised in the opening paragraph stem from practical policy considerations as governments debate their approaches towards European strategic autonomy that might have far-reaching consequences for the future development of EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP), European security architecture, and transatlantic relations. However, they also resonate with far-reaching academic debates regarding the small states' roles, significance, and influence in international institutions.

On the one hand, contemporary scientific literature emphasises the importance of memberships in international institutions for small states because it brings

various advantages for weaker political units within the international system.¹ International institutions, among other things, provide small states with a “shelter” from external security threats, enhance their international status, and enable a more assertive foreign policy (Thorhallsson, 2019). On the other hand, the realist tradition maintains that great powers dominate international institutions, and it envisages no valid reason why small states’ membership in such multilateral constructs would enhance their influence in international affairs (Waltz, 2000).

The contradiction between these approaches has eventually produced several important research questions, guiding papers within the field of small state studies. For example, to what extent can the small states advance their national interests in the policymaking of international institutions, including the ones having supranational properties as the European Union? Given the limited material capabilities of small states inferior to those of the so-called great and middle (regional) powers, what factors determine their influence (defined here as a capability to achieve national objectives in international institutions) in multilateral decision-making? Does influence stem from small state behaviour (negotiating strategies, activity, timing, choice of arguments, etc.), decision-making nuances within international organisations (distribution of voting power, chairmanship, loyalties of crucial personnel and others), or structural changes in the international system, positioning them either in restrictive or permissive environments?²

Answers to these questions have important methodological implications as they guide one’s research in different directions. Take realism, for example. For realists, international outcomes are determined by the distribution of power among states regardless of the institutional structure in which they interact (Schweller & Priess, 1997). Realists make a sharp distinction between great powers and small states, defining the former as the most capable actors whose interaction determines structural outcomes while characterising the latter as systemically insignificant units unable to influence international politics.³ As a result, they claim that international institutions mirror power realities and their decisions are shaped by the priorities of their most powerful members, whereas small states play only a symbolic role. Put differently, realists conceptualise small states as objects in international politics rather than subjects. Their logic suggests that small EU states have no impact on the debate and outcomes of ESA as its development is predominantly shaped by EU’s majors.

Following the realist line of argument, one could hardly justify why researchers should analyse small states’ perspectives on European strategic autonomy in the first place. Within such a theoretical framework, small states’ positions within international institutions are epiphenomenal, not impacting multilateral decision-making.

Liberals, constructivists, and, to a lesser extent, institutionalists have their own reasons to challenge the realists’ position on power as the primary force shaping international outcomes in highly institutionalised environments, but it is the small state studies that attempt to refute their claims most fiercely. From the perspective of small state studies, realist thoughts on the primacy of power

in international relations directly contradict their claims that small states have important roles in international politics beyond being tradable objects among more powerful countries. In particular, they argue that the growing institutionalisation of international relations allow the small states to be far more influential than realists suggest, even if they do not dispute the existence of a substantial power asymmetry between small states and great powers, accepting the latter being more influential in international politics. However, small state studies maintain that small states can mitigate their structural weakness resulting from the lack of material capabilities⁴ through membership in international institutions and active participation in their decision-making processes (Thorhallsson, 2017).

A growing number of case studies illustrating that international institutions' decisions often correspond to the preferences of their smaller members is perhaps their best argument against the realist position (Arregui & Thompson, 2009; Björkdahl, 2013; Deitelhoff & Wallbott, 2013; Jakobsen, 2009; Lakatos, 2017; Molis & Vaišnoras, 2015; Panke, 2010a, 2012a, 2012b; ; Thorhallsson & Magnusdottir, 2011; Thorhallsson & Steinsson, 2017; Urbelis, 2015; Vaičiūnas, 2009; Vilpišauskas, 2015). Such research provides an empirical justification for the small state studies to question the realist assertion that policymaking in international institutions is exclusively determined by power. If, according to realists, small states do not have any influence in the collective decision-making in international institutions because of their structural weakness, how they should explain numerous instances when their decisions reflect the national interests of small states? On the contrary to the realist notions, these findings would suggest that small states can influence international institutions' decision-making.

The problem is that small state studies also struggle to explain the congruence between small states' national interests and the subsequent international institutions' decisions. To be exact, the contemporary scientific literature indicates that international institutions' policies can correspond to small states' priorities, but the precise mechanisms leading to this result remain unclear.

At present, small state studies offer fragmented explanations that generally associate the congruence between small states' priorities and international institutions' decisions with small states' behaviour. They argue that certain behaviour patterns increase the influence of small states in international institutions, while others constrain their abilities to achieve their national objectives in international institutions (Panke, 2013). It ranges from broad ideas on selecting proper negotiation strategies and drafting proper instructions (Grøn & Wivel, 2011; Long, 2016; Panke, 2010a, 2010b, 2012a, 2012b; Thorhallsson, 2015) to precise proposals on exploiting specific international institutions' decision-making characteristics (Molis & Vaišnoras, 2015; Mosser, 2002; Schneider, 2011). For example, researchers suggest that small states' capacity to achieve their preferences in international institutions correlates with their ability to set adequate priorities and relate them with broader political problems relevant to the entire institution or most of its members, choices of arguments, contributions to peacekeeping missions and operations, diplomatic reputation,

activity, consistency, coherence between domestic and foreign policy, and many others (Thorhallsson, 2015; Vilpišauskas, 2011).

If a selection of such variables guides the research on the small states' perspectives towards European strategic autonomy, it will inevitably encounter at least two problems. The first problem is that small state-centric variables redirect one's attention from macropolitical processes that influence international institutions' decision-making outcomes. One such factor is systemic circumstances or the systemic stimuli, as the neoclassical realist would call them (Ripsman et al., 2016). In international relations literature, it has been long established that the properties of the international system affect the behaviour of states and other actors (including international institutions) that are forced to accommodate new international developments by changing their policies (Herbert, 1996; Keohane, 1984).

The transformations of NATO serve as an excellent example of how international institutions adapt to systemic pressures. During the Cold War, NATO's first and foremost task was to defend its members from the potential Soviet military aggression. Once the Soviet Union collapsed and the Cold War had ended, member states started transforming the Alliance to account for changes in the international security environment. Given the absence of its major geopolitical rival, NATO eventually reorientated itself from the collective defence to expeditionary operations, focusing its efforts on the fight against terrorism and other (re)emerging security challenges. Similarly, Russia's ongoing military aggression against Ukraine since 2014 challenged the European security architecture and forced NATO to reconsider the importance of collective defence.

Most importantly, one can make a reasonable case that changing systemic circumstances affect the ability of the small NATO members to advance their national security interests. Taking the three Baltic states as an example, they hoped to secure NATO's military presence in their territory since they joined the Alliance in 2004. However, the Baltic quest for NATO's "boots on the ground" went practically nowhere before Russian military intervention in Ukraine, as the systemic circumstances of that time were constraining their abilities to implement this goal. Simultaneously, the deteriorating security environment helped the Baltic states persuade their allies to enhance NATO's military presence. This example clearly illustrates that small states' capabilities to pursue their national interests in international institutions depend on the systemic conditions, empowering or constraining the implementation of their foreign policy objectives, at least to some degree.

Following this logic, one can reasonably expect to observe similar patterns when analysing small states' approaches to the European strategic autonomy. If the nature of the systemic circumstances coincides with the national interests of small states regarding European strategic autonomy, they will enhance small states' capabilities to achieve them. On the opposite, if systemic pressures contradict the priorities of the small EU members, they will constrain small states' possibilities to achieve them.

The second issue with variables representing small states' behaviour in international institutions is that they underestimate the importance of power. Even if many scholars believe that the realist approach towards international institutions lacks nuance, it is somewhat naïve to assume that small states can advance their foreign policy objectives in international institutions at the expense of its most powerful members or not to account for power discrepancies among their member states at the very least. To put it more provocatively, how precisely small states' level of activity, choice of arguments, negotiation strategies, and other actions could lead to favourable outcomes in international institutions if their national interests contradict the objectives of more powerful members, having more means to achieve them?

This question highlights the competitive nature of decision-making in international institutions. Even if their policies formally represent collective compromises achieved by their members, such compromises still produce winners and losers, promoting competition between the states to secure decisions that would reflect their national interests as much as possible. The classic realist writings of Carr (1981), Mearsheimer (1995, 2014), Morgenthau (1948), and Waltz (2000) serve as a sobering reminder for small state studies that great powers also utilise memberships in international institutions to advance their interests. Since member states are not equal in terms of their capabilities, and in many instances, the inequality is even formalised by assigning different voting weights, small states have more official limitations to influence international institutions' decisions than their larger peers.

Given the arguments provided above, small states seem to find themselves in the shadow of power, enabling or constraining their influence in international institutions. Sometimes, small states cannot do much but prepare to adjust to a new political reality. One can assume that small states can achieve their objectives in international institutions most effectively when the great powers have not yet reached a consensus on shaping a particular policy field or share similar interests. Hence, the interests of great powers and systemic circumstances establish opportunities and constraints for the small states in international institutions. At the same time, small states' behaviour defines how they can use the window of opportunity to advance their interest in international institutions, be it wide or narrow.

Presenting the case studies

Given the theoretical assumptions, the book's structure is counterintuitive to its title. A book on small states' perspectives on European strategic autonomy firstly studies the approaches of powerful European Union members and the US. Despite this alleged contradiction, the authors maintain that to understand the implications of European strategic autonomy on small states' national security, one also needs to analyse the respective positions of the powerful countries. After all, contemporary debates about European strategic autonomy largely stem from the strenuous relationship between continental powers and the US.

Analysing the US, a country that played the most crucial role in the European security architecture since the end of the Second World War, two questions are essential. First, what concept of the European strategic autonomy would the US find acceptable or even beneficial (if any) to its national security interest? Second, how might the pursuit of European strategic autonomy affect the US and EU relations?

Looking at the situation from the continental perspective, one should account for the dissatisfaction of major European capitals with the US behaviour during the Donald Trump administration. In particular, political friction grew when France and Germany could not achieve satisfactory compromises with the US on various security, trade, international law, and other issues. Among other things, Germany found the US intensive pressure to halt the construction of the Nord Stream 2 natural gas pipeline and spend more on defence unacceptable (Helwig, 2020). For the proponents of ESA, the disastrous withdrawal from Afghanistan further justified the need for the EU's capacity to act independently from the US, while France was frustrated by the recent Alliance between the UK, US, and Australia (AUKUS) that resulted in a loss of a strategic submarine contract. On the other hand, it seems that France, a long-term proponent of European strategic autonomy, sought to exploit this situation to limit the US' presence in the "Old Continent" (Liekis et al., 2021).

However, not all larger EU members believe that tense relations between major European powers and the US validate a pursuit of strategic autonomy. For them, safeguarding a transatlantic linkage is the key to maintaining national security. They are worried that Washington will interpret the EU's drive towards autonomy not as a growing responsibility for the European defence and capabilities to act but as a free-riding on the US security guarantees. The sceptical perspective might become increasingly credible if the European strategic autonomy ends up as an institutional exercise lacking an actual increase in military capabilities. Moreover, there is a growing concern that the EU's potential push towards autonomy might accelerate the US reorientation from Europe to the Indo-Pacific, given the new great power rivalry between the US and the People's Republic of China. Although neither a small state nor a great power, Poland became a potential coalition builder of small states sharing a transatlantic position towards European strategic autonomy and the authors believe that it is essential to include the Polish perspective in the analysis.

While analysing the small states, the volume aims to reflect their diverging national security policy positions. The Baltic states stand out with a rather critical position on the European strategic autonomy and its possible negative impact on NATO, believing that ESA will damage transatlantic relations in the long run by establishing a wedge between the US and Europe. A similar position is shared by Denmark which has recently organised a referendum on its opt-out from the EU's Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP).

However, some European Union members are not so dismissive as the Baltic states and Denmark. For example, because of its complex relations with Turkey,

Greece's NATO ally, Athens supports the defence policy initiatives related to the European strategic autonomy. The position of the Benelux countries is not homogenous. Belgium belongs to the so-called "Continental" camp favouring French ideas on European strategic autonomy. At the same time, the Netherlands are known for their transatlantic orientation prioritising the importance of the US and NATO roles in European security architecture, but they have recently become more interested in EU's security and defence pillar. Hungary also provides an interesting case. It has a somewhat ambiguous relations with Russia (Helwig, 2021), which welcomes the EU's drive towards strategic autonomy as long as it weakens transatlantic links and fails to produce additional military capabilities (Lipper, Ondarza, & Volker, 2019).

In the end, having the perspectives of small states and their powerful states allows producing at least three results. First, the book defines a range of expectations for small states to achieve their national security objectives regarding European strategic autonomy by contrasting their interests with those of powerful countries and the nature of systemic circumstances. Second, it helps to map the coalition-building potential regarding European strategic autonomy by identifying areas where the national interests coincide and diverge. Finally, it further advances the research on small states in international institutions by exploring theoretical assumptions presented above.

Defining the scope of European strategic autonomy

The book grapples with the fact that the meaning of European strategic autonomy is developing at the moment of writing. The European Commission, member states, think tanks, and academia propose different and, in many cases, conflicting visions for autonomy. First explicitly mentioned in the Conclusions of the Foreign Affairs Council in December 2013, the European strategic autonomy became a polarising yet firmly entrenched concept within the EU. Currently, the official definition of European strategic autonomy outlined in the EU's Global Strategy in 2016 represents the lowest possible denominator – "capacity to act autonomously when and where necessary and with partners wherever possible" (The Council, 2016, p. 2) – leaving much room for interpretation and debate. Even if the new EU's Strategic Compass mentions strategic autonomy only once, its proposals to develop defence-related instruments stem from ESA's conceptual framework.

Given the loosely defined concept of autonomy, the case studies are structured on five general questions representing major disagreements within the debate. First of all, EU members disagree on what policy domains fall under the abstract premise of strategic autonomy. For example, should the EU pursue strategic autonomy exclusively in foreign and security policy, or this ambition extends to other domains (economic, industrial, energy, trade, technologic, cyber, health, etc.)? Moreover, what is the primary guiding principle of policy domains under the premise of European strategic autonomy: finding compromises with partners or preparing for autonomous action (Tocci, 2021)?

Second, to what extent should the European Union pursue autonomous action in security and defence, and how do such initiatives interact with the role of NATO as the fundamental security providers for Europe? On the one hand, a more assertive European Union has an institutional capacity and financial instruments to supplement NATO's military capabilities with soft power tools, sanctions, and strategic infrastructure development (transport, energy, and telecommunications) critical for European security. On the other hand, there is a concern that the European Union might go too far and duplicate NATO structures, capabilities and mandate, undermining and weakening the Alliance (Biscop, 2019a, 2019b; Lawrence, 2022).

The third question is how does the EU's drift to loosely defined strategic autonomy affect transatlantic relations? On one side of the debate, researchers argue that Europe capable of defending itself is in the best interests of the US. However, others believe that European strategic autonomy runs the danger of becoming an institutional exercise rather than a move towards greater military capabilities (Lippert et al., 2019).

The fourth question is what set of EU capabilities should the autonomy produce? Do the small states believe that the European Union majors can develop sufficient military capabilities to guarantee their security or capability development should be focused on European defence industry, domestic production of strategically important goods and equipment?

Finally, how the possible institutional changes in the EU, resulting from the European strategic autonomy, are perceived among analysed small states? Some argue that proposals to reform the EU decision-making processes and strengthen its institutions will put the EU among the rule-makers in the international order on equal terms with the US, China, and Russia. They see the replacement of unanimous voting in CFSP/CSDP with the qualified majority voting (QMV) as a step towards the mentioned vision. Others even suggest reforming the EU's institutions based on the United Nations model where the Council would only serve as a general forum for discussions, and the European Security Council composed of Germany, France, Italy, Spain, and Poland would have the power to decide on CFSP/CSDP (Lippert et al., 2019). How do the small states approach these suggestions that might further weaken their formal influence in the EU's decision-making?

Notes

- 1 Even after 60 years since the seminal work on small states by Fox (1959), researchers debate their definition (Henrikson, 2001). The scholars agree that small states are defined by their weakness, but fail to agree on precise indicators constituting weakness. For the purposes of the study, small states are defined as weak political units within the international system which cannot significantly influence international politics and must rely on external guarantees for its security (Rothstein, 1968).
- 2 For research debating these questions, please see: Arregui and Thompson (2009); Lakatos (2017); Panke (2010a, 2010b, 2012); Thorhallsson (2012).

- 3 Some researchers incorporate the realist approach in their studies on small states. For example, please see Maass (2009, 2014, 2017).
- 4 Military, economic, technological, demographic, etc.

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2 European Strategic Autonomy

The Origins Story

Giedrius Česnakas

The European strategic autonomy concept became a buzzword in 2016 after the European Union released “A Global Strategy for the European Union’s Foreign and Security Policy” (EUGS) after the Brexit referendum. The increasing international uncertainty, worsening relations with the United States of America during the Trump Presidency, and (re)emerging security challenges like dependence on external supply chains of strategic products and pharmaceutical manufacturing during the COVID-19 pandemic, dependence on digital technologies of the People’s Republic of China and the US, instability in the southern and eastern neighbourhood, illegal migration, energy dependence, informational insecurity, and grey zone activities of other states had put ESA at the front of the EU agenda. At the same time, the ambitions of the French President Emmanuel Macron to limit the US role in Europe, illustrated by his very intensively discussed comments about NATO being “brain dead” and suggestions to increase European sovereignty (Politico, 2020) from the US, further established ESA within the debates on European security architecture. Unfortunately, the ongoing discussions, resulting in numerous political speeches, scientific articles, and exhaustive analytical studies, have failed to push the ESA beyond its loose definition of “capacity to act autonomously when and where necessary and with partners wherever possible” (Council, 2016), casting doubts wherever EU member states will eventually agree on its precise objectives and scope while questioning its conceptual utility. Moreover, Russia’s large-scale invasion of Ukraine on 24 February 2022 provided additional questions if the EU should be autonomous and in which areas?

The chapter presents the evolution of ESA, exposes its main drivers, and underlines the contemporary issues, defining its transformation from abstract political rhetoric to concrete policy action. It argues that ESA is not a new concept in its content, even though it has received more attention only since 2016. The archaeology suggests that ESA’s origins can be traced back to the first initiatives of Western European countries to cooperate in the defence policies after Second World War. After that, the concept of ESA deepened and expanded at varying rates of success as it was affected by two main variables: the systemic pressures and the interests of European powers, namely France, Germany, and

the UK, considering changes in their political leadership and interactions with the US as the primary security provider for Europe.

Systematically analysing the interests of European powers and tracing the systemic pressures, the chapter strips the concept of the static noise, allowing tracing the essential macro-political processes in the evolution of European strategic autonomy. Furthermore, the extended analysis period allows inferring from historical patterns to suggest the potential future development of European strategic autonomy, depending on the changes in the international system and the interests of the European Union member states (MS).

Same idea but a different name

The redistribution of power after the Second World War, the interest of France to remain one of the poles in the international system, assumptions that Germany might still become revisionist, and the search for shelter by smaller countries of Western Europe defined the development of European security initiatives through the Cold War. Domestic actors' changing interests have also been an important variable defining the outcomes of security cooperation.

At the dawn of the new European era in 1948, five countries (Benelux, France, and the United Kingdom) signed the Treaty of Brussels and founded Western Union (WU). The Western Union Defence Organisation (WUDO) (a military agency) was established as WU focused on military cooperation and mutual defence. Its primary focus was to deter possible aggression from Germany or the Soviet Union while at the same time balancing the US because some states feared that the US would hegemonically dominate any alliance. However, such cooperation was short-lived because NATO was founded just a year later, incorporating WUDO into the alliance's Allied Command Europe structure. With the dominant role of the US and much broader membership, NATO became responsible for the defence of Western European countries from possible Soviet aggression.

The security of Western Europe required the rearmament of Western Germany. Still, such an approach was challenging for some European countries, primarily France, because perceptions about possible German revisionism were alive. In addition, Western European states understood radical changes in their positions in the bipolar international system dominated by the US and the Soviet Union. Western Europe depended on the US defence commitments and, without sufficient military capabilities, could not play an active role as the third pole in international affairs. In 1950, French Prime Minister René Pleven proposed a plan to create a supranational European army of the Coal and Steel Community (Belgium, France, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, and West Germany) members – European Defence Community (EDC). The supranational army allowed avoiding Germany's rearmament while strengthening defence capabilities and the international positions of Europe, thus making it more autonomous from the US and NATO.

Pleven Plan foresaw the composition of military units from six MS directed by the Council of Ministers. In May 1952, the EDC treaty to create a supranational army was negotiated, but it did not satisfy Gaullists in the French parliament. The French feared the loss of sovereignty on national security and defence if the management of armed forces was transferred to the commissioners. The changes to the treaty during the negotiations decreased the role of France, which projected itself as the driving force of European integration projects. For the French, “interdependence could only be admissible on French terms” (Teasdale, 2016, p. 6). After France failed to ratify the treaty, the Italians also aborted ratification. This process was also affected by the General Treaty of 1952. This treaty ended the occupation of the Federal Republic of Germany and allowed its rearmament and, together with Italy, inclusion in European defence cooperation.

The EDC’s failure led to the political revitalisation of the WU in the form of the Western European Union (WEU) after the Modified Brussels Treaty was signed in 1954. The WEU was less ambitious than the WU. It did not duplicate NATO functions and was in the shadow of NATO domination. Despite attempts to strengthen the WEU and achieve greater autonomy from the US, WEU lacked importance until the 1980s. It must be acknowledged that WEU’s weakness was also the result of the US policies aimed at preventing alternatives to NATO (Dietl, 2009) and keeping the alliance solely responsible for European security and defence.

The idea of ESA was renewed in the form of the Fouchet Plan (named after Christian Fouchet – France’s ambassador to Denmark), proposed by the French President Charles de Gaulle in 1961. The plan aimed to promote *Europe des Etats* (Europe of Nations) and create an intergovernmental “union of states”, including cooperation in foreign policy and defence (common security and defence policy) among the EEC MS. The union had to decrease supranationalism and increase the roles of nations, primarily that of France, providing it with veto powers on foreign and security policies of the EEC countries. Considering French influence, West Germany and Benelux countries participated in the discussions of this plan, but they wanted to keep strong transatlantic links for security reasons. De Gaulle expected that the union would lower NATO and the US influence in Europe while contributing to France’s, though at the expense of the strategic interests of small MS (Teasdale, 2016, p. 3). However, in April to May 1962, due to the strong opposition of Belgium and the Netherlands to the original plan and unacceptable changes for France in the final plan, the parties failed to reach an agreement.

France was behind the idea to increase the autonomy of Europe from the US in defence and security matters in both cases (the Pleven and the Fouchet plans). The evidence suggests that the primary goal of Paris was to increase its role by being accepted as the leader of Western Europe, thus becoming the third pole – mediator between the US and the Soviet Union. Such interpretation is supported by French proposals on the tripartite political directory of the biggest economies in the European Community at the expense of Benelux countries

(1959) and by proposals on a directory of nuclear states in NATO (1958) (De Gaulle, 1958).

The EDC's failure was defined by the geostrategic environment of its inception and domestic policies and politicians in the offices at the time of negotiations (Kanter, 1970, pp. 203, 204; Walton, 1953, p. 67). The same variables defined the failure of the Fouchet Plan. The focus of smaller states of the European Communities and West Germany on the US and NATO in their defence, and the less prominent role of France in the final drafts of agreements initiated under Plevén and Fouchet plans, led to limited defence cooperation outside NATO. This environment stalled the integration of foreign and security policy in the EEC for nearly 30 years.

The end of the Cold War, decreasing importance of NATO and increasing uncertainty about its future, together with more integration orientated political elites in Western Europe, accelerated the integration of EEC, including in the security and defence sectors. With the support of the United Kingdom and Germany, France maintained leadership in defence cooperation. Still, EU countries alone could not produce structures and capabilities to act even in their neighbourhood.

The European Union (Maastricht) Treaty in 1992 introduced the intergovernmental "pillar" of Common Foreign and Security Policy. The Article J.4 of the Maastricht Treaty suggested the creation of the common European defence in the future, stating that: "the common foreign and security policy shall include all questions <...>, including the eventual framing of a common defence policy, which might in time lead to a common defence" (Treaty on European Union, 1992). The Maastricht Treaty had connotations with the Fouchet Plan because it was affected by the French favouring European defence capabilities independent of NATO and the American domination (Mauro, 2018, p. 6). The Maastricht Treaty was followed by the Petersberg Declaration of the WEU Council of Ministers on 19 June 1992. The declaration aimed to strengthen the European pillar of NATO's collective defence, focusing on closer cooperation among the WEU MS. The declaration became widely known because of the ambitions of Western European countries to play a more significant role in international security and conduct what has later become referred to as "Petersberg tasks" (humanitarian, rescue, peacekeeping, crisis management, and peace-making) (Petersberg Declaration, 1992). However, despite ambitions in the Maastricht Treaty and Petersberg Declaration, cooperation on common defence was relatively weak and still focused on NATO. The Yugoslav wars (1991–2001) showed that the EU, with the rudimentary Common Foreign and Security Policy, could not cope with conflicts in its backyard without the US. The instability in the neighbourhood forced EU MS to search for ways to increase capabilities to act without US involvement.

The concept of strategic autonomy appeared in the French White Paper on Defence in June 1994 for the first time. The document suggested that France must remain strategically autonomous from the dependency on NATO guarantees. Interestingly, the White Paper applied the concept of European defence

autonomy when it stressed the need for Europeans to maintain nuclear capabilities (Livre Blanc sur la Défense, 1994, pp. 50, 56). Strategic autonomy also had to contribute to the possibility of acting on the international scene (Livre Blanc sur la Défense, 1994, p. 139).

The Kosovo War in 1998 showed the limitations of Europeans to act autonomously. Individual EU members and all EU lacked the capabilities to act with appropriate measures without the US military assistance. Therefore, the EU MS needed to persuade the US to take military actions in the European continent when Washington was reluctant to do so.

EU's failures led to the Joint Declaration on European Defence at the British-French summit (Saint-Malo Declaration) in December 1998. The declaration marks the beginning of the contemporary approach to the strategic autonomy concept in the EU. Brits and French agreed to strengthen CFSP and defence policy, deciding to create the capacity for autonomous action (credible military force) to respond to international crises (Saint-Malo Declaration, 1998). Initiatives of Europeans had to contribute to NATO capabilities, while Article 5 of the NATO Treaty remained at the core of the collective defence. At the same time, the EU had to introduce "appropriate" structures for military action where NATO was not engaged. The declaration is important because of the decision of the United Kingdom to abandon opposition to EU security and defence initiatives (Yost, 2007, p. 72). The French found political support from a country sceptical about European defence integration. British support encouraged future European defence initiatives.

The European Council Declaration on Strengthening the Common European Policy on Security and Defence, in the conclusions of the presidency of the European Council of Cologne 3–4 June 1999, mentioned autonomy from NATO, stating that:

the Union must have the capacity for autonomous action, backed up by credible military forces, the means to decide to use them, and a readiness to do so, in order to respond to international crises without prejudice to actions by NATO

(Cologne European Council Conclusions of the Presidency, 1999).

The autonomy was pursued to ensure EU possibilities to implement EU missions – "Petersberg tasks" – through strategic cooperation with NATO and building EU capabilities on the existing NATO collective assets. Furthermore, NATO's decreasing role in the necessity of territorial defence of allies, search for its identity after the Cold War, focus on war with terrorism, and expeditionary operations also opened possibilities to strive for a more prominent role in military cooperation within the EU.

The increasing role of the EU at the expense of NATO signalled increasing EU's political ambitions and aim of autonomy. Increasing the EU role in defence became obvious when both organisations agreed on a strategic partnership. The EU-NATO Declaration on European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP) in

December 2002 welcomed the strategic partnership between two organisations on crisis management. The “Berlin Plus” agreements provided such tools for the EU.

The “Berlin Plus” was an outcome of the 1999 Washington NATO summit, which welcomed EU autonomy based on the NATO’s Ministerial Meeting in Berlin in 1996 (Washington Summit Communiqué, 1999). The 1996 Berlin meeting showed determination among European NATO allies to build European security and defence identity, indicating political support for autonomy. The practical support was suggested by providing possibilities to use NATO capabilities for the missions led by the WEU, considering that military capabilities can be “separable but not separate” (NATO, 1996). The “Berlin Plus” package provided: exchange of classified information; access for the EU to NATO’s planning capabilities; availability of NATO capabilities and common assets as well as headquarters; inclusion of needs of capabilities for EU-led operations in NATO’s defence planning system (The NATO–EU strategic partnership, 2004, pp. 4, 5). The primacy of NATO was underlined because the EU could intervene only if NATO refused to conduct the operation. Such a NATO–EU partnership gave the green light for two EU operations (EUFOR Concordia and EUFOR Althea), though not without challenges from non-EU NATO MS. Greater autonomy from NATO non-EU members in decision-making was necessary to strengthen the EU’s role.

The year 1999 was also crucial in developing deeper practical military cooperation among the EU MS. At the European Council summit in Helsinki, the idea of EU multinational battalion-sized combined arms units was proposed. The objective was to have small rapid response forces to implement the “Petersberg tasks”. Discussions between France, Germany, and the UK continued in 2003 and 2004, resulting in the first Battlegroups, which reached full operational capacity in 2007. However, Battlegroups have never participated in actual missions despite many opportunities to use them in the UN-mandated operations. The Battlegroups were not deployed because of the financial issues, MS political reluctance to contribute, and the prioritisation of NATO missions (Reykers, 2017).

The Treaty Establishing Constitution for Europe of 2004 did not suggest any significant changes in the defence area. The Constitution repeated Maastricht’s Treaty that the eventual framing of a common defence policy might lead to a common defence. There was no mention of ESA or something similar. Instead, the treaty indicated the need to focus on the EDA for capability development, research, acquisitions, and strengthening of the technological and industrial base of the defence sector (Treaty Establishing a Constitution for Europe, 2004).¹ The focus on deeper integration in the defence sector became more explicit, but NATO remained the central pillar of defence. In the end, the treaty was rejected in French and Dutch referendums.

The rejection of the treaty forced to change tactics to proceed with deeper integration of the EU. The work on the Reform Treaty, which later became known as Lisbon Treaty, began. The Lisbon Treaty was a new holistic treaty

that integrated and amended the Maastricht (1992) and Rome (1957) treaties. The Lisbon Treaty outlined deeper cooperation in defence among MS, focused on European identity and independence, and this can be considered an “ultra-light” version of ESA. The Lisbon Treaty suggests that common defence is inevitable and will begin when there is a unanimous decision of the European Council. The EU Common Security and Defence Policy is seen as compatible with NATO, which is no longer referred to as the primary collective defence provider. Article 42.7 of the Lisbon Treaty outlines something similar to Article 5 of the Washington (NATO) Treaty, stating that: “If a Member State is the victim of armed aggression on its territory, the other Member States shall have towards it an obligation of aid and assistance by all the means in their power” (Lisbon Treaty, 2008). The Lisbon Treaty began a more active integration in the defence sector by including the clause on mutual defence from the WEU and the termination of the Modified Treaty of Brussels. The Lisbon Treaty did not refer to ESA or decoupling from NATO, but the role of NATO and, as a result, of the US, is less significant than in the previous documents. It is necessary to note that EDA also gained more responsibilities to coordinate defence cooperation among MS with a greater focus on the technological and industrial base. Such an approach suggests a growing political focus on developing the defence industry in the EU at the expense of its main competitor – the US.

After the Lisbon Treaty, the strategic autonomy on the EU level was mentioned in the French White Paper on Defence and National Security published later in 2008. The concept appeared when outlining space capabilities, science, technological and industrial competencies, pooling of intelligence, creating autonomous strategic planning capability and strategic leadership for military operations and civilian missions (*Défense et Sécurité nationale Le Livre Blanc*, 2008, pp. 90, 135, 261). Strategic autonomy on the EU level was already on the French agenda, and the supranational organisation was gradually moving towards it.

For the first time, strategic autonomy in EU documents was mentioned in the annual report of the European Parliament (EP) in 2010. The EP stressed that the EU must enhance its strategic autonomy in foreign, security, and defence policy to preserve peace, prevent conflicts, strengthen international security, protect citizens, and defend EU interests and values in the world while contributing to multilateralism (Implementation of the European Security Strategy and the Common Security and Defence Policy, 2010). The report also called to create and strengthen the EU military–industrial complex by conducting preferential treatment – “European preference” – in procurements to maintain operational sovereignty. The report also signals the changing perception of NATO, which is perceived as an equal partner rather than a core organisation ensuring security. To sum up, autonomy meant greater capabilities to act without NATO and the US internationally and focus on strengthening the military–industrial complex by applying protectionist policies. These two pillars remained very important in future EU definitions of ESA.

The events in the neighbourhood once more tested the EU’s capabilities to act autonomously. EU MS armies intervened in the Libyan civil war in 2011

as part of a broader coalition. However, the EU was not capable of leading a robust military intervention. In the mentioned case, even the French foreign minister doubted the existence of EU defence policy (Keohane, 2016). NATO, led by the US, took over the mission just a few days after the active phase of the mission began. Though Europeans provided most of the assets, they heavily relied on the US expertise, intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance, smart munitions, and air-to-air refuelling (Nielsen, 2012). Once again, instability in the EU neighbourhood pointed to insufficient EU military capabilities and common defence policy problems.

At the end of April 2013, France published a new White Paper on Defence and National Security. The document tied the concept of “autonomy” with “sovereignty”. It indicated three levels of strategic autonomy: political, operational, and technological. Strategic autonomy had to allow France to take the initiative in operations it deems necessary to preserve its security interests and act with partners, particularly within the EU, where possible (Livre blanc défense et sécurité nationale, 2013, pp. 88, 89). The autonomy also had to contribute to fulfilling collective security commitments in NATO (Livre blanc défense et sécurité nationale, 2013, p. 20). However, when stressing the need for strategic autonomy, France maintained the primacy of its national interests over the EU ones because the EU was perceived instrumentally.

A couple of months later, ESA was mentioned by the European Commission for the first time. Strategic autonomy was perceived as a capability to act without third parties and an essential element of the credibility and reliability of the EU (Towards a More Competitive and Efficient Defence and Security Sector, 2013). The document was significantly impacted by the EU’s problems in the Libyan intervention. The document heavily focused on military–technological and industrial sectors, suggesting that autonomy is first and foremost seen as the competitiveness of arms and systems produced in the EU with which armies of the MS are equipped. The document suggests elements of protectionism for the mentioned sectors. It signals the domestic interests of the EU MS, which have solid arms industries (France, Germany, UK, and Italy), to deal with the outside actors’ competition challenges.

The concept of strategic autonomy was included in the 2013 European Council conclusions. The document underlined the decision-making autonomy between NATO and the EU. At the same time, it also highlighted the strategic partnership between these two organisations, suggesting that the role of NATO was decreasing because organisations were seen as equal partners. Furthermore, strategic autonomy continued to focus on the development of technological and industrial bases of defence capabilities (The European Council Conclusions, 2013, pp. 2, 8). The official documents of the EU in the period of 2014–2015 on strategic autonomy continued to highlight support and integration of the defence-industrial sector in the EU, while the development of capabilities to conduct prevention and crisis management missions received less attention.

In March 2015, reacting to Russia’s invasion of Ukraine a year ago, the President of the European Commission, Jean-Claude Juncker, called for the

creation of the EU army (The Guardian, 2015). This call once again reinvigorated discussions about joint European defence forces. The project was discussed occasionally but is highly unlikely to be implemented because of the differences in laws and regulations in MS, let alone the issue of sovereignty which is at its heart. Nevertheless, there are examples of bilateral military integration among EU MS: the operation of Belgian–Dutch navies under one command since 1948 (since 1996 in peace and wartime) and the Franco–German military brigade since 1989. However, the UK was always sceptical about the idea of a European army and strongly advocated NATO’s primacy in defence of Europe, but the Brexit changed the situation.

The overview of the evolution of ideas having ESA elements suggests that they have been defined by the systemic and domestic (interests of MS of the European Communities and the EU) variables. The power distribution during the Cold War and the search of smaller Western European countries for the shelter provided by the dominant systemic actor – the US – undermined initiatives to have European–centric defence capabilities. As a result, NATO became the core organisation providing security and defence in Western Europe. The ambitions of France on its more significant role in Western European defence failed to materialise, which led even to a French withdrawal from NATO’s integrated military command in 1966 (returned in 2009). The changing perceptions about the German threat to Europe also weakened French initiatives and strengthened the importance of NATO.

The end of the Cold War, declining NATO role, integration of the EU, its enlargement and deeper political integration reinvigorated European defence initiatives. The US and NATO encouraged Europeans to make more significant commitments to international security. In addition, the increasing support of the UK for French ideas enabled political decisions on stronger defence cooperation within the EU. However, conflicts in the EU neighbourhood showed that Europeans could not act without the US. The EU had few instruments, like Battlegroups, but it lacked will and capabilities. Because of the lack of capabilities and concerns about national defence industries, strategic autonomy on the EU level focused on the European defence industry. There was an understanding that NATO’s role in the European security architecture became less critical while the EU’s importance increased. Nonetheless, in practical terms, NATO remained the core security provider because of the US capabilities.

The study of the evolution of defence initiatives and autonomy in the EU since the Maastricht Treaty suggests that the development resembles a “snowball effect” because the European defence cooperation initiatives became bolder with each small success. In addition, archaeology of evolution also shows that strategic autonomy on the EU level was seen as an instrument to achieve the national interests of the influential EU members.

The ever-widening European strategic autonomy

The Global Strategy for the European Union’s Foreign and Security Policy was the game-changer in European strategic autonomy discourse, its intensity, and

practical development.² The Brexit referendum and the transatlantic rift after the election of Donald Trump as the US President was the window of opportunity for France to promote ESA. As a result, ESA's practical implementation was the most intensive since the first initiatives in 1948.

The Global Strategy for the European Union's Foreign and Security Policy provides highly speculative arguments for ESA's necessity. The document suggests that ESA is necessary to "promote the common interests of our citizens, as well as our principles and values" (Global Strategy, 2016, p. 4). ESA is also important for "Europe's ability to promote peace and security within and beyond its borders" (Global Strategy, 2016, p. 9). The issue is that the first argument covers all the EU policies and therefore ESA can be linked to any EU activity. The second argument for ESA's necessity is more precise, covering defence and a more significant role in the international system. The main objectives of ESA are: to deter, respond, and protect itself and also to act outside EU borders; to acquire capabilities to act autonomously and in close cooperation with NATO; to create sustainable, innovative and competitive European defence industry; to create a defence, technological, and industrial internal market and to develop space capabilities (Global Strategy, 2016, pp. 19–20, 46). Though ESA is important for defence policy, it can also cover any EU policy.

The EUGS provides somewhat ambiguity on the EU–NATO relations. On the one hand, the document advocates greater autonomy from the US and NATO in foreign, security, and defence policies. On the other hand, NATO is considered the primary collective defence framework. EUGS indicates that the EU will deepen its partnership with NATO in the coordination of defence capability development, synchronisation of exercises, cooperation in the capacity building for partners, countering hybrid and cyber threats, and maritime security (Global Strategy, 2016, pp. 20, 37). According to Howorth, the EUGS implies that the end goal of the ESA is "a multinational and integrated defence capacity enabling the EU to engage in high-intensity military and civil-military operations with minimal assistance from the US" (Howorth, 2017, p. 9). While Biscop argues that EUGS introduced ESA as an objective, but its meaning in defence remains inconclusive (Biscop, 2021, p. 35). The varying arguments for ESA's necessity, sometimes rather broad interpretation of it, contradicting statements, and intentions on relations with NATO, suggest that EUGS had to attract support for ESA from all EU MS. For some EU members, primarily small states, and members in the eastern part of the EU, NATO is the absolute priority to ensure collective defence. For such countries, the development of ESA is tolerable if it adds to the existing NATO capabilities, covering areas that NATO does not sufficiently cover. In contrast, others see the need to develop ESA to boost European capabilities, contributing to their national capabilities in NATO, thus increasing their role in the alliance.

After the introduction of EUGS, ESA had three dimensions: political, operational, and industrial (Arteaga, 2017). Political autonomy was understood as "the capacity to take security policy decisions and act upon them" (Kempin & Kunz, 2017). The operational capacity was understood as the necessary institutional framework and capabilities to plan and conduct civilian and military

operations independently. Finally, the industrial capacity was to develop and build the capabilities required to attain operational autonomy. The 2017–2018 witnessed initiatives in all three dimensions to achieve ESA.

In June 2017, the European Defence Fund (EDF) was established to coordinate and increase national investment in defence research and interoperability between the armed forces of MS. Unfortunately, the funding to develop new products for the defence industry remains somewhat limited compared to all MS defence spending.³ Nevertheless, the project can increase cooperation between MS in the R&D and defence industry in the long run.

A permanent operational headquarters – the MPCC (also referred to as EU Military Headquarters [HQ]) – was established in Brussels a day later. The MPCC must conduct military operations outside the EU. However, the vitality of the MPCC remained questionable as it only took over the responsibility of three military training missions in Africa (Mali [2010], Somalia [2013], and the Central African Republic [2016]). The initiatives to develop HQ and gradually expand its responsibilities and scope exist, especially considering the directions set in *A Strategic Compass for Security and Defence (2022)*. Consequently, MPCC requires additional staffing from MS, which is a challenge for small EU MS. Moreover, the growing responsibilities of MPCC will inevitably begin duplicating NATO responsibilities and activities, which is not a welcomed scenario for some members of both organisations.

The same year under the European Defence Agency, the CARD was launched to help coordinate defence spending between MS and identify collaborative projects. CARD must optimise defence spending when coordinating acquisitions between MS, thus leading to unified platforms and arms systems. In addition, multinational procurement and capability development should lead to mutual defence planning, thus leading to common strategic culture. However, collective defence budgets are unlikely, and joint procurement remains hugely complicated.

In November 2017, the PESCO (originally introduced in 2009 by the Treaty of Lisbon) was launched to develop the EU's security and defence cooperation. The objective was to enhance the EU's role as an international security actor conducting military operations abroad, protecting the EU, and developing its military capabilities. In addition, PESCO was seen as a way to build European strategic culture. It aims to enhance defence cooperation between 25 MS committed to investing, planning, developing, and operating defence capabilities by taking binding commitments.⁴ Despite ambition, PESCO remains focused mainly on joint defence technology projects. There were doubts about PESCO deliverables from the beginning because most projects focused on developing new technologies rather than integrating MS in mutual military cooperation, leading to strategic outputs and autonomous capabilities. For this reason, there are arguments that PESCO's purpose remains unclear (Biscop, 2020, p. 3) and that it does not go beyond the reflection of the national interests of EU members and NATO (Biscop, 2021, p. 35). This once more suggests

that ESA and PESCO remain the smallest common denominators of national interests of EU MS.

In March 2021, EU adopted the EPF fund (of nearly 5.7 billion Euros annually in 2021–2027), replacing the African Peace Facility and ATHENA mechanisms, to finance the EU CSDP military operations and provide military assistance for EU partner countries anywhere in the world (Council Decision (CFSP) 2021/509, 2021). The EPF marks a paradigm shift in the EU foreign and security policy. The EU is becoming a “normal” (geopolitical) power by deciding to provide military assistance and supply lethal weapons. The EPF appeals to many EU MS because EPF decisions are taken at the EU Council. The MS can also abstain and do not participate in a particular operation or provision of military aid to a specific partner. The instrument allows closer cooperation between certain groups of MS in CSDP while respecting the national interests of other EU MS. The EPF’s importance was already observed when the EU decided to provide capabilities to the Ukrainian Armed Forces after Russia began a large-scale invasion of Ukraine on 24 February 2022.

In September 2017, in his speech in Sorbonne, French President Emmanuel Macron proposed the European Intervention Initiative (EI2). The core objective of EI2 is to develop a shared strategic culture enhancing the capabilities of European states to carry out military missions under the framework of NATO, EU, and *ad hoc* collations. The initiative is outside the EU but compatible with ESA objectives and in synergy with PESCO (Letter of Intent of the European Intervention Initiative [EI2], 2018). The practical cooperation in EI2 covers strategic foresight and intelligence sharing, scenario development and planning, support to operations, lessons learned, and doctrine. Eleven EU MS (including Denmark, which has an opt-out from CSDP), Norway, and the UK got involved in EI2. As a result, the format does not entirely fall under EU defence integration or ESA because it is a coalition of the willing under French leadership and the EU umbrella. In four years, EI2 produced a lot of discussions but no practical application. EI2 falls under suspicion that France sees it as an opportunity to have national gains rather than move forward with EU defence integration because EI2 does not include all EU MS (Wither, 2018).

The “big bang” of initiatives (EDE, PESCO, CARD, EPF, and EI2) mostly complement one another, contributing to ESA in the defence sector. The initiatives must ensure that EU MS starts designing and producing major military equipment together rather than competing. They also must ensure that armies of the EU MS will use “homemade” equipment leading to decreased imports from third countries in the long run. Such an approach can possibly lead to a Franco-German military–industrial complex to which military–industrial sectors of other MS will have to join, or they will fail to survive (Biscop, 2017, p. 1). So far, the initiatives do not contribute to the formation of European strategic culture. There are assumptions that not the ESA has to create European security culture as intended, but the other way around, European strategic culture should lead to ESA (Tanner, 2021, p. 11). An approach of the Austrian

Defence Minister to ESA shows the problem of agreeing on the causes and objectives of ESA between MS. The developments of initiatives also indicate the prevailing MS national interests' priorities in the EU projects. The prioritisation of national interests can undermine European initiatives.

France, which is the driving force of the ESA, perceives it instrumentally. From the French perspective, ESA has “[to] contribute directly to the preservation of our [French] national sovereignty, as well as that of other European countries” (Ministere des Armees, 2021, pp. 3, 37). Interestingly, the contemporary perception of ESA is not so much different from the earliest European defence initiatives proposed by Paris. However, the French are not necessarily alone with such an approach to ESA, perceiving it as an instrument. Thierry Tardy notes ESA focuses on putting military dimension in the hands of EU MS and not in the EU (Tardy, 2021, p. 4), meaning that ESA provides capabilities not for the EU as a unitary actor but for the actions of MS.

Germany in ESA prioritises sovereignty and close cooperation with other European partners like Norway or the UK (Lippert, von Ondarza, & Perthes, 2019, p. 9). Berlin accepts that the EU is a driving economic power in Europe and sees the necessity for deeper integration. At the same time, choosing to balance between France and NATO underlines the importance of the mentioned partners. Furthermore, Germany understands that the concept of “autonomy” sends negative signals to partners, primarily to the US, so it chooses the concept of “sovereignty” over “autonomy”. Berlin also interprets ESA as much broader than the defence policy on which most activities have been focused (Lippert, von Ondarza, & Perthes, 2019, p. 36).

Because different MS link their national interests with ESA, it becomes a constantly expanding concept and, therefore, meaningless. For example, in 2019, ESA began to cover the COVID-19 pandemic, supply and production chains, and problems with data privacy. According to Niklas Helwig (2021, p. 16), “EU’s ability to act autonomously is connected more and more closely to the questions of welfare, health and post-crisis economic recovery”. In addition, the ESA began to cover climate change, human rights, digital services, trade, technology, and energy security. By adding new areas of necessity for joint EU action to ESA, EU MS see ESA as a way to address their national interests next to defence issues – to Europeanise issues. ESA became everything to everyone. It became a keyword that MS adds to signal that its national interests are EU interests.

In this context, EU’s HR/VP Joseph Borrell made a blog entry on strategic autonomy in December 2020. He stated that ESA has become controversial and needs clarification (Borrell, 2020). Unfortunately, rather than clarifying the concept, Borrell only referred to the ill-defined concept presented in the Council Conclusions of November 2016, which stated that ESA is “[the] capacity to act autonomously when and where necessary and with partners wherever possible”. Borrell even rhetorically asked where the problem is with understanding what ESA means, missing the point that the ESA definition lacks any substance. Ignoring that he fails to define the concept, HR/VP extensively writes why

ESA is necessary. The same approach continues in his later discussions about ESA. He considers ESA a “key goal” because, without it, the EU cannot be considered a “political union” and a “global player”, also argues that ESA is not limited to security and defence (Borrell, 2021, p. 10). For Borrell, ESA remains everything for everybody.

In the State of Europe speech, President of the European Council Charles Michel (2021) noted that ESA is “understood differently in different places, and with different sensibilities”. He argued that the ESA term is not the most important because the most important is ESA’s goals. Unfortunately, the precise goals have not been presented, except for some inspirational phrases, like: “mastery of destiny”, “ability to act together”, “managing interdependencies”, and “avoiding excessive dependencies”. According to Michel, ESA has two pillars. The first is prosperity and trade, and the second is security and defence (Michel, 2021). They cover any policy of the EU or its MS. The ESA concept remains ambiguous and delegitimises the necessity for its existence. In general, ESA has become synonymous with deeper European integration.

In the State of the Union 2021 address, President of the European Commission Ursula von der Leyen did not mention the ESA. Instead, the German approach is applied, which replaces the concept with the term “sovereignty”. The “sovereignty” was used very narrowly, only in the technological sector. When addressing defence issues, von der Leyen favoured the European Defence Union concept and indicated “[a] lack of political will” as the main problem why this union was not established (von der Leyen, 2021). Her address signals shying away from the ESA concept, suggesting that either she did not want to use a controversial idea or that the concept lost appeal among top EU decision-makers.

Von der Leyen’s approach might be a reaction to the discussed hollowness of the ESA, especially when it became self-contradicting after it was modified and the new concept of Open Strategic Autonomy (OSA) (European Commission, 2020) was introduced. OSA focuses on the economic rather than defence aspects and suggests that economic openness can be achieved through protectionism. Interestingly, openness and protectionism are seen as reinforcing one another. However, it remains unclear if OSA is part of ESA (the same ill-defined policy with a different title) or a separate and unrelated policy. OSA once again illustrates the problem of the ESA’s concept, which covers everything.

As a result of intensive discussions on ESA, the preparation of the Strategic Compass, which had to contribute to the development of the EU strategic culture and clarify cooperation in security and defence among EU MS, was initiated during the German Presidency in 2020. The document published on 24 March 2022 (*A Strategic Compass for Security and Defence*, 2022) indicates some specific vectors for joint capability development. Still, it fails to provide alignment in defence matters between EU MS, is process heavy, and lacks ambition. The Strategic Compass focuses on establishing EU Rapid Deployment Capacity (5000 troops), which lacks ambition and raises questions about its future considering the experience of the use of the EU Battlegroups. The focus

on article 44 of the Lisbon Treaty allows using EU resources for foreign and security policies of groups of EU MS, which plays in the interests of the most powerful states of the EU. The document acknowledges that MPCC is far from functioning as an EU Military HQ and raises questions if it can become such. Though the Strategic Compass was affected by Russia's aggression in Ukraine, it fails to provide a strategy for adequate reaction to such a challenge. The document does not focus on ESA too much as it mentions ESA just once. It also does not focus on sovereignty outside the national level, except for EU technological sovereignty. The Strategic Compass suggests that EU capabilities must be increased to contribute to NATO capabilities and benefit transatlantic security (A Strategic Compass for Security and Defence, 2022, pp. 10, 13, 14, 23).

Finally, before summarising the evolution of ESA, it is necessary to discuss changing relations between the EU and NATO, which is why ESA remains controversial in the first place. The development of the EU–NATO relations and the speeches of the EU representatives suggest a solid strategic partnership between the two organisations. Still, changing positions about NATO cannot be ignored. NATO remains perceived as the backbone of collective security in the EU by most MS, but there are more signals that the alliance is seen as a partner, while the importance of the EU in defence constantly increases. The focus on the EU pillar creates some distance from the US. The joint declaration between NATO and the EU under the auspices of the NATO Warsaw summit highlights the increasing decision-making autonomy of the two organisations (EU–NATO Declaration, 2016), which has been a continuing trend since 2008. The declaration on EU–NATO cooperation in the NATO Brussels summit stated that the EU and NATO are “two unique and essential partners”. At the same time, the declaration implied the primacy of the EU when ensuring the security and defence of EU MS and the increasing role of the European pillar in NATO through PESCO and EDF (EU–NATO Declaration, 2018).

Small and especially eastern members of the EU are not happy with the changing perception of NATO in the EU. However, they understand that it is inevitable to be part of the ESA to support initiatives of bigger EU powers responsible for allocating resources in the EU. Therefore, such states try to find a balance between NATO and the EU, proposing initiatives to redefine ESA according to their national interests, not to allow distancing from the US, and advocating ESA's development which would complement what is already secured by NATO. As a result, the PESCO Military Mobility (“Military Schengen”) project is the most interesting for EU MS because it includes NATO members outside the EU. Interestingly, the Strategic Compass returns to the interpretation of NATO as the core aspect of European security architecture.

Since 2016, systemic factors have allowed focusing on the popularisation of the ESA concept and its implementation in practice in the coordination of the EU defence policies of MS. However, the ESA faces several challenges. The first challenge is the lack of its precise definition. The second is that ESA does not seem to lead to European strategic culture. The third is that ESA is seen as an alternative to NATO and the US. The fourth, and perhaps the most important, is the increasing hollowness of the concept as it expanded and began to cover

all policies of the EU and, in general, became associated with deeper integration. All these challenges have the same independent variable defining ESA – prioritisation of national interests of EU MS. The ESA was and continues to be perceived as an instrument to promote national interests and concerns of EU MS Europeanising them. Paris supports it to increase national capabilities to conduct operations in regions important for France. EU MS, with a developed defence industry, see it as an instrument to support this industry. Other states strive to include challenges they are concerned about. Hugo Meijer and Brooks (2021, pp. 10, 23–32) correctly stated that ESA is unlikely for two main reasons: a shortage of defence capacity and, most importantly – “strategic cacophony”. ESA becomes everything for everybody, a concept which is impossible to define, essentially replacing the idea of deeper European integration.

Conclusions

The analysis showed that ESA essentially means autonomy from the US in defence and foreign policy, expanding into other EU policies. However, because the concept constantly expands, it has become all-inclusive and lacks essence. If everything is included in ESA, it becomes an irrelevant slogan. Currently, it is the synonym of deeper EU integration, diluting the importance and ambitions of defence integration for greater independence from NATO and the US.

The archaeology of ESA indicates three main patterns in the evolution of the idea. The first is that the international system defines if European countries can focus more on their mutual defence cooperation. The Cold War and its end defined the importance of NATO for most Western European countries, thus defining if ESA (regardless of its title) can be developed. ESA became the most discussed and implemented in practice when the EU–US faced significant tensions.

The second pattern is that the essence of ESA directly depends on the national interests of the EU MS because they want to instrumentalise it through the Europeanisation of their national interests. ESA cannot lead to significant changes on the EU level because all MS are primarily concerned with their national interests. The priority of European ideas does not guide EU members because they do not try to reinvent themselves as Europeans with single strategic culture, single defence capabilities, and defence industry. EU member states remain pragmatic and national interest orientated.

The third pattern is that all political decisions on deeper defence cooperation in the EU, at least until 2016, were not successfully implemented in practice. The EU had to ask NATO or the US to get involved in significant military challenges in the EU neighbourhood (wars in the Balkans, intervention in Libya, etc.). The EU was reluctant to use its capabilities even when it had them due to risk-averse policies (consider the EU Battlegroups). The challenges to the security and defence issues to countries on the eastern part of the EU after Russia invaded Ukraine (in 2014) continue to be addressed predominantly by NATO. NATO’s centrality is reaffirmed due to Russia’s large-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022.

The future of the ESA is still to be determined, but the lack of ambition and joint approach of EU MS to ESA undermine the idea, despite which buzzword

is used. Though it is difficult to imagine the systemic challenge that would break a transatlantic bond, the viability of autonomy primarily depends on the US positions. The return of the US to isolationist policies or focus on other regions (Southeast Asia) and significant security challenges in the EU eastern or southern neighbourhoods without proper US assistance might push EU for ESA. As a result, because of Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022 and the increased attention of the US on European security, the intentions of ESA were toned down. The decision of Finland and Sweden to join NATO also indicates NATO's importance and the lack of trust in the EU capabilities and therefore scepticism about ESA's future. Simultaneously, the EU's focus on independence (autonomy) in energy, cyber, and technological sectors might contribute to the greater geopolitical actorness of the supranational organisation.

Notes

- 1 Established in 2004.
- 2 Mentioning of strategic autonomy in 2016 EUGS led to the nearly geometrical progression of a number of documents mentioning strategic autonomy. In 2015, there were only three documents with words "strategic autonomy", while in 2016, already 16, in 2018 – 71 documents, and in 2021 – 224 (according to the search results in the Eur-Lex portal: [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/search.html?lang=en&text=""strategic+autonomy"&qid=1638975656341&type=quick&scope=EURLEX](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/search.html?lang=en&text=)).
- 3 The EDF budget will reach only €8 billion annually in the 2021–2027 budget period.
- 4 All EU MS except Denmark (until referendum on defence opt-out in June 2022) and Malta.

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3 Revisiting France's Commitment to Defence Integration

A Case of Political Functionalism

Ringailė Kuokštytė

France has enjoyed the (co-)leading role in the European Union due to its historical and structural status. The country was one of the proud founding member states of the European project and home to many visionaries of the latter. Moreover, France's international status continues to be gauged, thanks to its actorness in security matters of global prominence. France's permanent seat at the UN Security Council is neither the sole nor the most revealing feature of its effective actorness during the contemporary period. Most recently and prominently, assuming their share of the burden in the field of global security, the French have been heavily involved in the fight against terrorist groups in the Sahel.

To explain France's global ambitions, which seem alive and kicking (Le Corre, 2021), one may be tempted to refer to the country's oft-cited characterisation as a "quintessential Westphalian state, fighting hard to preserve and defend its interests" (Irondele & Schmitt, 2013, p. 125). This explanation, however, is insufficient to capture the complexity of France's political reality. Notably, the promotion of defence integration, which contributes to strengthening ESA and is often viewed as one of France's primary motives in foreign and security policy, does not square well, either conceptually or empirically, with the country's defence of its national interests and its ambition to preserve its (power) status. Defence integration implies a commitment to a common strategic culture and to force aggregation motivated by collective intergovernmental efforts (Haroche, 2017). Significantly, security and defence integration inevitably contributes to constraining national governments' "core state power" (Biermann & Weiss, 2021) and inherently contradicts the Westphalian explanation.

The chapter offers greater scrutiny over the conceptual and empirical ambiguity, which makes France too frequently appear as both a promoter of Europeanisation or, equally, "supranational consolidation" (Béraud-Sudreau & Pannier, 2021, p. 296) of defence and security and a loyal protagonist of independent state action. It is argued that the debate about the French-driven political integration of defence policy is a *faux débat*, insofar as it is likely to contain the bias of absolute continuity, over time, of France's strategic culture.

The chapter, which reviews relevant empirical research and analyses historical developments, as well as political positions, follows two main lines of

argument that help to explain such misreading of the relationship between France and defence integration, including ESA as it relates to this policy field. First, France's historical perception conducive to defence integration as a political project is too easily projected onto the country's current position on Europeanisation in defence matters. The ideas and interests attached to defence integration are context-dependent and, therefore, shift across time. The fact that France manifested, in the past, a political commitment to the supranational consolidation of defence does not necessarily imply France's active involvement in building European defence during the contemporary period, even if this policy appears to mirror the country's interests (Kuokštūtė, 2020; Mawdsley, 2015, p. 139). This contention appeals to the general idea of the existence of complex empirics behind easily observable appearances.

According to the second line of argument, France's position on defence integration and, thus, ESA is today predominantly structured by its defence industry interests. Consequently, the country's commitment to the Europeanisation of defence issues can be analysed as a derivative of the economic logic. On the one hand, such commitment may still be effective, so long as French defence industry interests are those of the government. But, on the other hand, such dynamics of what may be qualified as "political functionalism" (Mawdsley, 2015) reduce the ambition and scope of political integration in the field. Viewed in this light, defence integration ultimately serves tactical instead of strategic objectives of Paris.

The chapter proceeds as follows. The first section provides a review of relevant empirical accounts, which allows for framing the integration of defence policy as being promoted by France. The second section looks at France's historical position on European defence as a political project, which helps to elucidate the country's context-dependent appreciation of Europe as a defence actor. The third section zooms in on the post-Cold-War period. It stresses diverging structural conditions which, for France, are no longer sufficient to embrace European defence as a desirable political reality. Instead, the economic logic and, specifically, France's interest in protecting its defence industry come to the fore in matters of Europeanisation of defence. Conclusions, which also briefly consider the most recent geopolitical developments in Europe, follow.

France as the promoter of European strategic autonomy

Among EU countries, France is oft-cited as the leader in promoting ESA as part of European consolidated defence (Deschaux-Dutard, 2019). President Emmanuel Macron may serve in this regard as one of the most prominent illustrations. It has been recognised that the French president's objective is "to create a 'sovereign' or 'autonomous' Europe", which is consistent with France's long-term vision of multi-polar international politics (Stephens, 2021). Effective multilateralism, with Europe as an "equilibrating power" (Macron, 2022), is inherently linked to the French idea of a "third way", which serves as an alternative to bipolar and prone-to-escalation inter-state relations.

President Macron's position, however, largely builds on his predecessor's initiatives. It was, in fact, in 2016, under François Hollande's presidency, that Germany and France proposed an EU-level pact of defence, which aimed to foster the development of new defence capabilities, as well as to enhance the Union's operational military capacities and defence cooperation more generally (Béraud-Sudreau & Pannier, 2021). Other empirical references also corroborate this political line of French governments.¹ For example, Hubert Védrine, who served as the French foreign minister from 1997 to 2002, had recognised that France was the sole European country to support the idea of "*Europe de la défense*", the remaining European countries having never really rallied around this project (Irondele & Mérand, 2010, p. 30). To go further down the chronological line, President Jacques Chirac, in 1996, spoke in favour of a Europe "capable of defending European interests worldwide with the whole spectrum of power" (Irondele & Mérand, 2010, p. 32).

Such declarations seem to materialise into observable outcomes. Relative to the previous development phases of the CSDP, the most recent period has no short of achievements on display. These notably include the EDF and a dedicated structure for military planning and conduct of a portion of European military missions and operations. The significance of these two CSDP developments should not be underestimated. With the establishment of the EDF, an institutional taboo was broken, insofar as activities directly related to the defence sector were to start receiving funds from the EU budget (Haroche, 2020). Previously, the consensus, both within the European Commission and among member states, was in favour of keeping such activities off the common budget.²

Furthermore, the establishment, in 2017, of the MPCC for non-executive CSDP military missions is equally significant. There has been evidence that the MPCC has already contributed to resolving situations where, previously, the Union was "militarily challenged" (Reykers, 2019, p. 783), such as in Mali.³ Consequent to these and some other CSDP developments, such as the EPF, the EU appears as a more strategically capable (or, at least, strategically predisposed) actor. The presence of "more EU defense [stands to appear as] self-evident" (Béraud-Sudreau & Pannier, 2021, p. 295).

The prominent post-2016 CSDP developments materialised in the context of Brexit. While many ideas on European defence initiatives pre-dated the institutional and political tensions regarding the United Kingdom's referendum on its EU membership and subsequent withdrawal, the specific historical context served as a catalyst. As the British influence faded away, so did its determination to serve as a break for defence integration. The French seized this window of opportunity to promote the image of "a stronger Europe" (Ministère des Armées, 2018, p. 20). Paris was quick to appreciate the CSDP progress (Ministère des Armées, 2018, p. 21). The EU's seemingly becoming a real defence actor – thanks, most recently, to EPF collective funds dedicated to Ukrainians' military efforts against Russia – has highlighted the significance of all the steps towards making the CSDP possible in both political terms and those of policy implementation. At the same time, ever more challenging geopolitics in the region

appear to confirm the utility of France's, again, seemingly effective strategy of defence consolidation.

France's proclivity to support the EU's strategic autonomy as part of defence integration tends to be described by scholarship as featuring the country's long-term and consistent foreign and security policy priorities. Indeed, it has been forcefully contended that the strategy of defence integration is "deeply embedded in the French approach" (Rieker, 2017, p. 127). Béraud-Sudreau and Pannier (2021, pp. 7, 8) argue, specifically, that Paris "pushed for the term 'strategic autonomy' to become part of the European vocabulary, [which had] been a cornerstone of France's national defense strategy since the 1960s".

Historical references to France's position on and its role in fostering defence integration are numerous in the literature. Irondelle and Mérand (2010, p. 30) are in particular among those who contend that, historically, Paris played an essential role in pushing forward the idea of European defence. Rieker (2017, p. 25) argues that the association between France's approach to the European project, on the one hand, and the Europeanisation of defence policy, on the other hand, was one of the most prominent features of the country's foreign and security policy during the Cold War. This association was part of the perception held by French governments already in the 1950s, according to which the "French-dominated European integration process" served as an instrument to extend the political influence not only of Europe as a whole but also that of France (Rieker, 2017, p. 25; see also Maclean & Szarka, 2008). The entire machinery of France's political establishment and bureaucratic body deployed significant efforts to strengthen the integration process (Rieker, 2017).

Other scholars, similarly, describe the policy and political priorities of Paris in the security and defence field as a continuum along the "European" line, be it in the pre- or post-1989 epoch (Beraud-Sudreau & Pannier, 2021, pp. 7, 8; Irondelle & Schmitt, 2013). Consistently, this line of thinking has been argued to explain France's strategy concerning NATO, insofar as Paris, for 50 years, "aimed at building an autonomous 'European defense'" (Irondelle & Mérand, 2010), instead of being a committed ally. Furthermore, even such a strategic decision as France's return to the Alliance's integrated military command has been described as an instrumental act to serve Europe's defence (Irondelle & Mérand, 2010). It was supposed to reassure France's allies that defence integration at the European level did not contain any risk of weakening NATO.

Historical references suggest the notion of the French politico-strategic position as being of absolute continuity. Besides, they validate the contention that, like in the past, today Paris continues to promote ESA as part of a political project aimed at having "more EU defense" (Béraud-Sudreau & Pannier, 2021, p. 295). Such accounts, however, seem to lack a deeper analytical perspective, making one doubt their depiction of true empirical realities. On the one hand, for instance, Rieker (2017, p. 25) recognises that France promoted Europeanisation until the 1990s, but this course of action became too difficult to pursue afterwards, notably as a result of a "radically" changed EU (see also Gregory, 2000; Lequesne, 2008). Others, on the other hand, tend to

analyse France as a promoter of security and defence integration since the 1990s (Béraud-Sudreau & Pannier, 2021; Deschaux-Dutard, 2019; Schmitt & Rynning, 2018). A reunited Germany may have offered Paris unprecedented opportunities to “[take] the lead in pushing forward the idea that defence should become part of the European integration project” (Deschaux-Dutard, 2019, p. 56). To mark yet another point of disagreement among scholars, Berlin’s role, instead of providing a support platform, has also been analysed as a challenge to the French influence after the Cold War (Rieker, 2017).

These accounts tend to imagine France’s politico-strategic culture as constant, which disregards the possibility of within-country change (Becker & Malesky, 2017). The utility of considering changes in a national politico-strategic culture over time has been generally neglected in studies dealing with political integration at the EU level. Yet, a significant value of this approach lies in the fact that it allows for going beyond publicly declared political positions, preferences, or objectives. Indeed, equating France’s historical position on defence integration with the country’s contemporary perception of Europeanisation in the field, as this perception reveals itself through the political discourse, amounts to over-generalisation. It is likely to lead to erroneous conclusions, such as the one that defence integration, accompanied by the idea of the EU’s strategic autonomy, is a direct outcome of France’s determined and consistent efforts to upload its strategic culture at the European level (Haroche, 2020; Kuokštytė, 2020).

The following section looks more closely at the historical context, with the view of shedding light on France’s historical perception of Europe as a defence actor. The meanings of defence integration held in the past allow for clarifying their conditional features, comparing them with contemporary circumstances, and inferring about the current perception of relevant issues. A historical perspective also serves a methodological aim, in the sense that a richer empirical context allows for going beyond political rhetoric (Pannier, 2017; Schmitt, 2017).

Conditionality of the French strategic culture

The continuity-based narrative of France’s interest in fostering defence integration offers a convenient shortcut to explaining the country’s seemingly favourable position on a strengthened EU security and defence policy. Yet, shortcuts may contain a bias of over-generalisation. This explanation squares, in fact, badly with the French strategic culture, which predisposes the country to prefer national autonomy. The French may indeed be described as a nation where “ideas about the nature and locus of sovereignty” are known to play a “remarkable role” (Koenig-Archibugi, 2004, p. 137). This continues to be true today (Kuokštytė, 2020).

The EU dimension necessarily implies a certain degree of Europeanisation, which, empirically, allows for observing converging political will in the form of a consensus, be it short- or long-term, as is the case, respectively, with intergovernmentalism and communitarian dynamics (power transfer to EU

institutions). Another important empirical aspect is the aggregation of means to pursue a common objective. In the defence field, the ultimate convergence of political will implies “the aggregation of European armed forces with a view towards joint action” (Haroche, 2017, p. 234). Such an aggregation, even if of a relatively short-term nature (particularly in the case of civilian or military missions), imposes limits on participating countries’ own (sovereign) actions. It contradicts the French strategic culture based on the “sovereignty first” paradigm.

How is then one to reconcile France’s commitment to Europe as a defence actor and the country’s preference for sovereign policy? I argue that one has to look at the historical context. Until the end of the Cold War, Europe as a defence actor represented a political possibility in the French strategic culture. During the Cold-War era, Paris preferred deep defence integration rather than West Germany’s increased military power. Furthermore, Paris imagined European-level developments in the field “on French terms” (Mawdsley, 2015, p. 144). However, there was a shift after the Cold War. First, the German factor was removed. Second, Paris realised that the project of defence integration under the French guidance was infeasible.⁴

The notion of a strategic culture has already been an object of qualitative and quantitative studies (Becker & Malesky, 2017; Biehl, Giegerich, & Jonas, 2013; Katzenstein, 2003). It may be defined as “nationally shared values and practices in security and defence policy” (Biehl et al., 2013, p. 8; see also Larsen and Johnson, 2006; Schmitt, 2017). This general definition encompasses accepted meanings or beliefs associated with security and defence issues, as well as strategic behaviour motivated by existing perceptions (Becker & Malesky, 2017). Scholars have recognised the heterogeneity of strategic cultures across nations, yet within-country changes have been of less interest to researchers. Schmitt (2017, p. 469) even makes “deep thinking” about national foreign and security policy and its strategic aims a necessary condition for a country to play a role in regional and world affairs. Such thinking implies deliberation and, consequently, a possibility of change or, more specifically, a strategic culture’s capacity of shifting. It is only logical that relevant ideas and perceptions may shift as well. These insights have not been sufficiently addressed in studies on defence integration.

A long-term perspective allows for capturing the French strategic culture as capable of change, despite its apparent constancy. It has been recognised that already in the 1950s, Paris had a clearly “stated objective [to] sustain its independence [from] the two superpowers” (Béraud-Sudreau, 2020, p. 25; Serfati, 2001, p. 221). For example, France was determined to continue “develop[ing] weapon systems in its own right” and positioned itself as “an alternative armaments supplier” for those countries that were willing to resist dependence on either one of the two superpowers (Serfati, 2001, pp. 221–223). This made, for instance, the French government refuse its accession, in 1968, to the Eurogroup, a group established by European NATO members to “improve the competitiveness of their defence firms” (Mawdsley, 2015, pp. 143–144; see also

Serfati, 2001).⁵ However, historically, this ideological commitment of France to independence is far from being incompatible with the country's political appreciation of defence integration. While striving for its national independence, France was also committed to an unprecedented supranationalist defence project (Schimmelfening, Leuffen, & Rittberger, 2015, p. 778), which was the European Defence Community. Yet, this dose of compatibility was context-dependent and, thus, conditional.

The EDC was proposed by France in 1950 by then Prime Minister Plevin and won the support of the French political elite until it was rejected in 1954 by the French parliament. As documented by Haroche (2017, p. 236), even before that, one of the French visionaries of the European project, Jean Monnet, who was at the time the Planning Commissioner,⁶ welcomed the idea of a "European army with a unified command under the direction of supranational authority" (see also Gavin, 2009, pp. 73, 74). Perhaps even more importantly, for Monnet, the EDC was part of "a European political community" (Dawn, 2001, p. 141). He viewed defence integration as a welcoming course of development, insofar as it was able to contribute to the acceleration of political integration, "a political Europe" (Gavin, 2009, p. 77).

Despite the project's fate, France's choice to proceed with "a fully integrated European army" as part of the EDC and to build a truly integrationist project aimed at ensuring Western Europe's defence (Haroche, 2017, pp. 234–236) can be argued to have featured the country's strategic culture. The "European choice" was determined by France's fear of Germany, which was to be contained. This neighbour was, as history had proven, "the country which had invaded France three times in the last eighty years" (Gavin, 2009, p. 70).

The EDC has been largely understood by scholarship as a direct response to the United States' proposal to proceed with West Germany's rearmament. The EDC proposal was formulated amid Washington's concerns that "European allies were not doing enough for their defence", meaning that they should strengthen, in particular, their conventional forces (Lanoszka, 2015, pp. 133–136). It was not unreasonable to expect that the Europeans were capable of acquiring, collectively, "enough conventional military power to reach parity with the Soviet bloc" and provide deterrence, at least, at lower levels of violence (Lanoszka, 2015, pp. 137, 138). This initiative, which was premised on Germany's rearmament, met strong opposition from the French. The fear of Germany predisposed the French to what essentially amounted to agreeing to limit their national autonomy, which was to take the form of an integrated army and collective defence, in exchange for assurances of control over Germany (Haroche, 2017, p. 234; Mawdsley, 2015). Therefore, the EDC episode represents an unequivocally important strategic and political dimension that France, at the time, associated with European defence.

Yet, the EDC episode inevitably appears confusing. How is one to explain the rejection of the EDC by the French side? In the eyes of the French elites, the EDC had another condition attached to it. So did the very idea of European

defence. This condition was a “directorial role for France” (Mawdsley, 2015, p. 143). As it became increasingly clear that France’s troops would not be able to outnumber those of West Germany in the European army⁷ and, therefore, have a Frenchman as the EDC Commander-in-Chief, as well as other key positions (Gavin, 2009), the French parliament, motivated by the country’s military elites, dropped the EDC option (Haroche, 2017, pp. 237, 238). France’s wish to dominate Europe’s defence cooperation was necessarily closely linked to its paramount priority of sustaining the country’s national independence, its “freedom of action” (Gavin, 2009, p. 87).

France’s fear of West Germany persisted during much of the Cold-War epoch, regardless of “the creation of the French-German Brigade” and the Elysée Treaty of 1963 (Deschaux-Dutard, 2019, p. 56). Yet, the necessary conditions for the materialisation of an ambitious European defence policy were not satisfied, as France’s inability to guide European defence persisted. As a result, the country’s focus of attention remained elsewhere (e.g., the Algerian War of Independence); besides, NATO’s prominence in Europe prevailed.

The end of the Cold War brought about historical developments. Ultimately, it removed the variable of a threatening Germany from France’s politico-strategic equations. Furthermore, France understood its unaltered limits to assume a “directorial role” (Mawdsley, 2015, p. 143) in determining politico-strategic matters that were relevant to the continent. At the same time, Paris remained committed to claiming its strategic autonomy (French Government, 1994).

An important implication of these historical developments was that Europe as a defence actor lost its effective political significance in France’s strategic culture (Meijer & Wyss, 2018), yet defence integration remained in the French political discourse. Schmitt (2017, p. 469) explains this discursive feature as the one motivated by “habit and experience”. I introduce a somewhat different perspective. The chapter agrees that, during the contemporary period, European defence and related ideas, notably the strategic autonomy of the EU’s defence policy, have been devoid of substantive content and have not been associated with specific strategic ends in the French case (Schmitt, 2017). Yet, the notion of “usage(s) of Europe” (Béraud-Sudreau & Pannier, 2021; Jacquot & Woll, 2003) has stressed more intricate goals and strategies that EU member states may pursue behind the declared European objectives. Consequently, such usages are an outcome that is hardly unrelated to any “deep thinking” on the part of national decision-makers. In the French case, defence integration, including ESA, seems to benefit the country’s defence industrial interests ultimately and, consequently, serve Paris’s tactical rather than strategic objectives. The national defence industry has served as a critical vehicle for France to adapt to the post-Cold-War context, insofar as the interests related to competitiveness and protection of the defence sector largely replaced the political aspect of European-level defence integration. These interests underpin the French ambition of ESA in the defence field (Macron, 2022).

The role of France's defence industrial interests and European defence as a problem-solving structure

France is a prominent defence industrial actor at the European level and internationally. It has been one of the leading EU nations in arms exports. Although France is still far from the United States and Russia in terms of global market shares, it has been the third-largest arms exporter since 2017 (The Global Economy, 2020). Arms exports occupy a crucial position in the French government's strategic policy landscape (Ministère des Armées, 2017) and continue to enjoy a strong sense of ownership by the political incumbency (Vincent, 2021). Officially, it is recognised that “[m]aintaining the vitality of [France's DTIB] is a matter of national sovereignty”, particularly regarding the capabilities of nuclear deterrence (Coulomb and Fontanel, 2005, pp. 297, 298; Defence and National Security Strategic Review, 2017, p. 63). A strategy of active promotion of arms exports by the French government has increasingly imposed itself, starting from the 1980s, as a necessary condition for the sector's viability (Béraud-Sudreau, 2020). This was the consequence of reduced domestic demand, diminishing military expenditures, and increasing costs of technological innovation (Coulomb & Fontanel, 2005; Hollinger, 2022), to name but a few factors.

France was brought to start regarding ever more intense cooperation at the European level with greater appreciation by the 1980s. This tendency, over time, translated into the country's call and, in fact, support for “more independent defence capabilities for Western Europe”, a consequence of a budget crisis back home (Mawdsley, 2015, pp. 143, 144), as budgetary difficulties inevitably bore consequences for the French defence industry. It was, however, in particular after the Cold War that the French defence sector faced the challenge of diminishing efficiency and drying public funds (Coulomb & Fontanel, 2005, p. 309), all of which imposed a search for additional measures of different nature, including a push for the notion of Europe's “capacity for autonomous action” (Saint-Malo Declaration, 1998) as a promise for a more independent European defence industry. This independence was primarily a synonym for independence from the US and greater opportunities for the French defence industry to strengthen its market positioning in Europe.

The chapter does not suggest that, before the 1980s, France had maintained an isolated defence industry. Historically, for France, cooperation with European countries, including Germany, with the view of developing and producing armaments, had been “a way to maintain its self-sufficiency” (Mawdsley, 2015, p. 143). Defence-industrial cooperation had been particularly associated with the country's commitment to autonomy from the United States rather than other Western European nations. Although limited, especially compared to the contemporary period, this cooperation was not trivial. During the Cold War, the armaments industry enabled France to occupy a better strategic position with respect to West Germany, insofar as the latter's industry was constrained by the supranational High Authority of the European Coal and Steel Community

(Gavin, 2009).⁸ In the post-war period, Paris regarded Germany as a subordinate partner when it came to planning and production, yet the Germans were encouraged to contribute equally to the costs (Mawdsley, 2015, p. 143). The country's European and international politico-strategic prestige had been much enhanced by the development of its nuclear defence capabilities in the 1960s (Schmitt & Rynning, 2018). Therefore, the defence industrial sub-field served as an early policy platform for France to enjoy the leading (or "directorial") role.

The context of ever-more demanding structural constraints (Serfati, 2001) made the industrial axis the core (pragmatic) element of France's contemporary position regarding defence integration (Pannier & Schmitt, 2019). The country's historical preferences towards Europe as a political and military defence actor shifted to focus on the emerging European defence sector (Csernatori, 2021). Consequently, the French official political discourse on two autonomies – the national one and the European one – becomes only apparent when one considers the possibility that France is capable of setting the tone concerning EU-level defence industrial policy (Mawdsley, 2015). The effectiveness of the EU level to serve as a platform, which enables the strengthening of the French defence industry via additional funds (Kuokšytė, 2020) or, more generally, policy priority selection, makes integration dynamics desired in the eyes of French policymakers.

The notion of effectiveness is also important concerning defence industry representation by the French government. In fact, this representation may be expected to be effective in the French case more than in any other European country due to France's national governance system, which is characterised by state-centrism across policy areas, including the defence industry in particular. Apart from the above-mentioned role of the country's government in arms exports, its long-lasting efforts to consolidate the defence sector based on the creation of national champions may further serve as a prominent illustration of a special relationship between France's defence sector and its executive power (Béraud-Sudreau, 2020). More generally, it can be argued that the country's particular institutional culture serves as a facilitator for "beliefs" that are spread in the defence industry milieu to be mediated through governmental bodies and representatives at the EU level (Mawdsley, 2015, p. 141).

For Paris, defence industry interests have served as "a catalyst for European defence" (Defence and National Security Strategic Review, 2017, p. 64). This is consistent with the first efforts to use the concept of strategic autonomy in the EU context, insofar as it was most directly linked to the European DTIB (European Commission, 2013, p. 3; European Council, 2013, p. 7). In the context of the EU Global Strategy (2016), one of the key elements of the French "message" was a relationship between ESA and the vision of Europe as "a great economic power" (Béraud-Sudreau & Pannier, 2021, p. 301). The significance of this relationship becomes more evident in light of the consideration that France's defence industry continues to be one of the drivers of the country's edge in the field of innovations and is considered to be an important economic

resource (Mawdsley, 2015; Ministère des Armées, 2021, p. 7; Serfati, 2001). Thus, it is only evident that the French defence sector has a natural role in contributing to the strategic autonomy of the EU as an economic actor. The defence may serve as an additional but not a necessary core element to this strategic vision.

It is, however, possible that the defence industry is rather an exception to the French position regarding the EU's defence, including its strategic autonomy. In other words, a genuine political aspect of France's commitment to strengthening common defence may be revealed by looking at other fronts of the CSDP. Yet, ultimately, the analytical risks of a possible selection bias, which may arise due to the focus on the defence industry only, appear significantly mitigated. The CSDP itself is largely an institutional structure (Pohl, 2013) to make life easier for member states when the right moment presents itself. It does not reflect a collective strategic vision associated with a distinguishable political project but helps to solve arising problems, which are limited in either their scope and (or) duration (Schmitt, 2013).

Regarding common missions and operations, for instance, they remain limited in scope and do not, in principle, necessitate from member states significant and lasting political concessions; they do not impose high political costs on national governments either (Mawdsley, 2015). CSDP missions and operations serve as a tool for problem-solving instead of offering a political project to be realised. Similarly, the Franco-British Saint-Malo declaration, which is regarded as having provided an impetus for the emergence of an effective CSDP, was largely based on the two-party agreement to look for a common technical solution to the issue of military capability gaps at the regional scale (Mawdsley, 2015).

The establishment of the MPCC, likewise, serves as a means to solve a problem of coordination, without the Political and Security Committee losing its political control over the decision on manners in which to respond to crisis situations (Reykers, 2019). Furthermore, the new financing instrument of EPF may also serve as a reference here. The EPF was designed to allow for financing operations having military implications, including the provision of weapons, in the EU's partner countries. It has been presented as a concrete expression of the political will of EU actors, including member states, to strengthen the Union as a global player (Ferrando, 2021; Koziol, 2020). Yet, this off-budget instrument was only a logical addition to common efforts to manage international crises. Previously, gaps in necessary equipment were constantly observed in the context of common military missions and operations, which compromised the EU effort. Remaining outside the European budget, the EPF promises to narrow at least some of the gaps. However, the use of its funds remains subject to member states' unanimous decision-making. The EPF does not commit national governments to a common political vision and is yet another outcome of the problem-solving paradigm in EU security and defence.

Regarding the contemporary period of EU-level developments, defence integration hardly testifies to national governments' political will to render the

EU a capable defence actor. According to Béraud-Sudreau and Pannier (2021), the recent episode of the post-2016 CSDP developments was a coincidental outcome of a confluence of specific factors, notably, France, Germany, and the Commission. Concretely, the concept of “window of opportunity”, used by the authors, does not presume any systematic political will that could motivate the defence initiatives. Ultimately, a preferred venue for member states to advance their politico-strategic cooperation in the field of security and defence policy seems likely to continue being located outside of the EU framework (Béraud-Sudreau & Pannier, 2021), such as within the frame of bilateral or “minilateral” agreements (e.g., the Lancaster House Treaties, the Aachen Treaty, or the European Intervention Initiative).

Finally, member states’ relative disinterest may be compared with the motivation of other actors, primarily the European Commission and the defence industry itself, to push for defence integration (Biermann & Weiss, 2021; Csernaton, 2021). In fact, regarding the taboo mentioned above, which was broken to fund defence-related activities from the EU budget, the initiative could not have been successful without the European Commission’s active role (Haroche, 2020). Furthermore, this development has institutionalised specific beliefs regarding the technological edge of the defence and industrial innovation, notably, that defence-related innovation contributes to other industrial sectors and economic development more generally; these beliefs have been widely accepted and pushed by the European Commission, in particular, because of their link to the internal-market logic (Martins & Mawdsley, 2021). Within the EU, it is the economic dimension, rather than the political one, that most easily enjoys the institutional and intergovernmental consensus (Biermann & Weiss, 2021; Mawdsley, 2015). Overall, the CSDP has not become a “transformative discourse” capable of impacting the very nature of national strategic cultures (Mawdsley, 2015, pp. 141, 142).

Conclusions

The chapter tried to bring conceptual and empirical clarity to a neglected aspect of France’s double role in defence integration during the contemporary period. The country still too often appears in relevant scholarship as being engaged in promoting Europeanisation (or “supranational consolidation”) of defence policy and, at the same time, as defending its right to pursue independent state action, as well as effectively committing to this sovereign mindset. This issue is only too obvious because of its inherent contradiction; yet, more generally, it serves as an example reminding students of the EU of the necessity to look beyond political rhetoric and declared positions to make sense of complex EU politics.

The chapter agrees with the notion that the integration of defence in the post-Cold-War era, via its CSDP developments, has not resulted in a policy that can serve as a vehicle for elite socialisation (Mawdsley, 2015, p. 140). In other words, the CSDP is devoid of potential transformative influence on

national governments and their self-understanding. This is largely because the EU-level defence policy has not developed to become a political strategy (Schmitt, 2013, 2017).

The French case is a telling example of these considerations. Despite France's historical position on building Europe as a genuine defence actor, specifically in the context of the EDC, the country's politico-strategic commitment has faded away. During the contemporary period, France's rhetoric on ESA appears to be based on tactical rather than strategic objectives of Paris, to the extent that this declared pursuit of autonomy is primarily motivated by the French defence industrial interests.

The historical perspective is indispensable, as it allows for elucidating the conditions that motivated France's "choice of Europe". Paris feared Germany's rearmament, which was a worse alternative to an integrated army and its corollary of a constrained autonomy of state action; moreover, for long, France believed in the possibility of a French-dominated defence policy. With the removal of the "German" factor, France was no longer strategically motivated to seek political integration of defence. Furthermore, its potential to dominate relevant processes became increasingly challenged in a changed Europe (Rieker, 2017, p. 2).

Yet, another set of conditions did not permit complete disconnection from EU-level defence. Notably, the French defence industry, already before the end of the Cold War, had increasingly encountered difficulties in claiming its viability because of decreasing domestic demand and drying national funds for defence, as well as accruing innovation costs. Such tendencies severely challenged France's (national) strategic sovereignty, based on the politico-strategic belief that a nationally independent DTIB was a necessary condition for France's security and its political identity. Consequently, the industrial and, increasingly, technological (Verzelen, 2021) axes have become the core element of France's position concerning ESA in defence matters. These axes may only be expected to orient France's position on EU capability development, coinciding with the country's foreign and security policy priorities, such as expeditionary missions.

During the post-Cold-War period, the claim in favour of ESA, including in defence matters, conceals complex empirics. Notably, despite its rhetorical significance, the political dimension has lagged behind the economic one. In the French case, it appears to be significant to the extent that the country's defence industry interests are also those of the government. Viewed from a substantive political perspective, these dynamics belong to political functionalism, at best. The integration of defence has not generated a genuine political momentum. The notion of ESA ultimately appears devoid of substantive content and serves as a frame-notion that finds its empirical expression through the substance of secondary (non-political) nature, notably the defence industrial one.

Finally, the suggested perspective on France may serve as a resource to explain the country's position on some relevant and, in fact, pressing challenges to the EU. The idea of Europe as a strategically autonomous defence actor, in the French government's discourse, continues to be ill-defined (e.g., there is a lack

of possible institutional changes that this project may entail), except for a direct link between the EU's autonomy (or "independence") and European DTIB (Macron, 2022). This may explain France's lack of leadership in Russia's war on Ukraine.⁹ In other words, the French government is not used to articulating the issue of European defence in politico-strategic terms, which amounts to an externally imposed challenge, as opposed to an internally motivated objective. In the context of the war in Ukraine, NATO and the United States have reaffirmed their unchallenged role in ensuring the allies' security and defence, which seems to promise a place for Europe as a potential defence actor inside the Alliance and, more generally, the transatlantic community. This, however, may not be easily accepted by France, wishing to strengthen its position as a defence industrial and technological actor in Europe and beyond.

Notes

- 1 A relative exception may be considered the Sarkozy era, which saw France's return to NATO's integrated military command and, consequently, "a far more opaque hierarchy of priority" (Irondele & Schmitt, 2013, p. 130).
- 2 See Article 41(2) of the Treaty on European Union.
- 3 In 2016, there was an attack in Bamako, on a hotel that served as the headquarters of the EUTM Mali; as the mission commander was in Brussels at the time, difficult coordination on post-attack actions to be taken ensued (Reykens, 2019).
- 4 Other EU member states' fear of entrapment in crises on the African continent (Haroche, 2017) is a revealing illustration of fundamental difficulties encountered by the French.
- 5 France, however, joined an equivalent group, the Independent European Programme Group, in 1976 (Mawdsley, 2015, pp. 143, 144).
- 6 The Planning Commission was a body responsible for modernising the French economy.
- 7 France was occupied with dealing with crises overseas, which made it impossible for Paris to envisage the possibility of maintaining larger numbers of troops in Europe (Haroche, 2017).
- 8 Prior to the existence of the ECSC, Germany's unconstrained production, particularly thanks to its steel and coal reserves (e.g., the Ruhr area), was unrivalled by the French producers.
- 9 At the time of the writing, at least.

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4 Germany

The Renewed Quest for Strategic Autonomy¹

Andris Banka

This chapter seeks to elucidate the concept of European strategic autonomy as it is understood in Germany. As such, it aims to bring out key episodes from the German debates on strategic autonomy, disentangle controversies that surround it, and take stock of its ability to translate this vision into practical policies. Prior to delving into “the weeds” of ESA, however, it may be useful to set the scene by providing a broad overview of German foreign and security policy since its reunification as this may also lay the necessary groundwork for a more thorough understanding regarding its position vis-à-vis ESA.

Since reunification, Germany’s historical baggage has profoundly shaped its approach to foreign and military affairs. An important and often discussed undercurrent in post-war Germany has been the aversion to pure military-based solutions. The historical experience of Nazism and the cataclysmic consequences that it brought instilled a certain “culture of restraint” within the German society. Scholars have pointed out that despite Germany’s tremendous growth of material power, the country has sought to advance the vision of a “civilian” or a “normative power” (Crawford, 2010; Harnisch & Maull, 2001; Wolff, 2013). In the framing of Paterson (2011), Berlin became Europe’s reluctant hegemon.

Others, however, have pushed back against this notion by arguing that the Federal Republic of Germany gave up “most of its exceptionalism concerning the use of military force” already when German fighter jets joined NATO’s combat mission against Serbian military targets in 1999 (Baumann & Hellmann, 2001, p. 79). Since then, the Bundeswehr has been deployed to various far-flung corners of the world like Afghanistan, Mali, and Iraq. Crucially though, the notion of restraint has not faded away entirely as military missions have always been carried out within the multilateral institutional framework, thus avoiding a “go it alone” scenario (Bagger, 2018). Moreover, German military deployments have often come with various operational caveats. In the past few years, Germany has also notably expanded its military footprint in the Baltic Sea region. It was the first European power to assume lead-framework nation status in NATO’s enhanced Forward Presence model and place its armed forces in Lithuania, a move that would have been quite unimaginable not that long ago.

On its part, Berlin has repeatedly used this as evidence that it is pulling its weight in the military realm. That said, questions still linger regarding Germany's credibility as a security actor and its willingness and ability to shoulder greater European defence burdens. Over the years, the German government has been a frequent target of allied criticism. By failing to meet previously agreed NATO spending benchmarks on defence, it has, wrongly or rightfully, been castigated as a "free-rider". Critics have advanced the point that Germany's investment in hard power capabilities is not commensurate with the size of its economy. Given its economic clout, allied partners have repeatedly called upon Germany to assume a more prominent role within NATO.

The notion of economic interdependence has been an important layer in the strategic ethos of Germany. In the scholarly literature, certain authors have linked economic interdependence to the reduction of interstate conflicts (Doyle, 2005; O'neal and Russett, 2001). In its broadest sense, the interdependence paradigm assumes that when actors see their dependence expand, for example, through trade, energy relations, or cross-border cooperation, this alleviates the security-related concerns and decreases the likelihood of conflict. Compared to its EU peers, Berlin has routinely placed far greater emphasis on the need to maintain periodic and meaningful cooperation with Russia, holding the view that this could eventually lead to a more predictable and stable security environment. The often repeated line of *wandel durch handel*, or 'change through trade', has been one of the defining features of German strategic vision. In the account of Helwig (2020, p. 13), after the long decades of the Cold War, Germany actively sought to forge close relations with Moscow, hoping that increased economic ties might transform Russia into a more liberal-minded and predictable actor (Helwig, 2020, p. 13).

This positive attachment to economic interdependence has been deeply entrenched within German society. For example, in a 2019 poll, a clear majority of Germans (66%) favoured close cooperation with Russia even after its illegal takeover of Crimea (Fix, 2020). Moreover, notwithstanding allied objections, only 20% of the German public in 2020 supported nullifying the controversial Nord Stream 2 project (ZDF, 2020). It is safe to say that not all European countries embrace the German strategic outlook. Poland and the Baltic states, in particular, have viewed attempts to bind Russia with cooperative international agreements not as something that advances peaceful relations but rather something that only widens European strategic vulnerabilities. On the contrary, they have argued that such interdependence will be instrumentalised by the Kremlin for nefarious geopolitical ends.

In sum, Germany for decades has assumed the role of an EU economic engine. A status-quo power that generally shied away from being a driving force of European military affairs and instead relied on the protective umbrella of the United States. Its political leadership has been rather unwilling to take sharp policy detours, instead opting for the middle road in most of its dealings with the outside world. However, profound changes in Germany's external environment, namely the unexpected presidency of Donald Trump, the growing

assertiveness of the People's Republic of China, and the Coronavirus crisis inevitably triggered a rethinking of its most fundamental geostrategic tenets. The 2022 war in Ukraine, of course, dispelled all illusions about cooperation with Russia. Amidst these geopolitical concerns, a vigorous debate about ESA has ensued in Germany. The following unpacks the meaning of ESA in the German context.

Merkel: kicking the can down the road?

The vision of an autonomous or sovereign Europe that is capable of assuming ownership of its own defence and being self-sufficient in other domains has a long pedigree. Under slightly different banners, the ESA concept has circulated in EU institutions and European capitals for decades. On the EU level, the need for greater European autonomy was most recently staked out in the summer of 2016 with a manifesto published by the European External Action Service (EEAS, 2016). In the case of Germany, however, the debate, in its latest incarnation, was spurned by the arrival of Donald Trump on the political scene. During his 4-year term in office, Trump regularly fulminated about traditional treaty allies and insisted that they have not sufficiently reimbursed Washington for its protective services. The 45th president of the United States was particularly obsessed with Germany's lack of defence contributions. "Germany owes vast sums of money to NATO and the United States", Trump had typed into his personal Twitter account in 2017 (Trump, 2017). On another occasion, he insisted that Germans have been "very delinquent" and demanded that they pay "their bills" (Deutsche Welle, 2020).

Crucially, this was not just a mere rhetorical lashing out on behalf of the White House incumbent. In 2020, Trump stoked further unease in Berlin after announcing his planned US force structure realignment in Europe that involved a drawdown of about a third of US deployed troops in Germany. Trump's hard-nosed approach to US–German relations predictably generated an intense antipathy towards him among the German public. A Pew poll in 2017 recorded that a mere 11% of Germans had faith in the individual leadership qualities of Trump, while Russian President Vladimir Putin managed to receive more than a double (25%) of that (Pew, 2017). Along similar lines, only 22% of the German population in 2018 expressed a supportive stance toward the US role in global affairs (Gallup, 2018). This suggests that the historical Washington–Berlin relationship had entered an unprecedented downward spiral.

With the uncertainty of the Trump administration hanging over allied governments, European lawmakers launched into a self-introspection regarding Europe's geopolitical role in the world. In Germany, the "firing shot" was made by Chancellor Angela Merkel in 2017, when she openly questioned the reliability of the US security umbrella and urged fellow European governments to take their fates into own hands (Deutsche Welle, 2017). From there onwards, the discourse surrounding the ESA snowballed. Echoing this point, Sigmar Gabriel, then Germany's Foreign Minister, submitted that Europe may have

lost its special importance in the eyes of the US and become just “one region among many others” (Gabriel, 2017). His successor, Heiko Maas, in 2018 pushed the envelope further by delivering a dire public warning: “Old pillars of reliability are crumbling under the weight of new crises and alliances dating back decades are being challenged in the time it takes to write a tweet” (Maas, 2018b). Later, he doubled down by insisting that Europe cannot remain a spectator on the margins; instead, it ought to actively seek ways to redefine its global role (Maas, 2018a). In sum, these official pronouncements speak to the fact that the German leadership had become keenly aware of the need for reconfiguration of its strategic posture.

Yet, while German leadership signalled its displeasure with the state of transatlantic relations, it equally found the political messaging of another close partner, French President Emmanuel Macron, as too disruptive, unhelpful, and incoherent. Macron had roiled the diplomatic waters by delivering a scathing criticism of NATO when he diagnosed the military organisation as being “brain dead”. In response, German Chancellor Merkel publicly declared that such a drastic attack was not called for (Deutsche Welle, 2019). Similarly, in 2020, Germany’s Defence Minister Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer found herself in a public spat with the French leader. The former had penned an article, in a rather straightforward language, suggesting that while Europe should increase defence spending and be more involved on the international scene, it equally ought to abandon the “illusions of European strategic autonomy”. For the foreseeable future, she cautioned, “Europeans will not be able to replace America’s crucial role as a security provider” (Kramp-Karrenbauer, 2020).

In a way, these particular episodes worked to crystallise Germany’s understanding of ESA as it relates to the defence and security realm. While there have been some dissenting voices and conflicting interpretations, the majority of German lawmakers have attempted to convey the notion that ESA is, in fact, compatible with NATO and does not represent some kind of parallel-run initiative (Franke & Varma, 2019). In a clarifying interview, the outgoing German Defence Minister Kramp-Karrenbauer stressed that European countries should be seeking ways to “become capable to act within NATO” and not operate outside the transatlantic framework (Eder & Gehrke, 2021).

In a similar manner, upon the news of electoral victory by Joe Biden in 2020, German Chancellor Angela Merkel accentuated that European aspirations to “do more” must be nestled with the transatlantic partnership (Der Bundeskanzler, 2020). As such, scholars have argued that Germany in effect put “a brake” on the French ambition for a strategically autonomous Europe that may undermine NATO (Gulmez & Gulmez, 2020, p. 196). As elaborated by Claudia Major: “From a German point of view, there is no contradiction between stronger European commitment and strong transatlantic ties. They are considered mutually reinforcing” (Major, 2021). Stated differently, while German policymakers accept that given the rapidly changing external environment, Berlin needs to assume a greater role in military affairs, they equally profess that at this juncture, European security can be advanced only in tandem

with Washington. Indeed, some have argued that this understanding is further reflected in the choice of terms with most German policymakers opting for the term “sovereignty” instead of “autonomy”.

Yet, while the Merkel-led government managed to elevate this topic to a whole another level of urgency, as a practical matter, it actually did little to advance this vision. Subsequent internal audits of German armed forces have routinely painted a grim picture: the lack of modern “military muscle” would not allow it to adequately contribute to the collective defence efforts in case a fellow NATO member came under an external attack (German Bundestag, 2019). Some may counter this assumption by pointing towards PESCO, an EU cooperation military pact signed in 2017. Major and Mölling (2019), for instance, have argued that because this particular project is embedded within the wider EU framework, this may reduce some of the stigma that Germans traditionally associate with the financing of military projects. But while initially PESCO had been paraded as a success story, and an important step in the direction of greater self-reliance, five years down the road, it has little to show for. In this context, one of the most discussed initiatives has been plans to develop a European-based fighter jet. In 2021, French Armed Forces Minister Florence Parly proudly announced that “France, Germany and Spain are building one of the most important tools for their sovereignty” (Salaün, 2021). Yet, realistically, the new fighter jets would be in a position to replace the existing fleet only by 2040.

On the balance, former Chancellor Angela Merkel should be given some credit for managing to shepherd through an increase in Germany’s defence spending from 1.19% of GDP in 2015 to 1.53% in 2021 (NATO, 2021). That, however, is still far away from reaching the previously NATO-set 2% benchmark. Reputable scholars and research institutions, by running scenarios where the US withdraws its forces from Europe in a short time period, have demonstrated just how far off the lead European actors are from autonomously ensuring the security of the continent (Barrie et al., 2019; Meijer & Brooks, 2021). Even one of Chancellor Merkel’s closest national security advisers was forced to admit that the notion of sovereign Europe, as it pertains to the security and defence realm, is a rather misleading proposition in the foreseeable future (Heusgen, 2022). Stated differently, there remains a sharp mismatch between Germany’s pounced aspirations and what it has currently accomplished as a practical matter.

“Traffic light” coalition: the pursuit of sovereign Europe

After 16 years in the Chancellery, Angela Merkel, one of the most towering figures in European politics, left the political scene in 2021. It is still too early to tell exactly what type of correctives this will bring into German foreign policy thinking. That said, there are a few points of reference that allow us to gauge the worldview of the newly inaugurated “traffic light” coalition. The most relevant document for that, of course, is the coalition treaty (Koalitionsvertrag, 2021)

signed by the three political parties: the Social Democratic Party of Germany (SPD), the Free Democratic Party (FDP), and the Greens. While one can identify numerous areas of continuity from the Merkel era, the coalition agreement text equally contains some noteworthy policy changes. To begin with, the document puts a prominent emphasis on the notion of a more sovereign Europe where Berlin takes on a proactive role in achieving this goal. Speaking at a news conference devoted to the coalition agreement, the new German Chancellor Olaf Scholz reiterated that the “sovereignty of Europe is a cornerstone” of his government’s foreign policy vision (BBC, 2021).

In the context of the coalition agreement, some observers were caught by surprise by the accentuation of values-driven foreign policy and plain-spoken language directed at both China and Russia. As it pertains to these major powers, the incoming coalition appears to have broken sharply with Merkel’s middle-of-the-road public rhetoric. Whereas former national strategy documents had regularly referred to China as a “strategic partner”, the new government did not shy away from using the term “systematic rival”. NATO allies were likely pleased by the sober language of power politics that flows through the text, with references to the need for credible deterrence and continued nuclear sharing. What is more, the Scholz government equally vowed not to pursue its Russia policy over the heads of smaller Central and Eastern European nations, something that the Merkel-led coalition was often criticised for.

Equally though, the coalition agreement fell short of pledging to meet the 2% of GDP on defence mark. Instead, the lawmakers undertook a somewhat original spin on this topic by proposing that 3% of the GDP will be allocated to combined defence, diplomacy, and development efforts. In sum, the key take-away of the document, as it pertains to the security and defence realm, is that we have entered a period of systemic rivalry between democratic and authoritarian regimes and that Germany can no longer afford to do the bare minimum on the world stage. This framing likely mirrors the policy preferences of the Green party, which were handed “the keys” of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs. Needless to say, future events will shape the written text in profound ways. The 178-page document, however, does provide a general sense of the “traffic light” coalition direction.

Furthermore, it is worth noting that the discourse on European autonomy in Germany has also seeped into domains such as trade, climate change, and critical technology. On the occasion of her inauguration at the Federal Foreign Office, the newly appointed Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock remarked:

The crucial question of how we can breathe life into the much-discussed strategic sovereignty is in any case not primarily a military question, but rather an economic and technological one [...] we can use investments in this single market not only in terms of critical infrastructure in terms of security strategy, but also in terms of connectivity in a more sovereign way
(Baerbock, 2021).

Indeed, as Rühlig (2022) observes,

the fact that the terms ‘digital sovereignty’, ‘technological sovereignty’, and ‘data sovereignty’; are also found in the coalition agreement makes it clear that the focus of this quest for ‘sovereignty’ is not primarily about classic military defence, but about future strategic technologies – and thus about dependence on China.

The discussion over digital space and Chinese 5G technology’s role in them stretches back to the previous Merkel era. For a considerable time period, Berlin “sat on the fence” regarding the proposition of reducing technological dependence on China. Already in 2019, then-Foreign Minister Heiko Maas sounded the alarm about the need for Europe to chart its own course as it pertains to digital sovereignty (Maas, 2019). However, only in 2021 did the German Bundestag finally pass a new IT security legislation aimed at restricting untrustworthy 5G technology suppliers (German Bundestag, 2021). This, in essence, brought Germany on par with other major EU countries in terms of digital regulation. The new Scholz government has sought to advance this issue even further. In 2022, Berlin and Paris announced a collaborative project concerning the creation of 5G applications. According to the German Federal Minister for Economic Affairs and Climate Action, this initiative represents a big step in pursuing “digital sovereignty for 5G in Europe” (Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs and Climate Action, 2022). While it is still too early to make sweeping conclusions, it looks as though some ground has shifted in relation to Germany’s pledge to advance European sovereignty in the digital arena.

The *Zeitenwende* moment?

During the amassing of Russian troops around Ukraine in late February 2022, Germany’s reluctance to provide military equipment to Kyiv once again prompted hard questions about its ability to lead Europe in a crisis situation. As put by Claudia Major, a defence analyst at the German Institute for International and Security Affairs, “Germany is not leading, it is being dragged” (cited in Bennhold & Erlanger, 2022). Russia’s full-scale assault on Ukraine’s sovereignty in the early hours of February 24 profoundly shook German political elites’ long-held assumptions about the Kremlin. In light of this, the German government moved swiftly to undertake a host of noteworthy decisions: cancellation of the Nord Stream 2 energy pipeline, a pledge to inject an additional €100 billion into the Bundeswehr, approval of a massive targeted sanctions package against Russia, and granting of military armaments to Ukraine. Just a few days into the war, Chancellor Olaf Scholz addressed the parliament, calling the moment a *Zeitenwende* (turning point) in German relations with Russia (Scholz, 2022). Echoing this sentiment, Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock submitted that Germany may be “leaving behind a special and unique form of restraint in foreign and security policy” (Baerbock, 2022b).

Amid the brutal war in Ukraine, German public opinion has also shifted suddenly and profoundly. Initial polling points to the German society being fully on board with the proposed substantial increase in defence-related expenditure (Kinkartz, 2022). Looking into the future, however, Berlin will have to solve hard questions about the structuring of such a dramatic spending increase. During his address to the Bundestag, Chancellor Olaf Scholz pleaded: “We need planes that fly, ships that sail, and soldiers who are optimally equipped for their missions” (Scholz, 2022). This, to be fair, cannot be achieved overnight. Militaries are institutions that take time for turning. For decades, due to living with the notion that large-scale conventional conflict is impossible on the European continent, Germany has allowed its defence capabilities to atrophy. At the outset of the Ukraine war, the chief of the German army conceded that the Bundeswehr is standing “more or less empty-handed” and that the options the German government can offer in its support of its allies “are extremely limited” (Reuters, 2022). While one should not underplay Germany’s U-turn in military and strategic affairs, the expectation that it is in a position to assume ownership of Europe’s defence matters in the near future is equally misplaced.

What implications does Vladimir Putin’s war in Ukraine carry regarding the German ESA debate? To begin with, Olaf Scholz-led government will likely need to undertake some prioritisation as to which of the previous dimensions of the strategic autonomy debate to advance politically. Given the sheer magnitude of the war in Ukraine, and the wide implications that it carries for Europe, security-related questions are bound to dominate previously underlined initiatives such as digital technology or climate change. Military issues will likely become front and centre of the ESA discussions. Secondly, while Germany has undergone swift changes by its own standards, it equally must realise that expectations among EU countries regarding its role have risen significantly as well. Allied partners won’t be satisfied with empty symbolism or mere diplomatic gestures. Not after witnessing Russian attempts to dismember Ukraine.

Conclusions

The purpose of this chapter has been to appraise Germany’s approach to ESA. The evidence presented speaks to the fact that this topic has gained salience in German political discourse. The initial debate regarding ESA in Germany was sparked by the presidency of Donald Trump. His personal dislike of long-standing alliances created considerable tension within the transatlantic community and pushed European capitals for deeper introspection. Indeed, a 2019 wide-ranging survey conducted by the European Council on Foreign Relations revealed that German political elites generally regarded the ESA as an important policy objective (Franke & Varma, 2019). Already during the end phases of the Merkel-led government, it became palpable that simply sticking to the old status quo, in an era increasingly characterised by great power competition and disruptions, was no longer a viable approach. Yet, despite telegraphing its

willingness to chart a more independent course, Berlin did not rush to translate this ambition into practical policy steps.

Russia's 2022 full-scale war in Ukraine undoubtedly will leave a strong imprint on the geopolitical map of Europe. In light of the new realities, German lawmakers have been forced to acknowledge that it was a cardinal error to hope that stable and peaceful relations with Russia may be built primarily through economic interdependence. The aversion to power politics has now given way to the notion that military force is a prerequisite for the maintenance of peace and prosperity on the European continent. In a significant reversal from previous decades, Berlin has sought to inject considerable resources into its military. As put by German Foreign Minister Baerbock, "following the outbreak of Russia's war in Ukraine, Germany started looking at security in a new light" (Baerbock, 2022a). As old dogmas that dominated German foreign policy thinking are broken, it will be fascinating to see what type of changes this will bring to Europe's quest for greater strategic autonomy.

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5 Poland's Resilient Atlanticism

Ieva Gajauskaitė

Poland's position on the implementation of the EUGS was based on strengthening the CSDP, with equal emphasis on building resilience in both eastern and southern European neighbourhoods. Despite the commitment to strengthening the CSDP in the face of the growing Russian military threat, a key condition has been set for the Union not to duplicate, much less compete with NATO. This provision has become the dominant principle in Poland's *modus operandi*. At first, the main question for Poland was how to introduce transatlantic relations into the debates on ESA. From Poland's perspective, the economic consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic raise the question of how to guarantee the growth of the EU economy without encouraging protectionism and isolationism. This vision is based on the key underlying interests – secure and prosperous Poland. For Poland, the fundamental defence principle is to rely on the deterrence by denial strategy, i.e., US military involvement in the security of Europe. At first glance, it would seem that Poland gives priority to NATO in dealing with hard security issues, while the EU serves as a provider of soft security. Prosperity can be reached by promoting free trade based on fair competition, as Poland is heavily dependent on the export of goods and services.

First, the initial reaction of the governing political elite (Law and Justice Party, PiS) to the idea of ESA is presented. The reasoning behind the reaction and following decisions are examined as evidence of a lack of trust in the European partners and the EU's ability to become effective global security and defence actor as it misses a common goal for all MS and a clear definition of ESA. Instead, Poland promotes that ESA should begin at home by strengthening the common market, renewing the industrial policy, and promoting economic cooperation with third countries. All these goals coincide with the spill-over of ESA to other policy areas – becoming an open concept. However, it should be noted that there is an alternative agenda for EU autonomy in security policy presented by the political opposition (Civic Platform, PO). This brings a possible future fluctuation of Poland's preferences over ESA.

Scepticism and reasoning

When the concept of ESA was introduced to describe the implementation of the CFSP, Poland's ruling political elite reacted with great scepticism. Based on previous experience, many ambitious visions for the EU remained visions due to the lack of a common and well-described concept. As the debate on ESA intensified, Polish Foreign Minister Jacek Czaputowicz has bluntly stated Poland's position: "the so-called strategic autonomy of the European Union cannot, in our opinion, take its place at the expense of NATO and the weakening of transatlantic ties" (Informacja Ministra Spraw Zagranicznych, 2019). Moreover, PESCO has been linked to the goal of creating "a two-speed Europe" and reducing the opportunities to influence European integration processes. The EDF has also been met with fears that only large states with large defence industries will be able to seize its opportunities successfully.

Poland's ruling elite had a firm stance that the loose term of strategic autonomy should not be used in the context of transatlantic relations, as this can cause divisions in the transatlantic community, leading to the isolation of the US regarding European security (Minister do Spraw Unii Europejskiej, 2021a). Poland presented its position as "active and constructive, and assertive at the same time". This position consisted of several main assumptions. First, Poland's national security depends on NATO's ability to deter Russia, while the success of NATO's deterrence strategy depends on US military involvement in Europe. Subsequently, Poland has begun to mobilise the support of other states on the eastern flank of NATO for the permanent presence of US military units to create "real deterrence" (Informacja Ministra Spraw Zagranicznych, 2018). Second, the transatlantic partnership with the United States in all areas (security, trade, investment, science, etc.) must remain a top priority of the EU's foreign and security policy. Thus, at first, Poland's position was based on a clear reluctance to give the false impression to the United States that its involvement in European security was not vital and that the relations between Europe and the US were shifting from a strategic partnership (Prezydent Duda: Unia Europejska nie może konkurować z NATO, 2019). Third, the EU's defence policy cannot duplicate existing institutions, i.e., NATO and the EDA. At first, the only suitable strategic autonomy of the EU for Poland was one that would be limited and would not change the balance of transatlantic relations with the United States: "[...] the strategic autonomy of the EU should be understood as a long-term ambition under which the EU [...] will play a valuable, complementary role to NATO or will act where NATO chooses not to act" (Ministerstwo Spraw Zagranicznych, 2020). Furthermore, experts agree that the role of sovereign MS in ESA is not entirely clear. This aspect is very important for the ruling Polish political elite, who emphasises that the EU is – first and foremost – voluntary cooperation between MS and not a federation.

There is a broad consensus that Poland supports the more capable European pillar in NATO and will support the EU initiatives aimed at the strengthening of the common defence under NATO, including increased military spending

(Zieliński, 2020). However, Poland's ruling elite is convinced that the contemporary EU project is based on the idea of federalism, which is favourable only to the states that created the European Communities. From the Polish perspective, the CSDP is driven by the security and economic interests of the major states – France and Germany. Therefore, decisions in this area must be taken only with the consent of all members, while the European Commission or other institutions without a direct mandate of the MS must not dominate the formulation and implementation of the CSDP. The elite strongly disagrees with any attempts to build the EU as an independent entity, and this idea is supported by the military establishment close to the governing political elite. The underlying reason is the fear that MS will lose control over the implementation of the CSDP.

Poland interpreted ESA not only as a threat to EU federalisation but also as an attempt to “liberate Europe from the United States” (Czaputowicz, 2018). The main threat to the transatlantic link was the possibility that the EU would create common armed forces. As former Minister of National Defence Antoni Macierewicz stated:

“The creation of an army that would also be directed against the US has been a dream of Russia for many years [...] it would mean the separation of Western Europe from the United States and, in fact, placing Europe at the mercy of the armed forces of the Russian Federation

(Macierewicz o „europejskiej armii”, 2018)

Consequently, Poland has expressed opposition to the creation of an EU rapid response force of 5000 troops, based on a waste of resources as EU Battlegroups are not being enabled (Bielecki, 2021; Świerczyński, 2021).

The Polish political elite has given a rational explanation based on economic logic. First, countries that are members of both the EU and NATO have only one defence budget and do not divide their spending into separate budgets, exclusively dedicated to the Alliance and the Union: “In the competition of ‘what to invest in’, that is, in the ‘Euro army’ or NATO, the Alliance wins because it exists” (Europejska armia?, 2018). According to former Polish Minister of Foreign Affairs Wytold Waszczykowski, inability of European states to increase their military spending is the main reason why the idea of the European army should have been rejected from the very beginning: “If European NATO allies are unable to meet their NATO commitments, how can it be supposed that they will create a parallel defence organisation alongside the North Atlantic Alliance? By what means? With what money?” (Waszczykowski: Agentura Kremla w UE jest aktywna, 2021).

Poland is convinced that the EU army would be exclusively dedicated to expeditionary missions in Africa and would therefore have no real benefit for Central and Eastern Europe (Stolarczyk, 2017). Poland is constantly questioning the 360-degree approach or the universal geographical principle of the CSDP, as the interests of the EU MS do not and will certainly not coincide in the future

due to their geographical position (Gotkowska, 2019, 2021). Furthermore, in the current security context, it is important for the states on the eastern flank that NATO members would be able quickly to mobilise their capabilities for collective defence (Terlikowski, 2021). Consequently, the proposed strategic autonomy and the creation of the EDU do not serve the interest of countries located in NATO's eastern flank. And even in choosing which expeditionary initiatives to support, Poland would be more willing to cooperate with the United Kingdom on the Joint Expeditionary Force (JEF), which targets threats from the north of Europe (Łukasiewicz, 2019). The geographic location of Poland "locked" between Germany and Russia has an inherent influence on the decision-making process that cannot be ignored.

“And the Earth was without form...”

Although ESA was initially received negatively by the Polish elite, the changing international structure of power has begun to be considered over time. The emerging power and international influence of the PRC, and its competition with the United States, has been recognised by Poland as important prerequisites for the EU to define how the Union intends to respond to geo-strategic and geoeconomic challenges. The political elite defined the strategic autonomy of the EU as a possibility for the Union to implement its goals while reducing its dependence on third countries (Premier Mateusz Morawiecki rozmawiał z komisarzem UE Thierryem Bretonem, 2021). However, dependence from Poland's perspective means being dependent in strategic sectors on autocratic states, which do not respect democratic values, and do not follow environmental standards in production processes (Kancelaria Prezesa Rady Ministrów, 2021). Hence, Poland is drawing a clear line between the Union's partners, namely the United States, Great Britain, Canada, Japan, and the like, and its opponents, Russia and the PRC.

Dependence on the US from the Polish perspective is not an obstacle for the EU, as President Andrzej Duda stated:

[...] transatlantic relations remain a pillar of the European order. Hence, our opposition to the thesis that the Union must maintain an 'equal distance' to major global players. There is no equal distance between democracy and tyranny, freedom and labour camps, free elections, and putting the opposition in jail

(Duda, 2021)

Furthermore, Poland's ruling elite believes that for the EU to become strategically autonomous, that is, act on a global scale, it is necessary to cooperate with the US (Minister Rau wziął udział w posiedzeniu Rady do Spraw Zagranicznych, 2020). The allusion to the equal distance is based on the history of Poland, which meant a balanced policy towards the USSR and Germany during the Second Republic of Poland. The basic principle of this policy was

cooperation with both countries while not making an alliance with one of them against the other. The policy has not worked and ended in a loss of sovereignty. As Molly Krasnodębska (2021) reminds that the US supported Poland's aspiration to become independent of the USSR, and as a result, the US became the only state to be trusted as a superpower. Poland supports the hegemonic power of the US mainly due to the main security concern – Russia's neo-imperialism – while global power competition raises questions on the future role of the States and “pivot to Asia” consequences to European security.

For Poland, it was quite clear that US security guarantees for NATO's eastern flank could not be based solely on geostrategic position or NATO commitments. For this reason, strategic cooperation was linked to the US involvement in the modernisation programme of the Polish Defence Forces, namely the acquisition of armaments (Informacja Ministra Spraw Zagranicznych, 2018). Furthermore, Poland sought to respond to the expectations of US President Donald Trump for the member states to contribute more to their security. For this reason, Poland's political elite has pledged to increase its defence budget to 2.5% of GDP by 2030, making it “an example to others” (Informacja Ministra Spraw Zagranicznych, 2019).

During Donald Trump's presidency, Poland sought to become the US's exclusive strategic partner in Europe and, for this reason, rejected any initiatives that could be directed against the states, especially those proposed by a traditionally anti-American France. The fact that France did not offer Poland to contribute to the E12 served as another example that France has no interest in strengthening NATO. Thus, Poland was seeking to take the place of the United Kingdom in the EU, not only to gain the status of a key strategic partner of the US but also to prevent the EU from developing initiatives that are incompatible with the strategic interests of the United States (Buras & Zerka, 2018).

The second reason for Poland's reluctance to support loose ESA is the lack of consensus on the use of military force since states have different conceptions and interests. Eastern European countries are interested in strengthening collective defence capabilities, while Western and Southern Europe seek to strengthen EU crisis management capabilities (Gotkowska, 2017). The number one priority of Poland's security and defence policy is a political agreement between NATO members that Russia is a threat to Eastern Europe. As a result, there are differences in strategic culture, which means that European countries are reluctant to use military force and are more likely to use soft power. Therefore, according to former Polish Foreign Minister Witold Waszczykowski, “Europe from Venus needs US from Mars” (Waszczykowski, 2020).

Even though the US withdrawal from Afghanistan has sparked a debate in Poland over US future priorities, the primary truth believed by Poland remains the same – the EU is not capable of resolving an international crisis without the US. There are several reasons for this. The first, of course, is the lack of capacity. Poland, for example, often emphasises not only the inability to use EU Battlegroups but also the inability of the most powerful European states to carry out any mission without US military support: “Even France, the greatest

military power of the EU, which has the nuclear arsenal, is not able to carry out such actions on its own. In Mali it is supported by American air transport, American drones, and American intelligence.” (Słojewska, 2021). Consequently, Poland prioritises bilateral cooperation with the United States within and outside the NATO framework (Malinowski, 2021). In addition, Poland reassures itself with the thought that due to the US military presence in Poland, in case of an attack by a third country, the US and NATO would be “automatically drawn” into war (Zięba, 2020, p. 125).

The Polish elite is showing a desire to see at least signs that Europe can act as a strategic actor respecting the interests of its members. For this reason, evidence from Poland’s perspective could be energy independence from Russia, support for countries of the Eastern Partnership, and EU enlargement to the Western Balkans (Minister Rau wziął udział w posiedzeniu Rady do Spraw Zagranicznych, 2020). Ukraine’s Euro-Atlantic integration process is a litmus test, as Poland is pushing for Ukraine’s fast-track accession to the Union. Until then, one cannot rule out a theory that “this autonomy is a legitimate strategic bluff to show the US that we are worth counting on and working with?” (Krzysztozek, 2021).

As long as the defence-sufficient European military power is a distant and perhaps impossible mission, Poland takes a pragmatic approach and seeks to use the EU to strengthen NATO. One such example is Poland’s participation in PESCO. Although Poland delayed becoming a member of PESCO, the final decision to contribute to the initiative was driven by a reluctance to deepen disagreements with other EU members and reassure transatlantic partners that Poland and Europe were ready to take responsibility for its security (Mazurek, 2018). Over time, Poland has begun to shape the position that CSDP should be supplemented with the elements to meet its interests. Consequently, Poland’s attitude towards PESCO is based on the capability to deter Russia – Poland mostly supports capability-driven projects rather than industry-driven (Roos, 2020). It has undertaken only those PESCO projects that would add value to NATO’s deterrence and defence in the eastern flank (Ministerstwo Spraw Zagranicznych, 2020). In addition, Poland promotes EU-NATO cooperation in creating “Military Schengen” and prioritises PESCO initiatives that aim at military mobility, logistics, and communication (Terlikowski, 2018). One of the main interests is the ability of the Polish Armament Group (PAG), established in 2014, to compete in the European defence market while, at the same time, implement a military modernisation programme relying as much as possible on the PAG (Arteaga et al., 2016) or the US defence industry. This is well illustrated by the decision to allocate PLN 23 billion to purchase 250 Abrams tanks.

Polish security and defence policy experts agree that the only idea of ESA preferred by Poland would be clearly defined, built on common security interests (threats to energy security, hybrid threats, cyber threats, etc.), promoting close EU-NATO cooperation, and would strengthen NATO European pillar. Moreover, the process of implementation of the autonomy must respect the national interests of all members and not be beneficial just for major European

powers that are not just trying to dominate Poland, but at the same time promote the idea of inevitable dialogue and cooperation with Russia to build a secure Europe.

Common causes of trust issues

Poland's ruling elite is convinced that the major EU states are striving for European federalisation. Hence, Poland must offer an alternative and mobilise allies. The guiding principle of the EU was clearly defined in the speech of President Andrzej Duda delivered during a meeting of the Arraiolos Group in 2021:

The Union derives its legitimacy from the will of sovereign states that have transferred certain competencies to it. The European Union is a community of economic and geopolitical interests, also a community of values. But it is always a community of nation-states! Always!

(Duda, 2021)

In summary, Poland's vision points out that the EU cannot have any hierarchy of states with a single decision-making centre, i.e., the Union must be made up of many regional centres operating on the principles of democracy and openness to new members (Tomal, 2019). Thus, according to the Polish elite, "a strong EU is a union of strong states, supported by the EU institutions, based on the principles of equality, subsidiarity and proportionality" (Minister Rau wziął udział w postiedzeniu Rady do Spraw Zagranicznych, 2020).

Kirch and Sus (2021) underline that Poland's strategy towards the EU can be explained by the "asymmetry of the ownership" between the old and new EU MS. Poland has failed to become a European political power on an equal footing with Germany or France, which is why support for initiatives of the major MS only increases perceived asymmetry. Poland's dependence on bilateral cooperation is based not only on its fragile geopolitical position or relative weakness against potential adversaries but also on its aspiration to become recognised as a middle power in the EU. Thus, a strategic partnership with the United States is seen as an opportunity to reduce Germany's dominance over Poland and increase Poland's role in addressing European security issues (Szwed, 2019). Poland's instinctive or pragmatic choice to rely on the US as a key partner rather than on the major EU states is due to a lack of trust in the ruling political elites in Germany and France.

Poland's historical experience presupposes the prioritisation of national sovereignty and territorial integrity. Therefore, Poland is more inclined to defend national interests and the principle of intergovernmental cooperation than to rely on multilateralism or supranational institutions (Kirch & Sus, 2021). The element of Polish strategic culture, based on the constant fear of being left alone or betrayed, plays an equally important role: "The West is a crucial provider of physical and ontological security, it is perceived at the same time as

unreliable and even ‘traitorous’”. (Krasnodębska, 2021, p. 87). This fear translates into the belief that proposed ESA (if it is not a hollow ambition) will increase the domination of France and Germany, at the same time will weaken the already compromised position of Poland in the Union. Fear of being betrayed by other MS or partners can be traced to the disparities between declared values and actions towards Russia:

Let everyone ask themselves a question: Are we feeling well after the construction and commissioning of Nord Stream 2? Does it bother us that its construction began after thousands of Ukrainians paid with their lives, among others, for wanting to join the EU?

(Duda, 2021)

In the same category falls French President Emmanuel Macron’s decision not to call Russia’s war crimes committed in Ukraine since 24 February 2022 genocide.

Implementation of any kind of policy leading to strategic autonomy from Poland’s perspective first of all means solidarity. However, the contemporary EU does not present itself as a Union based on solidarity. The driving force behind the strategic autonomy is seen in the desire of French President Emmanuel Macron to make NATO less dependent on the supply of US arms and military equipment (Zalewski, 2021). Thus, in Poland, the pursuit of strategic autonomy was linked to France’s long-standing desire to gain independence from the United States in European affairs.

Warnings coming from France or Germany that the US will sooner or later leave Europe and that the strategic autonomy that Europe needs are interpreted quite the contrary from Poland’s perspective, i.e., if the EU seeks strategic autonomy, the US will withdraw from Europe. This does not mean in any way that European countries do not need to strengthen their military capabilities or reduce military spending, but all initiatives to increase Europe’s military capabilities must meet NATO’s needs: “The French are constantly reminding of ‘strategic autonomy’, and it is precisely this persistence that raises fears that ‘freedom of manoeuvre’ will primarily mean ‘French manoeuvres’ in North Africa or the Middle East” (Lukasiewicz, 2021). Consequently, the ESA in public discourse is portrayed as a unilateral ambition of “military too weak and too global” France (Prof. Miszczak: Polska nie powinna dać się wciągnąć Macronowi, 2020).

An important source of mistrust is the conviction that ESA is based on strategic dialogue with Russia, including negotiations on nuclear weapons (Gotkowska, 2020). French President Emmanuel Macron is seen as a pro-Russian leader: “The foundation of his policy toward Moscow is the belief that the Russian Federation is part of Europe, therefore the policy of ‘pushing’ it out of the old continent is a mistake” (Czego chce Emmanuel Macron?, 2021). In general, German and French cooperation with Russia and the opposition to NATO membership plans for Georgia and Ukraine do not increase

the trust. Poland's governing elite believes that it is just a time of question when ESA would lead to a strategic partnership between Germany and France with Russia, knowing that Russia is seeking to divide and rule the EU. Thus, as long as trust-based cooperation in security and defence is unlikely, Poland is promoting cooperation that would strengthen Europe's economic growth. Although Poland at first had a firm stance that EU strategic autonomy should not be extended to areas not related to security, the perception has changed.

Open strategic autonomy

Since 2016, Poland has sought to influence the European project in the “right” direction – to return to the four fundamental European freedoms of movement (people, services, goods, and capital). Therefore, the EU has come to be defined primarily as a single market, including the need to create a single digital market and ensure the competitiveness of the European economy in the global market. Poland has started to stress the “strategic autonomy of European industry” based on a circular economy and short value chains (Ministerstwo Spraw Zagranicznych, 2019).

When the COVID-19 pandemic had a decisive impact on the global economy, fuelled state-led protectionism in medical supplies, and highlighted dependence on Chinese supply chains, Poland began to support ESA, in particular by enhancing EU strategic value chains and developing a new European industrial policy based on the Green Deal and Digital Agenda. Therefore, the autonomy began to be interpreted by Poland as the autonomy of the EU industrial ecosystems (Minister do Spraw Unii Europejskiej, 2020). For example, Poland, with other Central European countries, contributed to the European Pharmaceutical Strategy by proposing instruments aimed at strengthening the EU's supply autonomy. One of Poland's key proposals was the creation of fifth freedom in the EU, i.e., the free flow of data that would allow the EU to take the lead in artificial intelligence in the long run (Czaputowicz, 2018). Thus, reluctant to make the EU autonomous in the security and defence area, Poland has begun to support OSA. The important factor is that the concept of OSA is preferred by the US, especially in terms of third-country participation in European defence initiatives (Tocci, 2021).

A breakthrough in defining Poland's comprehensive official position on ESA occurred in September 2021. The Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs presented its vision to EU institutions and MS in a non-paper titled “Stronger EU in a turbulent world. Contribution to the discussion on the concept of EU strategic autonomy”. In this vision, the central aspect of strategic autonomy is economic autonomy, or rather sovereignty, which Poland defines as the resilience of the EU economy to future crises. Consequently, according to Poland, ESA should have two pillars: “completing the single market without barriers as the main EU asset and a leverage vis-à-vis third parties” and “EU's autonomy should be firmly anchored with the broader transatlantic community and its values” (The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Republic of Poland, 2021). Thus, the part

dedicated to the first pillar includes the identification of the areas of action, while the second pillar only confirms Poland's previous attitude toward the EU as a strategic actor in the security area.

Poland's proposals consist of priority areas such as strengthening the single market (especially in the services sector), assertive industrial policy (based on resilient value chains), digital revolution (based on equal competition rules for more balanced digital markets), diversification of energy resources and promotion of nuclear energy, strengthening the pharmaceutical production capacity of the EU, increasing the efficiency of the WTO, basing EU free trade agreements on reciprocity, combating practices that distort competition (including taxation havens), etc. According to Poland, the strategic action depends on further cooperation with the United States, other NATO countries, Australia, Japan, and South Korea, with which the EU shares common democratic values. The open-door policy and the Eastern Partnership initiative also remain important. In the field of security and defence, Poland's priority is to avoid duplication of NATO, promote EU–NATO cooperation to harmonise capabilities, increase military mobility, respond to external hybrid and cyber threats, and implement joint PESCO projects with third countries, i.e., the US, the United Kingdom, Canada, and Norway. From Poland's point of view, ESA cannot be achieved without a long-term strategy towards Russia and PRC and a common commitment to impose sanctions on countries that violate international law.

Poland's position towards the EU as a strategically autonomous actor is based on a couple of premises. First of all, strategic autonomy should mean the resilience of the European economy, i.e., independence from external constraints on technology, raw materials, food, etc. The Union is as strong as its single market and can be resilient while competitive in the modern global economy. Furthermore, the EU's industrial capacity must be built on resilient supply chains based on domestic technologies and production. One of the features of Poland's perspective on strategic autonomy is the necessity for the EU to become a player in the space sector while increasing the synergy between defence and space programmes. Second, Poland stresses the need to gain strategic autonomy from external actors in the energy sector. This is based on diversified energy supplies and reducing energy dependence on Russia (for example, abandoning the Nord Stream 2 pipeline) (Minister do Spraw Unii Europejskiej, 2021a; Minister do Spraw Unii Europejskiej, 2021b; Minister do Spraw Unii Europejskiej, 2022).

The promotion of ESA in the economy provides a couple of very important opportunities for post-Covid Europe – it could improve the EU competition in the global market while enhancing industrial policy, and it could act as a stimulus to shape common digitisation policy according to the EU standards. It should be considered that, at the same time, European economic autonomy can have a negative effect. Strategic autonomy is linked to protectionism, internal competition between EU members, monopoly of the groups of states in the single market, lowering standards to be able to compete in the global market,

or even using interventional instruments to create so-called European industrial champions (Conway, 2021; Marusic & Brudzinska, 2021; Tocci, 2021). Consequently, from the Polish point of view, autonomy should not be issued as a justification for the protectionism or application of double standards in the common market.

From the Polish perspective, OSA is a preferable term to define the EU ambitions in the global arena. While still vague and loose, this concept at least strives to find “a golden balance between opportunity and risk of economic interdependence” (Gehrke, 2021, p. 93). Open autonomy aims at resilience rather than autonomy, i.e., the EU is open for trade and economic cooperation with third countries while basing this cooperation on the rule-based trade order and globally accepted standards (Conway, 2021). This, on the one hand, limits protectionism, while on the other hand, promotes global cooperation. Poland supports a shift from conventional strategic autonomy to open autonomy based on trade and European sovereignty in terms of industrial policy or digital market.

Poland, for the last couple of years, expressed the belief that the implementation of the EUGS should be based on support for the EU's neighbourhood (with a special focus on Ukraine), the maintenance of a world order based on international law, and cooperation with the United Nations (UN) (Ministerstwo Spraw Zagranicznych, 2018; Ministerstwo Spraw Zagranicznych, 2018b). Furthermore, Poland's choice to support strategic autonomy in the field of economy is pragmatic, since focusing on enhancing the capacity, innovation, and resilience of the internal economy shifts MS' attention from areas where there is no consensus (such as security and defence, relations with Russia) to areas of common concern to all EU members (Van den Abeele, 2021). However, while the Polish governing elite (mainly Law and Justice party (PiS) (*Prawo i Sprawiedliwość*) members) have a common idea of how ESA should be implemented and focus on the economic area, the political opposition (mainly Civic Platform (PO) (*Platforma Obywatelska*) members) has an alternative proposal on how to strengthen the autonomy in the security area.

“I have a dream”

When in 2007, PO won the parliamentary elections, a new governing coalition engaged in the strengthening of CSDP, based on the intergovernmental cooperation with France and Germany (Weimar triangle). PO made Poland pro-European, even though NATO still was a dominant pillar of Poland's security (Zajac, 2016). The states of the Weimar Triangle have emphasised the need to increase overall European defence capabilities even though the PO, even after the annexation of Crimea in 2014, promoted pragmatic relations with Russia “to prove Poland's maturity in dealing with its former occupier” (Krasnodębska, 2021, pp. 98, 99). Consequently, Poland was liked and encouraged by European partners – Germany and France – for this reformed and ‘Europeanised’ policy towards Russia. Furthermore, Poland was among

the most active supporters of CSDP operations to show that Poland has global interests and outreach.

The PO government was determined to strengthen the EU pillar in NATO. For example, in 2015, Poland, France, and Germany presented a proposal to strengthen the common defence policy, develop common defence capabilities, and strengthen the European defence industry. The key figure became the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Radosław Sikorski, who was involved in developing strategic cooperation with major EU countries to increase the civil and military crisis management capabilities of the EU and turn Battlegroups into a functional defence policy instrument (Zięba, 2020). Sikorski, now a member of the EP and a “fan of President Emmanuel Macron”, promotes the idea of strengthening ESA in security and defence (Zbytniewska, 2022). Russia’s aggression towards Ukraine and Belarus’ hybrid attacks against Latvia, Lithuania, and Poland is an example for Sikorski that a European defence union must be created. Consequently, he and the European People’s Party have proposed to appoint a Commissioner for Defence and create a Defence Council composed of defence ministers of the MS (Sikorski, 2022). The ambition goes further, as the Defence union would not be complete without operational capacity. As Sikorski stated during the PO national conference in 2021: “After the removal of PiS from power, we will become a leader in the creation of the European defence project and we will strive to create a European legion” (Sikorski chce stworzenia europejskiej armii?, 2021). The legion would be under the Council of the EU for Foreign and Defence Affairs, and its financing would come from the common budget, according to the GDP of the members. Sikorski acknowledged that the name of the legion was used to dissociate the initiative from the PiS leader’s proposal to create a European army.

Jarosław Kaczyński (a leader of PiS) was the first to present the idea of creating a common European army due to the belief that NATO had wasted its military potential. In 2006, he proposed the creation of an army of 100,000 troops that would be politically subordinate to the President of the European Commission and operationally to NATO Headquarters (Wieliński, 2006). The proposal was based on the assumption that a European alternative financed from the budget of the Union would act as a counterweight to the US military (Paruch, 2021), which was involved in the War on Terror and paid little attention to the security of Europe. In the long run, this idea was abandoned because of a lack of political support from the major European powers and a lack of financial resources (Szułdrzyński, 2016). However, the PO representatives believe that the idea may still materialise just under a different name – the European legion.

Conclusions

The ESA is not a topic of open discussion in Poland. Politicians and experts mostly use the term to stress Poland’s Atlanticism rather than define its content. At the strategic level, autonomy means maintaining a strategic partnership with

the US and cooperating closely in all areas. At the same time, Europe's strategic autonomy is not possible without an acceptance by the major European powers that Russia is a threat to Europe and can in no way be treated as a partner. Russia's war against Ukraine has further strengthened Poland's conviction that unconditional support for Ukraine's Euro-Atlantic integration and a refusal to cooperate with Russia on European security issues are the essential conditions for ESA.

Russia's war against Ukraine has prompted Poland to strengthen its defence capabilities by increasing the size of its army to 300,000 troops, introducing voluntary basic military service, increasing defence funding, expanding its acquisition programme, etc. These decisions indicate Poland's determination to be able to guarantee its territorial integrity without help from others – to become self-reliant. The strategic partnership with the US remains a priority in case of need for allied assistance. To ensure US interest, Poland is willing to modernise its military capabilities by acquiring weapons and equipment produced by US companies.

Poland supports the idea of OSA, especially in the single market and international trade areas. Poland's idea of autonomy is primarily linked to reducing barriers, increasing competitiveness through the circular economy, and creating the digital market. The most important aspect that the Polish elite stresses is the possibility of returning production from third countries to the EU, strengthening local production, and technological development. Thus, autonomy primarily reflects the EU's ability to be independent of disruptions in global production chains, shortages of raw materials or rising prices, and a lack of energy resources. Accordingly, in CSDP, Poland is primarily interested in opportunities to strengthen the national defence industry (for example, join the European Main Battle Tank project), acquire and develop the latest technologies, and thus increase national defence capabilities and support the local economy.

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6 US Foreign Policy during the Biden Presidency

A Reset in the US Approach towards the EU Strategic Autonomy?

Gerda Jakštaitė-Confortola

The European strategic autonomy is still very much about the United States, which was and remains the main security provider for Europeans. Every newly elected US president has been accompanied either by fear of Europeans that something would change (the US would reconsider its strategic interests in Europe and would turn away, for instance); or that nothing would change. Joe Biden's presidency, which started in January 2021, was followed by high expectations from Europeans: some US-European allies hoped the Biden administration would be pro-European and support American engagement in Europe (Brattberg, 2020). While leaders of certain European countries, France, for instance, described the transition in the White House "as an opportunity to build independence" (Wheeldon, 2020).

For decades, the United States had concerns about the ESA, especially in the foreign and security policy domain. The Trump administration, for instance, numerous times reminded European leaders that NATO, not the EU, is the key to the Western military alliance (Benitez, 2019). Moreover, the Trump administration officials expressed deep concern about the European Defence Fund, which is considered one of the steps towards ESA. The new President of the US, Joe Biden, on the other hand, underlines the restoration and strengthening of the transatlantic partnership among its top foreign policy priorities (Biden, 2020). The Biden administration also highlights that a strong EU remains in the US interest (Joint Statement by President Biden and President Emmanuel Macron of France, 2021). Thus, the question is whether the Biden administration has brought a new vision about the EU ambitions to strengthen its positions in the international arena to the White House.

The goal of the chapter is to examine whether there has been a reset in the US approach towards the ESA during Biden's presidency. The chapter also poses such questions as: has the US approach towards the EU strategic autonomy been dynamic? What concept of the ESA would the US find acceptable (if any) or even beneficial? What are the main factors determining the position of the US? With what risks and opportunities does this idea is associated in the Biden administration? To what extent should the European Union pursue autonomous action in security and defence, and how do such initiatives interact with the roles of the US and NATO?

The chapter proceeds as follows: first, the traditional US position towards the ESA is discussed; then, the Biden administration's stance about the EU as one of the transatlantic relations' pillars is explored since this is directly related to the American approach to ESA. The third, the most elaborated part, examines the Biden administration's approach to the ESA, focusing on foreign and security policy domain as this ESA sector causes the biggest dilemmas for the US.

However, it has been a challenge to assess the Biden administration's position on the ESA since the ESA matter has not been addressed directly on the highest level of official political discourse (on the presidential level, for instance). Therefore, statements of other administration officials had to be analysed for this matter. Since, for the US, the ESA issue is directly related to NATO and the US position towards the EU, the Biden administration's stance towards the US–EU relations, NATO–EU relations, and towards NATO has been explored by applying analysis of the US strategic documents, Biden's political discourse, and constructing event data-sets (based on the information provided by the American Presidency Project, the White House, and mass media).

Traditional US position about the European strategic autonomy

Historically, the US supported the EU integration project; however, the Americans endorsed the EU integration in the security domain only to a certain degree. The US opposed the ESA idea (and its predecessors) and considered it to be challenging to NATO, which is one of the most important pillars of transatlantic security architecture. The US traditional position towards ESA has been driven by the perception that the ESA might duplicate NATO's functions and might be “impractical” for transatlantic countries as a result (Vershbow & Binnendijk, 2021). This idea dominated the US position about ESA up until the Obama presidency, which indicated slight shifts in the US stance but came back to the traditional US position during the Trump presidency.

The US had encouraged Europe's integration project already in May 1950 when the US president Harry Truman welcomed the European Coal and Steel Community as a path for further US cooperation with European countries (Archick et al., 2020, p. 8). As the EU project evolved over the years and manifested European ambitions to develop Common Security and Defence policy as well as the EU military capabilities, the US administrations expressed support for CSDP as for the initiative that would strengthen NATO's European pillar (Archick et al., 2020, p. 20). At the same time, however, during the Cold War, there were tensions among the decision-makers in the US about the extent to which Europe should be more independent (Cox & Stokes, 2018, p. 202): despite the support for the European Coal and Steel Community, the US was interested in maintaining its influence in economic and security structures in Europe. In this context, in the 1960s, the US referred to European Economic Community as part of the Western system. The 1970s signified dynamics in the US stance towards Europe when the Richard Nixon administration's European

policy shifted from containment in the economic sector (reacting to the challenge posed by France) to the “Year of the Europe” (in 1973). In the 1980s, when the Western European Union was revived, the US focused once again on the emphasis that any European initiatives in the defence domain should be complementary to NATO (Cox & Stokes, 2018, p. 200).

The time after the Cold War, when the US was enjoying the unipolar moment and when European countries needed the Americans less than during the Cold War (Krauthammer, 1990), did not alter the traditional US position about the ESA. Although the Bill Clinton administration seemed more pro-European than its predecessors, this administration also drew certain “red lines” that still shape the US position towards the ESA today. On the one hand, the Clinton administration looked favourably at the EU’s ambition to develop a Common Foreign and Security Policy (Lundestad, 2005, p. 257). On the other hand, the administration made it clear that the US would accept European Security and Defence Identity (ESDI) only if the Europeans agreed to create it within a wider NATO structure. Moreover, in 1998, reacting to the Saint-Malo declaration, which aimed to advance the creation of European security and defence policy, US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright encouraged ESDI, claiming that the US “would welcome a more capable European partner” (Thompson, 2019) but also outlined the infamous “3 Ds”: European Defence Initiative should not “decouple” the US from Europe; it should not “duplicate” NATO; it should not discriminate against NATO members that did not belong to the EU (Rutten, 2001). The Bush administration also maintained the traditional American foreign policy position that NATO should be the core of transatlantic security and was concerned about “the EU becoming an independent force than its predecessors had been” (Lundestad, 2005, p. 278).

In this context, Barack Obama’s presidency brought some changes in the traditional American approach towards the ESA. Having to deal with the implications of the world financial crisis, rising powers, US involvement in the Afghanistan and Iraq wars, the Obama administration set a pivot to Southeast Asia, had great expectations for the European allies, and developed a “leading from behind strategy” to address international conflicts. The Obama administration was ready for a more “autonomous” EU that would take more responsibility and be capable of managing international crises in the European continent and Northern Africa but be taking the US lead at the same time. Thus, the Obama administration was not against giving the EU a seat at the table and was encouraging Europeans to be more active in foreign and security policy domains.

The Donald Trump administration, however, had concerns that ESA might undermine the US primacy in NATO (Thompson, 2019). Although the administration’s National Security Strategy (National Security Strategy of the United States of America, 2017) stated that “The United States is safer when Europe is prosperous and stable and can help to defend our shared interests and ideals”, the administration openly demonstrated a transactional approach in transatlantic relations and more than ever criticised its European allies about

burden-sharing. During the Trump presidency, the ESA idea for the US was acceptable up to a degree if it did not weaken NATO and undermine European countries' commitments to the alliance. The Trump administration sent a stern letter to the EU diplomats expressing concern over European Defence Fund. The administration also had concerns that PESCO might restrict US defence companies' access to participation in European military projects.

In short, the traditional US position about the ESA could be summarised as follows: the US associated the ESA idea with the security domain mostly and supported the ESA in the security domain to the degree that it did not duplicate NATO's functions or weaken the alliance.

Biden administration's position about the EU as one of the transatlantic relations' pillars

Historically, the US position about the EU integration in the security and defence domain has always been related to its visions about Europe and NATO. The Biden administration's position about the ESA study is inseparable from the administration's stance analysis of transatlantic relations, Europe, and NATO, since, in American political logic, they are pieces of the same puzzle.

Biden's election as the President of the US was widely perceived as a great promise for transatlantic relations among Europeans. European countries welcomed Biden's victory in the US presidential elections with hopes for a diplomatic reset in transatlantic relations and repairing damage after four years of Trump's presidency. Phrases like "partnership" and "friendship" dominated the congratulations messages from Europe (Balfour, 2020). The EU expressed a wish to work together with the Biden administration to address global challenges (A conversation with the President of the European Council Charles Michel, 2021). Moreover, with the new president in the White House, some opinions emerged that ESA is no longer necessary (European Strategic Autonomy and the Biden Presidency, 2021).

Joe Biden himself is a firm believer in transatlantic relations. During his election campaign, he emphasised the importance of "working with allies" and outlined the restoration of the US relations with European allies as some of his foreign policy priorities (Speck, 2020). Once in office, at the Munich security conference, he claimed that "The transatlantic alliance is a strong foundation — the strong foundation — on which our collective security and our shared prosperity are built" (Remarks by President Biden at the 2021 Virtual Munich Security Conference, 2021). Furthermore, Biden's foreign policy team is dominated by Atlanticists. For instance, Secretary of State Antony Blinken is known for his advocacy for alliances; while National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan, by some European states' leaders, is described as having a similar world view to theirs (Remarks by President Biden at the 2021 Virtual Munich Security Conference, 2021). Strategic documents released by the Biden administration state that the US will recommit to its transatlantic partnerships (Interim National Security Strategic Guidance, 2021, p. 10) and refer to Europe as one of the regions where

the US has strategic interests. Short after the presidential elections, the US under the Biden administration has re-joined the initiatives that were important for the EU: Paris Climate Change Agreement, the Iran Nuclear Deal, and others (U.S.-European Relations in the 117th Congress, 2022). On the other hand, the US has pulled out its troops from Afghanistan without consulting its European allies prior (a step that was called a sign of unilateralism by some) (Haas, 2021) and signed the trilateral security pact between Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States of America (AUKUS) that made France recall its ambassador to the US. Hence, the first year of Biden's presidency signalled that despite Biden's strong belief in the importance of transatlantic relations, Europeans should not expect Euro-Atlantic relations to return to the state of 2016 (before the Trump presidency) and, as the EU foreign policy chief Joseph Borrell pointed out, to expect the US "fighting other people's wars" (Hopper, 2021).

In general, for the Biden administration, Europe remains among the top regions where the US has strategic interests: "We will recognise that our vital national interests compel the deepest connection to the Indo-Pacific, Europe, and the Western Hemisphere" (Interim National Security Strategic Guidance, 2021). For his first official visit abroad, Biden has chosen Europe as a destination (June 2021).

Certain elements of the US traditional transatlantic policy, namely, the position about NATO, however, were maintained by the Biden administration. The current administration has reaffirmed the US support for NATO and views the alliance as a core pillar for transatlantic security: "That is why we will reaffirm, invest in, and modernise the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)" (Interim National Security Strategic Guidance, 2021). Biden administration, like previous US administrations, expressed the same demands for Europeans about the burden-sharing in NATO and support for the NATO-EU partnership portraying it as an important element of transatlantic security: "The Presidents reaffirm their support for strengthening the NATO-EU strategic partnership" (United States-France Joint Statement, 2021). However, even though the NATO-EU partnership issue has been on the agenda of every NATO summit since 2016, the Biden administration's official reaction to the NATO-EU aspect has been rather limited: for instance, for the Biden administration, the NATO-EU issue has not been among the topmost important issues to be discussed in NATO Brussels Summit in 2021, the same as for Obama and Trump administrations (deterrence and burden-sharing issues were) (Belkin, 2021). Such a viewpoint suggests not only the presence of the US traditional transatlantic policy but shifts, that are mostly related to the US stance about the EU, away from it as well.

The Biden administration has continuously highlighted the US relations with the EU as an important channel of transatlantic relations (for instance, in conversations with France's leadership which is one of the biggest advocates of ESA). Moreover, the new administration demonstrated openness towards the EU and initiatives to create more engaging US-EU relations emphasising common values that unite transatlantic countries, such as the rule of law, freedom

of expression, and democracy (The White House, Fact Sheet: Rebuilding, Revitalizing, and Raising the Ambition of U.S.-EU Relations, 2021). The US president expressed a desire to “revitalize the US–EU relations” (Press Release – President Biden to Meet Virtually with EU Leaders at European Council Summit, 2021). There were special calls with the EU representative (EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and Vice President of the European Commission Joseph Borrell) at the beginning of Biden’s presidency (28 January 2022)). New direct dialogue formats have been established between the US and the EU, such as the US–EU dialogues on defence and security, the Indo-Pacific, and China (Huntington, 2021). Thus, the EU has been perceived as an actor that is gaining higher importance in international and transatlantic relations. Biden’s administration has emphasised the following challenges that could be addressed together: COVID-19, climate change, transatlantic data flows, and economic cooperation (including trade), as well as technological development and support for democracy (U.S.–European Relations in the 117th Congress, 2022). This variety of domains for cooperation shows that the Biden administration believes in the EU’s potential to be a versatile international actor.

In brief, the Biden administration is led by a strong advocate for transatlantic relations. Joe Biden, who is interested in maintaining the US presence in Europe and keeping structures that facilitate Euro-American relations functioning. Moreover, the current administration views the EU as an important pillar of transatlantic relations that might potentially take a bigger burden in transatlantic relations responsibilities share.

The European strategic autonomy in the Biden administration’s foreign policy

Although the EU-related issues are a rather frequently addressed topic in the Biden administration’s political discourse, it is not easy to grasp the administration’s position about the ESA or the perception of the ESA idea. In the first year of his presidency, Biden or his spokesperson referred to the EU-related topics in 75 speeches (American Presidency Project). However, the ESA idea was not discussed directly at the US highest political level, and such terms as “European strategic autonomy” or “EU sovereignty” were not used at all. It seems that the Biden administration was cautious in utilising the concept, which is ambiguous even for the EU members themselves since the idea of the EU strategic autonomy is still in the development process (Tocci, 2021). The administration’s avoidance of the usage of the ESA term might result from the White House indecision about the ESA idea or the complex process of the ESA development, which is still ongoing. Despite the ESA’s concept absence in Biden’s rhetoric and administration’s strategic documents (Interim National Security Strategic Guidance, for instance), the ESA topic was discussed in Biden’s administration.

The US political elite and defence establishment have a broad understanding of the ESA idea. Biden's administration expects that the EU will seek strategic autonomy in a variety of domains (not only foreign and security policy). In the US documents and Biden's administration's official discourse, the EU is portrayed as an actor capable of addressing mutual challenges in a variety of domains with the US in an equal manner. Biden's administration stressed multiple times that a strong EU is in the US interest. At the same time, however, the Biden administration associates the EU with economic capabilities mostly: "The US – EU Summit is fundamentally about two very large economies" (Background Press Call by a Senior Administration Official Previewing the U.S.-EU Summit, 2021). Thus, the US political elite and defence establishment do not limit the ESA idea to foreign and security policy domain only and extend it to other policy domains. Moreover, they seem to assume that the EU can pursue strategic autonomy in various policy domains.

At the same time, however, during the Biden presidency, the American discussions about the ESA mostly focus on the security and defence domain. Nonetheless, this should not be perceived as a sign that the US foreign and security policy establishment considers that the EU should pursue strategic autonomy exclusively in a foreign and security policy. The Biden administration's focus on the foreign and security policy sector in this context shows that this is the domain that the administration has concerns thinking about ESA. Other EU activities sectors, for instance, economy, have been discussed by the American foreign and security policy establishment as well; however, various dilemmas for the US that might emerge as a result of the ESA ideas which have been mostly examined in foreign and security domain.

Within the Biden administration, the perception of ESA in foreign and security domain is not limited to hard security concept only. Various US officials (Huntington, 2021) believe that the EU should be capable of doing diverse out of the area crisis management operations. Thus, a broad understanding of ESA in the foreign and security domain is used, and it suggests that the administration expects the EU to develop diverse capabilities in the sector.

Biden administration's public discourse and strategic documents suggest that, on the one hand, the administration supports the ESA idea; on the other hand, it has certain red lines that should not be overstepped in the idea's execution process. For the Biden administration, the ESA idea presents opportunities for transatlantic relations. The ESA in the foreign and security domain for the Biden administration is acceptable if it enables burden-sharing in transatlantic relations. The US is interested in promoting greater EU integration in the foreign and security domain since it strengthens the capabilities of the European allies and the European pillar of NATO as a result (Retter et al., 2021, p. 41). The US is also interested in a stronger EU since having to deal with aggressive Russia, ambitious PRC, and continuing instability in the Middle East, the US needs capable European allies and transatlantic division of labour to form a credible deterrence strategy and because in such a way it can

direct attention and resources to Indo-Pacific. This approach is not new in the US foreign policy: critical statements towards the Europeans have been part of the US political discourse for a long time, and they became more noticeable during the Obama's presidency, whose foreign policy was driven by a pivot to Asia, greater burden-sharing, and leading from behind ideas. Thus, ESA in the foreign and security policy domain presents opportunities for the Americans who are interested in burden-sharing in transatlantic relations. Some think tanks suggest the US concerns about burden-sharing in transatlantic relations are likely to continue shaping the American position about ESA in defence for the years to come (Retter et al., 2021, p. 41). For the Biden administration, ESA is a political matter, to begin with: the US is interested in having stronger European allies that would not cause competition for the US in transatlantic relations and would follow the foreign and security policy line that is beneficial for the US.

According to the Biden administration officials, the US is ready to "provide guidance about the types of capabilities to start building up" (Herszenhorn, 2021). Biden administration's support for ESA is not unconditional. From the administration's perspective, the EU could pursue strategic autonomy in a foreign and security policy domain if it does not undermine NATO and duplicate its functions. Thus, NATO is seen as a primary framework for European defence (Biden is an Atlanticist), which is a key issue in the US position on the ESA. Like his predecessors, Biden also shares the idea that Europeans should invest more in their defence capabilities (including in the framework of the EU) as long as this does not harm NATO: "We recognise the contribution EU security and defence initiatives can make to both European and Transatlantic security and plan to launch a dedicated dialogue on security and defence and pursue closer cooperation in this field" (the quote was made in the context of the EU's invitation to the United States to join the PESCO project). Therefore, for the Biden administration, NATO's future is the red line that should not be crossed: NATO should remain the main pillar in transatlantic security architecture and its functions should not be duplicated in the ESA execution process. Essentially, for Americans, the ESA in the foreign and security domain is not only about advancing the EU military capabilities but also about the EU's strategic responsibility (those are the expectations).

Multiple reasons for the Biden administration's relatively positive stance towards ESA might be named. On the international level, a strong EU is an important partner for the US in dealing with revisionist Russia and the ambitious People's Republic of China. Biden's administration's position towards the ESA also is a logical sequence of the administration's wish to strengthen transatlantic relations and the US-EU relations. Recent public support for ESA in the foreign and security domain (as of November 2021), according to some sources, also is a sort of compensation for France, one of the biggest advocates of the ESA, that has been disappointed by the US Indo-Pacific security partnership with the UK and Australia. Moreover, during Biden's presidency, the

US is not looking forward to managing European security problems (as before). The ESA might be an important element that enables the burden-sharing in transatlantic relations and satisfies the US interests (among structures, policies, and strategies). (Retter et al., 2021, p. 38). According to the current US president, sufficient defence funding is the key to burden-sharing (Cordesman & Hwang, 2021).

Biden administration's position about the ESA in the foreign and security domain is determined by national developments as well. A more capable EU in the defence sector is a valuable partner for the American defence industry. Numerous US administrations, including the Biden administration, were insistent on formalising agreements that regulate cooperation between the EU and US defence industry sectors. The Biden administration is more open to the EU defence industry policies (Besch & Scazzieri, 2020) if those serve the mutual goal: strong partnership (and not only as a countermeasure against American firms). The Biden administration insisted on European Defence Agency Administrative Agreement that is necessary for US defence firms to be able to participate in EDA-managed defence capability projects (Huntington, 2021). The EDA AA issue was resolved at the end of 2021 through bilateral talks between Paris and Washington after the AUKUS deal. More capable Europe (ESA in defence and security domain) is beneficial for the US not only because of burden-sharing, but it also makes easier to justify the US investment in Europe for the Americans (Retter et al., 2021, p. 38).

Despite expressed support for the ESA in foreign policy and security domain and constant encouragement to defence capabilities increase, the Biden administration has doubts about the EU's will and abilities to execute its ambitions about the strategic autonomy. It seems that the Biden administration officials are concerned not about the increase of the EU military capabilities and potential challenge for the US but about the EU failing to execute the ESA idea (Herszenhorn, 2021). Biden administration's officials (State Department Counsellor Derek Chollet, for instance) claim that "US President Joe Biden 'absolutely' supports European allies developing their own, stronger military capabilities – but it's high time for EU leaders to move beyond theory and rhetoric" (Herszenhorn, 2021). In general, the Biden administration views the European debate about the ESA (idea, purpose, sectors, execution details) as distracting from the main question – how Europe will boost its military capabilities (Besch & Scazzieri, 2020).

To conclude, the Biden administration is sending mixed messages about the ESA. On the one hand, the current administration has openly expressed support for the ESA in the foreign policy and security domain and suggested its expertise to help boost the EU defence capabilities. On the other hand, the Biden administration approves the ESA only if it serves for stronger US–European partnership, transatlantic relations where partners contribute equally, and mutual interests, which in the US case, evolve around NATO as the main defence structure in transatlantic relations.

Conclusions

The Biden administration's approach to the ESA could be summarised in the phrase "something old, something new". The Biden administration does not object to the ESA idea *per se* and perceives it to be wider than only in the foreign and security policy sector. However, the administration welcomes ESA only if it serves transatlantic interests and compliments NATO. Given the fact that strengthening NATO–EU strategic partnership is encouraged by the US on many levels, the Biden administration's position regarding ESA (including foreign and security policy domain) is compatible with the ESA ambition since there is potential to solve issues for potential duplication and find a way to make it work.

On the other hand, in the ESA in the foreign policy and security domain, the Biden administration sees not only risks but potential benefits for the US as well. For the US, the ESA in the foreign and security policy domain might enable more effective burden-sharing in transatlantic relations and would make it easier to redirect part of its focus to other world regions. Moreover, the current administration has gone further than previous US administrations and openly suggested guidance for the ESA's execution in the foreign and security policy domain.

The Biden administration's approach towards ESA is not "a Reset" in the US foreign policy. It is a sequence of traditional American foreign policy (after 2009) that favours the strengthening of US–EU relations and views the increasing EU capabilities as potentially beneficial for the whole transatlantic community if the same traditional transatlantic channels are maintained functioning in harmony. Biden administration, however, seemingly, has given a new impetus for more harmonious transatlantic relations and the potential of ESA (in foreign and security domain). Thus, the Biden administration's position about the ESA is a shift in the US approach but not a reset.

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7 Through the Estonian Looking Glass

Can NATO's Credible Deterrence and EU Strategic Autonomy Succeed Simultaneously?¹

Viljar Veebel and Illimar Ploom

European strategic autonomy is still rather an amorphous concept. Its recent introduction plays a role, but its potential impact on the historical balance of transatlantic relations could be seen as a culprit. While this can be a major reason why the Estonian political and military elite has trouble understanding what is meant by ESA and what are its benefits even if fully functional in the future, it does not look like the main rationale behind this stance. A closer look reveals that there are more fundamental misgivings. Estonian political and military elite is pro-European and pro-integration but asks: what could the EU deliver that the US-led NATO is already not delivering? As Estonia has no global ambitions and interests, security is a regional issue for its elite and is primarily meant to cope with Russian aggressive ambitions. It is also a fair dose of scepticism against federal developments within the EU that makes Estonian politicians and a wider public critical of ESA. What is more, even if ESA arrives, it could become another shiny vision with a big institutional framework without actual capabilities. Actual willingness to act seems to be the main concern.

The Estonian defence and deterrence mostly rely on the eFP forces of the UK and the US, and there seems to be little willingness to replace the *status quo*. As a result, a stronger consensus among the Estonian elite seems to be found in the question that ESA initiatives should, under no configuration, threaten NATO. Duplication is not seen as a problem, as long it does not bother the US. However, it is unclear, who is most bothered by this, the EU, the US, France, or the UK. In practice, as long as ESA has not proven its actual capabilities, survivability and added value, all security and defence resources are dedicated to cooperation with NATO and special relations with the US. So far, ESA has meant only talks and few results, if any at all (Värk, 2021).

Why should a tiny member state of the EU and NATO, like Estonia, support ESA at all? Mostly for the sake of “keeping European integration evolving”. Accordingly, ESA is positively seen mostly by lifelong supporters of the EU integration (who support it to support a wider spill-over effect of the integration process), while other groups see it as either a useless shiny initiative

or a functional competitor to existing NATO capabilities. And it is yet to be understood what is meant and aimed with “ESA”. As a result, Estonia is one of the least enthusiastic among EU member states about strategic autonomy. Even Vladimir Putin has an impact on this matter: so far, he has been belittling ESA, however, should he become critical of EU strategic autonomy, this will be a serious positive argument for Estonian politicians to support ESA.

Estonia is in a paradoxical situation. While ESA is a foreign policy concept, current Estonian foreign policy is completely in service of its defence and survival needs and therefore aimed at pleasing the US. This has started already in 2014 during the Russo-Ukrainian war and has only deepened in the following years. For a small state bordering Russia, even membership in NATO does not offer enough relief, therefore, balance between basic survival needs and broader interests in international relations is necessary.

In this context, it is rather understandable that Estonia does not entertain ambitious global goals but concentrates on regional or even local military protection and deterrence against Russia. This line is clearly visible in the statements of former defence minister Jüri Luik and current head of the foreign policy committee of the Estonian parliament Marko Mihkelson. It must be acknowledged that some former defence ministers (Sven Mikser, for example) had a different opinion. Eventually, most of the experts admit that ESA seems as mostly a French ambition, with some “de Gaulle” flavour to it meant to criticise and reduce US impact and importance in Europe. As the UK has Brexited and Germany is not spending enough, then who is left to go forward with strategic autonomy?

Estonian political elite on ESA

It is worthwhile inquiring into the question of how the Estonian political elite perceives ESA. When they discuss ESA, topics like survivability of the nation, sovereignty of the state, security guarantees, European Army, and value-based security policy surface. And, as to the actors, within that context, the US takes the primary, while the EU plays a secondary role. The most concise articulation of the dominant position of Estonian politicians is pronounced by the Estonia Minister of Foreign Affairs Eva-Maria Liimets. According to Liimets (2021), there is no need to invent alternatives to the special and functional relationship with the US; however, anything with added value is welcome. This reflects two things, the Estonian existential paradigm and the slight opening for weighing possible changes as to the answer. For the Estonian elite, survival is a keyword, and it is related to the US as the only realistic ally to counter Russia’s attack today and in the near future. The second key contributor to Estonian security is the United Kingdom, while the EU comes only long way after that.

Probably the most clear-cut argument is presented by Ambassador Sven Sakkov. He sees ESA and the European Army as poetic concepts with no actual value in terms of Estonia’s interests and argues that Europe is not ready to invest in actual military capabilities (Sakkov, 2019). This marks the most

important aspect of Estonia's defence policy, i.e., the almost exclusive emphasis on the availability of hard military security capabilities to create credible deterrence against Russia. According to Sakkov, ESA would have some chance if Germany would increase its defence budget by over 2% of GDP and somehow develop a "strategic intervention culture". It is thus eventually German pacifism, and not French ambitions, that is the main reason why ESA has very little chance of success. If one takes a look at the actual practice and the lack of progress therein, by the above-exploited metaphor, ESA remains "a poetry" which allows everybody to build and project their dreams as they wish into it. However, it is different from real poetry as long as it could become dangerous to actual security and defence. It could namely be misunderstood in Washington, losing their commitment to Estonia (Sakkov, 2019). During Russian aggression against Ukraine in 2022, several positive changes have already taken place and can also change the sceptical attitude of the Estonian political elite towards Germany. German political leaders have openly supported Ukraine and have both allocated more resources to help the Ukrainian army and also to strengthen the Bundeswehr.

Political heavyweights like the many times foreign and defence minister Jüri Luik (Pro Patria Party) and a long-serving chairman of the foreign policy committee of Estonian Parliament Riigikogu Marko Mihkelson (Estonian Reform Party) are both sharing these views, being staunch Atlanticists and rather rejective to ESA. The only diverging prominent to this dominant view is Sven Mikser (Social Democratic Party), present member of the EP and former foreign and defence minister of Estonia. Mikser is a supporter of ESA, seeing a value in European defence capabilities. While debating the relations between strategic autonomy and European Army, he also sees independence in terms of military industry as an important aspect of being able to act without the US approval (Mikser, 2021). This, however, is a rather rare position which falls into the relatively tiny camp of Estonian Euro-optimists.

The divide between parties is similar to the eminent political figures. Among the political elite and leaders, three groups appear. The group of "Convinced Atlanticists" includes the prime minister's Reform Party and the Pro Patria party from the opposition. This is a group that draws from the moral high ground of a long-term historical consensus in Estonian politics. Thus, the centre-right Luik (Pro Patria) and Mihkelson (Reform Party) are putting all their weight into supporting the present orientation towards the US and the UK. Since matters of defence are securitised in Estonia, it is only understandable that the Atlanticists refuse to debate any alternative security option or foreign policy orientation next to that of focusing on the US, the UK, and NATO. The notable exception is Luik, who has dynamically led Estonia to support French initiatives. Second, the "Pro-Europeans" feature as the only representative of the Social Democratic Party that gives its full support to ESA, mostly because of their close connections to the European Social Democratic Party in the EP. This leaves them as the only clear-cut Euro (and ESA) optimist. The "Doubters and Sceptics" include the radical Conservative People's Party

of Estonia *Eesti Konservatiivne Rahvaerakond* (EKRE) and the Centre Party, both flirting with both options but also doubting both the US ability to follow certain values and the EU's ability to deliver (Veebel, 2020). However, the Centre Party (Liimets) still officially remains, with some hesitancy, a supporter of the dominant position. What is interesting, even the radical anti-EU EKRE party and national radicals can find something good in ESA. They favour the idea that both Estonia and the EU should be able to produce more products independently from the US (Kallas, 2020). Some political parties and interest groups are raising the question of the importance of being sustainably independent of the EU: to be able to defend itself and handle the economic challenges.

In sum, there is hardly any alternative to NATO to counterbalance Russia, but a need for strategic dependence on the EU is not that much understandable. What emerges from this account of positions, the most explicit pattern among the Estonian political elite, is countering on the US and NATO with the EU. The EU lacks tangible military potency, so ESA is seen as not only unable to replace the guarantees of the US and NATO but a distraction from real issues. The maximum role of the EU is merely to fill the gaps left by the US and the UK. Of course, part of the explanation can be related back to the insufficiency of everyday practical diplomacy with the main promoters of ESA. It appears that diplomatic contacts with France, Germany, and Italy are not sufficient to facilitate a clear understanding of ESA and its potential value. In their turn, the US and the UK have made their expectations much clearer to local leaders.

Next to possible deficiencies on the diplomatic plane, the term ESA is sufficiently ambiguous and linguistically confusing to cause misunderstandings. Elina Libek (adviser to Riigikogu, the Estonian parliament) speaks about ESA as “a cacophony of European political visions” (Libek, 2019). She asks even if there is value in a debate where most participants understand the phenomenon differently. When searching for practical political roots, the quest usually collapses into the question of what does the French President mean by it or what France is aiming at. So, confusion around ESA does not necessarily have to do with the Estonian-specific perspective. It is a wider shared ambiguity if ESA is something that is against a strong transatlantic defence alliance or actually strengthens it by providing a reasonable alternative if needed. At the same time, it is worth asking, is ambivalence necessarily bad? Some degree of ambivalence appears natural to a phenomenon that is only about to be launched. But could it work in Estonian national interests if we don't understand what it is and how to participate in it? Here, one can see that it actually could, in a sense that it provokes new ideas and some action.

Estonian MEP Yana Toom (2021) explains the need for ESA with the example of microchip production. The EU has refused to obtain chip producer ARM by the US-based producer NVIDIA as this might lead to full control of the US over the supply of the certain type of microchips, including embargos, when the US goals are not met. Huawei's case is seen as a warning example, according to her. Yana Toom's commentary about NVIDIA's wish to buy ARM is largely about this. With digital autonomy, different digital standards have motivated the

stakeholders to uphold the importance of technological and control capabilities. This applies both from the military and wider security viewpoints.

But ESA is not merely about the “hard” security and defence industry. It has an overarching layer of political meaning. On that level, ESA would enable the Europeans to set their own priorities and political goals and to make their own decisions in accordance with European rules, principles, and values. They would have the means, the capabilities, and the readiness to implement these decisions, autonomously if necessary, including through the use of credible military forces.

Estonian military leadership on ESA

Estonian military elite sees a divide between the Atlanticists and the Pro-Europeans. The CHOD Martin Herem speaks about defending Estonia from the Russian Federation in the Blue Hills (a legendary North-Eastern battlefield from the time of World War II) and about the defence cooperation with the US and the UK in the framework of NATO (Herem, 2021a). In a characteristic clarity for a military leader, the EU and ESA are diplomatic categories for Herem, not related much to defence forces. In contrast, his predecessor Riho Terras focused more on the EU and remains active in that regard as a present MEP (Terras, 2018). Overall, the convictions of most CHODs have been favourable to the Atlantist idiom, including the US and much less to the EU.

What comes out from the positions of the military elite is the emphasis on the military itself, not other domains. With the exception of Sven Mikser, military elite mostly consists of ministers of defence and the higher civil servants, i.e., the entire military establishment. Estonia’s Minister of Defence Jüri Luik has been a dedicated supporter of the transatlantic alliance throughout his career. Nevertheless, as alluded to above, the EU has figured prominently in its agenda. It was the case at the time of the Estonian Presidency of the Council of the EU. As an additional condition, President Macron seemed to offer a more accentuated partnership to Estonia than President Trump, who had warmer relations with President Putin. It seems thus that, articulated by such a grand diplomatic figure as Jüri Luik, the EU’s role in security together with strategic autonomy becomes valuable for Estonia only when NATO is bound to fail. While talking about the European allies, he demonstrates the little hope one can place in the security guarantees offered by them. The UK is a good and reliable ally but has unfortunately Brexited. France is almost as good, but it is busy in Africa.

The main question appears to be why, in contrast to many Europeans (Biscop, 2016) the EU is a distraction and not a plausible amendment to defence capabilities for the Estonian defence establishment. And yet, it could be seen as a future extension of the security guarantees offered currently only by NATO. To explain that, one needs to look at the fundamental principles underlying Estonia’s dominant viewpoint. These principles relate to the overarching threat perception, according to which the threat from Russia is acute and it will

necessarily realise in the military conquest of Estonia (Herem, 2022). Russia is seen as opportunistic at best, but more probably as a retaliatory revisionist power that wishes to re-establish its dominance in the post-Soviet space. Even belonging to NATO does not exclude the attack, membership in that club has not changed Estonia's identity as a post-Soviet country. The local elite perceives Estonia to belong to the same category as Ukraine. Thus, an attack against Ukraine is automatically seen as predicting a possible attack on Estonia (Herem, 2022). Of course, this scenario cannot be entirely excluded, and Russia has done its utmost to keep the pressure on all post-Soviet states. The Baltic states have been particularly appealing, as they can be used as a lever to test cohesion and provoke disquiet within NATO. This means that for the Estonian eyes, what is needed is a counterbalance of a similar magnitude to ominous Russia, an ally who can immediately deliver considerable quantities and quality of hard military power. The defence establishment of Estonia has been extremely realistic in judging the only such possible actors to be the US and the UK.

This means *inter alia* that Estonia's main focus has been to build up conventional military capabilities to be able to defend itself independently in a manner that allows the allies to arrive before *fait accompli*. To prepare against a military attack, Estonia, as a small country, has dedicated almost all its attention and resources to the military (Herem, 2021b). For some time, the official defence doctrine of Estonia has drawn on a comprehensive approach (Veebel & Ploom, 2019). Yet, the allocation of finances shows that the actual priority is still conventional military capabilities (Veebel et al., 2020). It has been argued that in contrast to the Nordic states which stress a comprehensive approach even when retaining the term total defence, Estonian nominally integrated defence has much larger stress on the conventional military capabilities (Andžans & Veebel, 2017). As a minor, though a clear sign of the hard power-oriented military mentality, when implementing the relatively minor public budget cuts of 2021, the defence forces decided to give up its traditional military orchestra and the Chaplain services, the rationale being that one cannot fight with a brass musical instrument in the battle, while every additional shotgun would (Herem, 2021c).

In this context, it becomes clear why there appears to exist a systematic problem with conciliating ESA and the Estonian needs. The latter are mostly on the tactical and operational levels, while the EU is offering and expecting strategic level options. Within the NATO framework, there is a clear division of responsibility according to which the organisation provides a strategy, and for Estonia, it is only efficient to focus on operations and tactics.

Estonian academic debates on ESA

While there is no superfluous academic debate in Estonia about the issues touching the ESA, most studies try to weigh pro and contra arguments. The structure of the debate reminds that of the elites, but it goes significantly deeper and opens thus up the underlying presuppositions of the positions (see Ainsö,

2019; Järvenpää, 2019; Lebrun, 2018; Ploom, Sliwa, & Veebel, 2020;, 2021; Sakkov, 2019).

The ongoing debate in Estonia centres around the following questions. Do we need to choose between values and deliverables? Could we have two horses (NATO's credible deterrence and ESA) running simultaneously for our security? Could credible NATO's deterrence be compatible with ESA? Strategic autonomy among other strategic choices: is it actually an option considering the Estonian needs/the inner logic? Defining strategic autonomy: by whom and how?

The main juxtaposition of NATO and the EU is clearly present, and so are the derivative questions that probe the ground for the juxtaposition. To ask if those two organisations could simultaneously work for the same purpose is to understand the membership of Estonia in those organisations. Depending on their profile, it is possible that the question is not even about a choice between alternative options, but rather about combining them. ESA may look like a relatively weak practical choice, yet it appears to presume radical steps in terms of classical sovereignty and venturing into areas that the EU has thus far avoided going. This brings us again to the question of what is actually meant by ESA. Drawing on this, it is possible to see that the strength of the academic debate is the ability to bring the two otherwise opposing poles to meet.

When inquiring into the origins of the academic debate, pro-European views clearly ignite them. Among those views, one can distinguish between two alternative ways to approach the need for ESA that could conditionally be called a positive and a negative definition. The positive definition consists of a belief among pro-Europeans that if the EU had complete sovereignty in CSDP, it would be able to promote peace and security within and beyond their own borders. European states would thereby have the capacity to tackle serious security problems in their neighbourhood. As to the relationship of the EU with the transatlantic alliance, the Europeans would bear half of the burden of defending Europe (Biscop, 2016).

The negative definition is more common among ESA proponents. It relies on real political change. According to this viewpoint, it is a sensible hedging strategy against US disengagement from Europe that the latter has a responsibility to take a greater share of the burden of European security. This position also puts stress on partnership with NATO. In that regard, instead of signifying independence or the rejection of alliances, on the contrary, a stronger European contribution will strengthen the transatlantic relationship.

Now, against this backdrop of pro-ESA definitions, the academic debate also articulates the main problems and misgivings about strategic autonomy. These positions characterise the Atlanticist party. Outlining the position of Estonia, there appears to exist a fear of losing "credible NATO deterrence". It eventually collapses into a realisation that while deals with the US and the UK bring assets on the ground, France simply wants to talk about its global ambitions. ESA critics also question how realistic ESA is given the current state of European

defence and worry about unnecessarily offending the US, in particular in the defence industrial realm.

This helps to understand that, in the sceptical Estonian eyes, the EU should pursue autonomous action in security and defence only as this does not harm the roles of the US and NATO as the fundamental security providers for Europe. Drawing on the above, it is no wonder that, in most cases, the strategic rationale of ESA remains unclear for Estonians. The sceptical Estonian mind is rather looking for tactical contributions and capabilities needed to play with the US and to deter Russia. The EU capabilities that ESA produces should provide credible deterrence against Russia. The answers are clear, the EU does not have sufficient capabilities, and it is not ready to deploy that which would actually help. As Estonia only needs regional military assets, why waste money globally?

Raik (2021) asks if the EU needs strategic autonomy? Estonia needs to deter Russia, which the EU is not ready and not interested in doing. Raik opens the inner variety of the ESA and shows that strategic autonomy seems to be more about regional–operational autonomy. While there is a need for such a thing about which Afghanistan 2021 is a good example, the question is if it is also relevant for Estonia? For the former, the vital thing is if the US can manage its promises. Nevertheless, Raik believes that the EU states need to enhance their common defence capabilities.

According to Järvenpää (2019), the content of ESA remains unclear. Also, a logical problem of concept is indicated: ESA seems to be initiated from fear that the US will shift their attention away from Europe, and so Europe should act first and build its independent capabilities to act without the US or with competing powers. Here is revealed the negative definition and also the opposition of the EU to the US. At the same time, the author is critical of the ESA discourse. Instead of focusing on its own aims and purposes, the debates are generally obsessively busy with worries about the EU–US relations. It is concluded that the ESA means being without the US, but leaves the question with whom the autonomy should work (Järvenpää et al., 2019)?

For Estonia, the importance of Brexit for ESA cannot be underestimated. On the one hand, the UK was sceptic, if not anti-ESA. On the other hand, the UK is the biggest and most visible eFP contributor in Estonia and locals would be very happy to keep it that way. Likewise, why offend the US if there is no one else on the horizon? The authors boil it down to French global ambitions and competition in the weapons market, about which the idea is not that bad, but negative communication is combined with absent practical steps (Järvenpää et al., 2019).

There also seems to exist no orientation to reduce risks or increase actual capabilities. One of those concerns the role of France. Here, it is useful to turn to the study of Lebrun, who juxtaposes the UK and France and debates their aims when investing in defence initiatives in Central and Eastern Europe (2018). Leaving the UK aside, it is indeed France that is fully involved in the strategic autonomy initiative. It is instructive to inquire about the French approach itself.

According to General Lecointre, the main idea behind French autonomy is to avoid violent force strategies by other global and regional powers such as Russia, but also the US and the UK. In reality, the question is mainly about the Russian threat and contradicting French and the US perceptions. This also explains why there is a fog on the French doctrinal level not to confront the US openly. To bring this interpretation into Estonian context, the approach towards ESA is made difficult for two reasons. First, because of the inherent competition of France with the US in ESA and because it is precisely the US that Estonia relies on in securing its independence. This explains the prevailing understanding that Estonia should “not be left alone if the US rejects the idea”. What is more, the deployment readiness of France is not as high as the respective readiness of the UK.

There is an aspect of the ESA that has a relatively comprehensible meaning, and it concerns the production of arms and related technology. Hitherto, part of the transatlantic relationship has been a mutual understanding that while the US offers security for Europe, the latter buys its defence technologies and equipment from the former. This enables the US to maintain its technological dominance in the military equipment market. But this also inevitably means that the US receives remarkable benefits related to its dominance. This has made the EU look for a third way as that would be necessary to maintain freedom of choice of which technologies to purchase and how to use them. Here, there also appears a clear contradiction. The US does not understandably wish for the cross-usage of its military equipment as this would allow an option to buy cheaper alternatives. In this regard, sovereign Europe in security and defence would also have a strong, innovative, and competitive defence industry whose expertise in the future strategic technologies is on a par with that of the other major powers. Of course, there remains the question of against whom the EU could use those alternative arms systems and if there is enough purchasing power to obtain them.

If there is any specific-original essence in ESA, then it is the idea of normative power and external governance (Veebel, 2019a,b). Are those ideas understood and welcomed by the Estonian political and military elite? Logically, normative power has been negative to strategic autonomy. Instead of the usual military levers of security policy that the EU has missed, it has been found to have a certain soft power phenomenon to put forward. In other words, the economic, social, and other attractiveness the EU can boast has arguably made neighbouring countries wish to emulate the EU. Be it for the sake of possible membership or for society building. In the context of ESA promotion, normative power is seen as a specific part of ESA. When inquiring what Estonia thinks about normative power in Europe, in most cases, its reception collides with the usual obstacle, hard military security. First, there are doubts that European normative power is clearly defined and has a long-term strategy. This raises the question of how to follow something that is rather abstract and in constant change in terms of content and importance (Veebel, 2019a,b). Once again, from the political scenery, social democrats and some similarly minded

academic writers consider it worth debate, while most political and military leaders do not. While it looks like the importance and added value of normative power does not deserve much debate, there exists some rhetoric which points to a potential. Namely, the importance of values is often stressed by the Estonian political elite, meaning human rights, democracy, and the rule of law. Yet, when weighed against practical needs, values clearly make way for loyalty to immediately contributing allies. Therefore, despite the openings in the academic debates, most public discussions still conclude that in the Baltics the EU needs to support the US and the UK and fulfil the gaps in keeping global and regional security.

Would institutional reforms make ESA more appealing for Estonia?

In recent decades, European countries have witnessed a myriad of internal developments that push them towards a more independent stance in defence matters, coordination, and capabilities. An underlying historical factor is the drastic decline of defence expenditures in the years following the “Fall of the Wall”. The popularity of austerity measures at the time of the financial crisis has given a further blow to the actual capabilities of European armies. The rather bizarre result of the ever-lessened actual defence capabilities of the European countries means that at times when immediate threats have arisen, the only realistic perspective to be able to adequately respond in time is to combine the capabilities of different countries. But this needs a truly supranational effort and respective institutional mechanisms to achieve it (Biscop, 2016). On the positive side of this solution would be a much-lessened pressure on national budgets due to the efficiency of combined capabilities and forces.

In recent years, the EU has taken steps toward common defence governance, but the extent of those changes is not straightforward. First, as ESA remains conceptually ambiguous, it is difficult to translate into institutions. Does it mean a defence-oriented approach and capabilities or expeditionary focus? Also, geopolitical trends and interests of actors may be contradictory. There has been a noticeable pressure from the US towards the EU to take more responsibility in matters of security and defence in its region. At the same time, the US is not too favourable to the perspective of the EU developing its defence industry. This is also reflected in the still ongoing discussion on the degree of openness of the ESA. However, the creation of a common defence industry is the clearest part of ESA.

Years 2020–2021 indicated the growing competition and tensions between the US and the EU. The three most visible complications include the cases of the drone-killing of the Iranian General Quasim Soleimani, the US decision to push France of submarine deal with Australia by offering its nuclear submarines, and finally, US sudden withdrawal from Afghanistan. The first was a worrying case regarding a different understanding of international law and morality between the US on one side and Germany and France on the other

(Veebel et al., 2021). The second was a financial blow against the European (French) military industry, and the third was seen as an example that the US does not care enough about the needs and preferences of its NATO partners when making strategic decisions. The US and UK political elite's plans to safeguard or not to safeguard the Baltic states might be the next topic that brings crossing opinions between the US–UK and France–Germany coalitions.

At this juncture, one could raise the question if, from the perspective of Estonia, institutional changes and policymaking reforms in the EU would make ESA edible. The necessity and importance of European defence initiatives next to NATO have been debated in Estonia for more than a decade. Worries and doubts have unfortunately stayed the same. There are practical needs related to Russian threats and abstract concepts of ESA leaves a huge gap in between (Veebel, 2017a,b,c). Thus, an immediate answer would point to capabilities that will make the EU able to match Russian agility, aggressiveness, and ambitions in a crisis situation.

Therefore, building institutional autonomy within the EU, European states should consider existing structures such as the Political and Security Committee, EU Military Committee and Military Staff, and Military Planning and Conduct Capability. They should agree on modifications to these structures and initiatives, such as PESCO and the EDF, to allow the post-Brexit UK and other third parties to be included as closely as possible. Thus, from the perspective of the sustainability of the transatlantic security relationship, the rationale for the EU defence industrial policy as the main focus of ESA can be problematic. Although this is far from a one-way road, and much depends on how the policy is designed and implemented (see Biscop, 2016), recent polemic around PESCO developments has demonstrated that the US is very concerned about possible negative implications.

Can such institutional reforms buy Estonian support for the strategic autonomy concept? Estonian political leaders were up to 2021 visibly sceptic about security and defence integration, including ESA (Veebel, 2017a,b,c). Among the reasons are also time-consuming, complicated, and hardly efficient institutional decision-making models of the EU. Would institutional reforms help? On the one hand, if the EU could decide and deploy as efficiently as NATO, that would increase Estonian support. On the other hand, this will even more strongly raise the question of why a security initiative similar to NATO is needed while NATO is successfully delivering (Veebel, 2020). However, Russian aggression against Ukraine in 2022 has changed their opinion to more supportive.

Behind the question of EU institutional reforms, the federalisation debate looms large. Here, it is vital to amend the concept of survival as one of the core assumptions informing Estonian positions. At a closer inspection, one sees how this idea is tied to the classical notion of national sovereignty. This means that survival should be qualified as Estonia's elite does not want to give up classical sovereignty. Here surfaces a paradox: Estonia seems to cling to formal sovereignty under the protective hand of the giant US, while not willing to sacrifice formal sovereignty even if membership of the EU would retain most of the

autonomy feasible in the most modern supranational organisation. With the US, despite sincere, dedicated efforts, it is difficult for Estonia to become an equal partner. With the EU, classical sovereignty has been given away anyway, yet the remains (defence) Estonia does not want to give up.

In more precise terms, it must finally be asked how PESCO and European Army relate and contribute in terms of support to strategic autonomy? PESCO, when introduced during the Estonian presidency in 2018, seemed to receive a visibly positive impulse from the Estonian government and the then defence minister Jüri Luik. Being partially caused by President Trump's temporary sympathy for President Putin and President Macron's readiness to be the most anti-Russian president in NATO (Veebel, 2018). However, during the next four years, not much was materialising about PESCO or European Army. The positive momentum and Estonian support were lost by 2022. With PESCO, in order for a small state like Estonia to be successful in linking its defence industry to the European value chains, the wider economic integration logic of the EU needs to change from the present neoliberal to a more inclusive and development-oriented policy. Thus, PESCO as an institutional development is better understood but hardly beneficial for Estonia, while the European Army concept is more needed while, in practical terms, barely understood.

Some academic researchers propose that ESA might also be constructed within a European pillar of NATO, by a small formal or informal group of states, or through a combination of these. Practical considerations, however, suggest that the EU is the most appropriate format in which to build political and institutional autonomy while states should be responsible for the prerequisites for capabilities and industrial autonomy (Järvenpää et al., 2019).

Along these lines, would Estonia be more supportive of ESA if it was included more in policy development? It is hard to tell, but the present option to be only a "policy-taker" without a right to design this policy is too little. Of course, this design has its reasons (Veebel, 2017a,b,c). Accordingly, there appear to be two ways to gain more Estonian support. The first is to include Estonia in the policy design process, and the second is to make the policy itself more precise and practical in relation to Russia. Even if now the momentum is lost, it might as well be found again.

Conclusions

The Estonian view of ESA consists of the following elements. Survival takes the centre of gravity, making existing realistic guarantees an absolute priority. And, at least in the short-term perspective, those are available only from the US and the UK. The EU does not have the capabilities or capacity needed, nor can it act immediately or in upcoming years. Therefore, the EU is not even seen as replacing NATO but instead potentially harming NATO's guarantees. This means that in the Estonian eyes, the maximal role of the EU is to fill the gaps left by the US and the UK. What is more, even if in the Estonian foreign and security policy discourse the rhetoric of values is common, it cannot be taken

as too deep. Otherwise, the EU would have to be higher up on the ladder of priorities. It is possible to go deeper into understanding Estonia's take on ESA at this juncture. Namely, the aim of survival should be qualified by the idea of classical sovereignty, which Estonia's elite does not want to give up. The obvious paradox is that with the US as the giant, it is difficult for Estonia to be an equal partner in their cooperation. With the EU, classical sovereignty has been given away anyway, yet Estonia does not want to give up the remains – defence.

The Estonians care mostly about “hard” security, while the rest is not a priority. As reflected in the budgetary choices, the long-term policy choices support this understanding. Even in the context where the new generation warfare of Russia puts significant stress on hybrid activities, the main bulk of Estonia's defence expenditure still goes to the area of “hard” security and NATO's credible deterrence posture. Only in recent years have Estonia's financial decisions started gradually recognising the need for integrated (read: comprehensive) defence.

Returning to ESA, not only political and military leaders, but also academic researchers tend to highlight that NATO, differently from the EU, is delivering quickly and with high visibility. As long as this continues, the EU, with its ideas of strategic autonomy and the European Army, is seen as an option for “Plan B” in case the necessity appears, but not earlier. At least, as long as the ESA is mostly about rhetoric, support from the Estonian military elite can hardly be earned. Among the main political parties, only the radical EKRE and the Social Democrats see the EU's strategic autonomy as worth of debate under current conditions. Along these lines, Estonia has mostly been passive or even rejected ESA, hoping that this initiative will disappear as smoothly as it appeared. However, the push from the US is for the EU to take more responsibility for its regional security. Only something like this can stabilise Europe and its neighbouring regions in the long run. Unfortunately, one can see that this more complex dimension of ESA discourse has not been adopted in Estonia.

What is more, many among the Estonian political elite fear that ESA is a French plot and point to the general ambiguity that surrounds the concept. It is certainly true that, to a large extent, ESA has remained on the rhetorical level, the concept being ill-defined. Even if ESA's potential cannot be reduced to French interests, the latter's role in ESA necessitates the question of what should France do to make strategic autonomy work? For one, France could achieve something should it clarify that Estonia does not need to choose between NATO credible deterrence and ESA. If conducted in the French way, institutional reforms could also bring some risks for smaller member states without interests in Africa. They might find contributing to something of verily secondary importance to them. Or, the debate around ESA should be more open and accessible to eventually accommodate both CEE interests about Russia and the Southern European interests about Africa.

As it was demonstrated, compared to Estonian political or military debates, the academic debate consists of more nuanced ideas. One of its main constructive conclusions is to design ESA on an “EU + x” basis. But the academic debate

also mirrors the deepest fear in Estonia about the “European Army”. However, the army is not anywhere close to materialising. At the same time, autonomy without an army is close to an “impotent gorilla” (Franke, 2017). As such, it will be far from meeting Estonian needs against the aggressive Russian bear.

How could the Russian war of aggression against Ukraine potentially change Estonia’s calculations on ESA? It will probably prove to be a game-changer in terms of the future shape of ESA and its reception in Estonia. On the one hand, it has revealed the often-low level of political consensus in the EU, but on the other hand, it has brought practical cooperation to quite a new level. So, while the Russian war of aggression has revealed especially the limits and preferences of German and French political elites, it has also helped get the EU into closer defence cooperation with the UK and the US. Therefore, the reactions to Russian aggression have demonstrated more function and content for ESA. As NATO has been rather self-restrictive to avoid any additional escalation from the Russian side, leaving more space and role for the EU states, the outcome of Russian aggression has been encouraging for ESA. Overall, it appears inevitable that both the US and the EU will realise that NATO and EU cooperation needs to be brought to an entirely new level. Hence, there is a hope for the ESA being defined and structured as a necessary and functional part within NATO that can deal with regional conflicts on its own. If this perspective comes to realisation, Estonia’s political and military elite will perceive ESA in a less ambiguous and much more positive way.

Note

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8 **Military Capabilities First, Politics Later**

Latvia's Approach to European Strategic Autonomy¹

Toms Rostoks

Latvia's approach to European strategic autonomy has been cautious. It was seen as a proposal that could have either a positive or negative impact on Latvia's security, depending on what form this proposal would take once it transformed from a policy initiative into a policy with specific aims, plans, and budgetary allocations. Latvia's cautious engagement with ESA has been shaped by systemic and country-specific influences, and it came at a time when Latvia's reliance on NATO security guarantees increased. Although a greater focus on strengthening the European pillar of NATO was regarded as a welcome development, there were lingering questions about the overall direction of European defence integration efforts and the actual ability of the ESA (whatever form it would take) to have a positive contribution to Latvia's security. Above all else, there were concerns that the vague notion of autonomy would take the form of a lesser involvement in European security by the United States of America. Despite the extravagancies of Donald Trump's presidency, Latvia hoped that there would be continuity in the US approach towards Europe in the long term. This has been the case at least since early 2021, with Joe Biden's approach to NATO being more supportive. Indeed, J. Biden's foreign policy platform placed NATO "at the heart of the United States national security", and the US commitment to security of its NATO allies was regarded as "sacred, not transactional" (Biden, 2020, p. 73). If ESA was a reaction to D. Trump's presidency, it became less relevant once J. Biden was sworn into office in January 2021.

European Union defence integration efforts are not new, and neither is the realisation of Europe's military weakness vis-à-vis its key ally – the US – and Russia as its key geopolitical competitor in Europe. For Latvia, the ESA proposal came when its defence sector was undergoing profound change. Defence spending increased rapidly from 1.1% of GDP in 2015 to 2% in 2018 (Rostoks, 2019). Since then, defence spending has increased further, and it has been proposed that it should be increased even beyond the 2% threshold because of Russia's aggression towards Ukraine in early 2022. Latvia's defence spending is projected to reach 2.5% in 2025 (LSM, 2022). New military capabilities have

been acquired, the National Guard has been revamped, the defence industry is slowly emerging, and ambitious plans have been formulated regarding air-defence systems and coastal defence systems. In short, Latvia, along with the other two Baltic neighbours, has turned from a laggard into a frontrunner. This partially explains why ESA did not become the focal point of expert and public discussions on European security in Latvia. ESA has been scarcely mentioned in the annual reports by the Latvian Foreign minister since 2017 either. Also, there has been little academic and think tank interest in Latvia's approach to the ESA with the partial exception of Mārtiņš Vargulis (2021).

The ESA proposal emerged against the backdrop of a greater NATO military presence in Latvia. Measures such as the rotational presence of NATO eFP battlegroups (since 2017), prepositioning of military equipment, frequent military exercises with a specific focus on Russia, and rotation presence of the US troops that were almost unthinkable before 2014 were suddenly not only possible, but widely regarded as necessary. Thus, Latvia's prioritisation of NATO deterrence posture in the Baltic region is key to understanding its cautious approach to and limited engagement with European security and defence integration. However, Latvia also positions itself as a country that makes a positive contribution to international security and European integration. It does not intend to stay out of the European security and defence integration, as this process proceeds apace irrespective of how Latvian authorities feel about it. Thus, Latvia has been compelled to formulate its interests in this area of European integration. Although Latvia's involvement with ESA has been limited, it is regarded as a step in the right direction (Rostoks, 2020).

The subsequent analysis proceeds as follows. The first section addresses Latvia's position on the broad contours of ESA. The second section looks at the variety of views about the relationship between the ESA proposal and NATO's (and the US) involvement in the security of Europe. The third section addresses the issue of military and non-military capabilities that the ESA should eventually produce, as well as the potential institutional changes and innovations that the ESA might bring about. The fourth section, in turn, identifies Latvia's aims regarding the ESA and the potential coalitions that it might use to accomplish those aims. The impact of Russia's invasion of Ukraine in late February 2022 on Latvia's view on ESA is addressed throughout the chapter. This chapter concludes that Latvia's approach to ESA has been cautious at best. However, Latvia's political decision-makers deemed it necessary to participate in European defence integration, and it has recently adopted a more optimistic outlook on ESA.

The analysis of Latvia's involvement with ESA is largely based on annual foreign minister's reports, annual foreign policy debates in the Latvian Parliament, and semi-structured interviews with key Latvian political decision-makers and government officials. Most interviews were conducted before 24 February, when Russia's invasion of Ukraine began, but two interviews were conducted in April 2022.

Desirable scope of ESA

In general terms, ESA is about deepening European security and defence cooperation, but it remains to be seen how that aim will be translated into practical policies. Although ESA means different things to different actors, two fundamentally different views can be identified: the broad and the narrow interpretation of ESA. The narrow interpretation entails a focus on establishing the EU as a global actor, deepening military integration and strengthening the military capabilities of the EU member states, while the broad interpretation aims to build upon the EU's traditional strengths, such as its ability to pursue integration in a variety of non-military policy areas. The emphasis here is on societal and institutional resilience, countering non-military threats, and reducing the EU's vulnerability to disruption of production chains. The first view implies the EU that is less dependent on the US militarily, but the second view sees the EU as an actor that is more resilient and able to deal with a wide range of non-military crises. Also, the two views are not mutually exclusive.

What is the preferred direction in which the ESA should be heading according to Latvian policymakers? Unsurprisingly, the ESA should be both. The EU should strengthen its defence identity (Ministry of Foreign Affairs Republic of Latvia, 2017, p. 7), and Latvia fully supports the strengthening of the EU's civilian and military capabilities because the EU has an important role to play in promoting peace and stability in its neighbourhood (Ministry of Foreign Affairs Republic of Latvia, 2020, p. 13). However, Latvia emphasises complementarity between the EU's defence initiatives and NATO's collective defence. In this regard, numerous sources express concerns about the potential effects of ESA on the transatlantic partnership. Foreign Minister's Report (2019, p. 9) emphasises that the EU's defence and security integration should "complement NATO and strengthen then transatlantic relationship". Rihards Kols, Chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee at the Latvian Parliament, has recently remarked that the EU member states should strengthen their military capabilities, but European defence integration should in no way be seen as an alternative to NATO's collective defence (Foreign Policy Debate, 2022). In fact, it has been remarked by the Latvian Foreign Minister Edgars Rinkēvičs that the EU's strategic autonomy should be open to its partners such as the US, Canada, the United Kingdom, Australia, Japan, South Korea, and Israel (Foreign Policy Debate, 2022). On the one hand, openness is almost an antithesis of autonomy. On the other hand, the argument that the EU should work together with like-minded partners where possible is relatively uncontroversial. The EU should strive to keep its partnerships with other democracies while remaining autonomous in the face of harmful influence from third countries. These partnerships have been key in addressing Russia's aggression against Ukraine. While the EU has performed remarkably well during the war, increasing the effectiveness of economic sanctions on Russia and providing military aid to Ukraine would

not have been possible without active participation from global partners such as Japan, South Korea, and Australia.

Latvia's position on the ESA was cautiously pessimistic in 2016 when the EU's Global Strategy was published (Interview with I. Lasis, 9 February 2022), but it has recently grown more optimistic because of the tension between the ESA and maintaining a strong transatlantic link has been reduced. The reasons for that are many. First, the ESA has become more inclusive, and there is less emphasis on the "autonomy" part of the initiative. Second, Joe Biden won the US presidential election in November 2020, reducing concerns that Donald Trump might pull the US out of NATO during his second presidency. Third, Russia's aggressive actions towards Ukraine and Russia's ultimatum to the US and NATO have re-emphasised the significance of NATO and the US involvement in European security. These factors, taken together, have assured Latvia that the risks associated with European defence integration and quest for autonomy are negligible. If anything, the EU's reliance on the US has massively increased since 2008, when the combined GDP of EU member states exceeded that of the US by a small margin. Since 2008, however, the US has overtaken the EU, and its GDP exceeds the GDP of the EU by approximately a third (Shapiro, 2022). Finally, Brexit has further exacerbated the EU's security problems. Thus, Europe's reliance on the US is a short-term solution, while the long-term solution would be enhanced defence integration.

Preservation of the transatlantic link is one aspect of Latvia's position on the ESA, and preference for a broad definition of the ESA is another. Latvia's Prime Minister Krišjānis Kariņš remarked in early 2022 that the ESA has two components, one of which is military, but the other component is economical. The COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated how dependent the EU was on supplies from the People's Republic of China, which became unavailable when the pandemic started. Two years after the pandemic, the EU is no longer dependent on supplies of face masks, disinfectants, and medical gloves from the PRC (Foreign Policy Debate, 2022). Thus, the quest for European autonomy should be driven at least partly by economic considerations to facilitate reindustrialisation. Also, this would strengthen the EU's resilience in the face of threats posed by systemic rivals such as Russia and China. As remarked by the Latvian Minister of Foreign Affairs E. Rinkēvičs, the EU should prioritise crisis coordination, protection of critical infrastructure, and improving coordination among the EU member states during international and regional crises (Foreign Policy Debate, 2021). In short, the ESA is an initiative that may help the EU reduce some of its vulnerabilities. There is little doubt that the EU should aim for increased military capabilities, but the focus should be broader, and it should include other aspects of European integration where the EU can use its strengths to increase resilience. These should include resilience against hybrid threats, energy security, reindustrialisation, and health (Interview with J. Karlsbergs, 3 February 2022). All in all, this squarely places Latvia among supporters of the broad interpretation of strategic autonomy.

Compatibility with NATO and the role of the US in European security

The political and security implications of ESA for the involvement of the US in European security has been the most contentious issue for Latvia (Interview with G. Brūmane-Gromula, 9 February 2022). There have been some concerns in Washington about the implications of the ESA for the transatlantic relationship, but those have largely waned (Interview with Rihards Kols, 14 December 2021). Although Latvia agrees that Europe should be able to act on its own when necessary, even in the absence of the US involvement, there was and still is considerable room for misunderstandings and misperceptions between the US and the EU. Genuine autonomy in security and defence would require creating a European NATO, meaning the EU would have to create all the necessary preconditions for autonomous action in defence. That would entail parallel command and control structures, capabilities for projecting military power abroad and building a defence industry to ensure Europe's autonomy from the US.

The implications of the ESA would largely depend on the level of ambition. The Strategic Compass, which was released approximately one month after Russia invaded Ukraine, states that “Over the next decade, we [EU] will make a quantum leap to become more assertive and decisive security provider, better prepared to tackle present and future threats and challenges” (Strategic Compass, 2022, p. 62). Much would also depend on the EU having capabilities for autonomous action. Latvia's main concern has been that the EU would pursue ESA, thus alienating the US, while not having the capabilities and the will to use them. That might have tragic consequences for Latvia, where an overly ambitious EU tries to punch above its weight without fully considering the implications for the security of the states on NATO's eastern flank. When the President of the European Commission, Jean-Claude Juncker, floated the idea of creating a European Army, that proposal created confusion because the EU member states clearly did not support the initiative, it came at a time when the focus was on NATO's efforts to reinforce the Baltic states, and the EU did not have the capabilities and the infrastructure to pursue the lofty aim of a European Army. Put simply, the EU cannot in the foreseeable future assume responsibility for the defence of the Baltic states. The Strategic Compass identifies developing the EU Rapid Deployment Capacity of up to 5,000 troops “for different types of crises” (Strategic Compass, 2022, p. 6), but this would fall short of what the Baltic states would need in a scenario where Russia would use military force against them. Also, the Baltic states would be uncomfortable with the idea of putting their security in the hands of Germany and France. Both states have underperformed during the war in Ukraine. Germany's announcement a few days into the war about increasing military spending was widely welcomed in the Baltic states, but Germany's subsequent efforts to supply heavy arms to Ukraine and wean itself from dependency on gas and oil supplies from Russia have fallen short of expectations.

The potential negative fallout from the ESA on the US involvement in European security and defence has not materialised, but the concerns in Riga have not abated. The worst-case scenario would imply that the US would continue to focus on the Asia-Pacific region, assuming that the EU can take responsibility for key aspects of European security. The EU, however, would pursue a more substantive autonomy from the US while ignoring the fact that it does not have the capabilities and the political will to use them. Latvia would have the worst of both worlds, namely, the US, which is absent from European security and the EU, which is unable to strengthen Latvia's security. Moreover, disagreements between the US and some key European partners may spill over into NATO decision-making. States, such as France, the key supporter of pursuing an ambitious ESA, may obstruct NATO collective decision-making with potentially damaging consequences for Latvia. Thus, NATO measures that would strengthen Latvia's security might not be adopted by the Alliance because of the lack of the Alliance cohesion and European allies' insistence on taking actions that would decrease the US stake in European security.

But Latvia's concerns regarding putting its security into the hands of France and Germany go beyond the ESA. Latvia's view of Russia has been considerably more pessimistic than that of its partners in Western Europe. Although Germany has been a reliable partner for Latvia in many ways, it has pursued a partnership with Russia on Nord Stream even after the Russian-Georgian War and Russia's annexation of Crimea. Germany halted the Nord Stream 2 project only after Russia recognised the two separatist regions – Luhansk and Donetsk – as sovereign entities and threatened Ukraine with a full-scale military invasion which it carried out in late February 2022. The diplomatic overtures of the French President Emmanuel Macron before Russia's attack on Ukraine were viewed with scepticism in Latvia. The US, in turn, has been a consistently reliable partner for Latvia since the early 1990s. The US played a key role in negotiating the agreement on the withdrawal of Russian troops from Latvia, a process that was completed in 1994. The US signed the Baltic Charter with the three Baltic states in 1998, once it became clear that the EU would only start accession negotiations with Estonia. The US offered unwavering support for the Baltic states' NATO membership, and the US was the first state to deploy troops to Latvia in the spring of 2014 after Russia annexed Crimea. Also, Latvia has developed a strong military partnership with the US. Also, the United Kingdom has provided leadership both before and after Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022 by providing military assistance to Ukraine. In sum, Latvia trusts the US commitment to the security of the Baltic to a far greater extent than it trusts its key European partners to do the right thing, at the right time, and with the right capabilities.

Capabilities

When it comes to the military capabilities, the European pillar of NATO is much weaker than the North Atlantic pillar. The US economy has performed

better than that of the EU over the past 15 years since the global financial crisis. The United Kingdom has left the EU. On the one hand, this paves the way for a Franko-German partnership on European defence integration (Interview with I. Lasis, 9 February 2022). On the other hand, the United Kingdom has a capable military, and its capabilities will not be readily available to the EU. Also, Russia made it abundantly clear in late 2021 that it does not consider negotiations with the EU worthwhile because the only negotiations worth pursuing are with the US. Even before, the relative weakness of European allies had been exposed in the NATO-led military operation in Libya in 2011, where European powers intended to lead the way while the US was expected to “lead from behind”. That did not work, and the US had to do most of the heavy lifting during the military operation. More recently, the inability of European allies to act independently of the US was exposed during the US withdrawal from Afghanistan in August 2021.

After hiking its defence spending to the 2% threshold and aiming to increase the defence budget even further, Latvia has tried to make the case that its European partners should also prioritise defence spending as well. In the context of the ESA, Latvia has emphasised the need to focus on tangible military capabilities suitable for high-intensity mechanised warfare. In the absence of such military capabilities, the ESA may go down in history as an empty slogan, a testimony to the EU's ambitions in the realm of security and defence, but without the practical ability to deliver tangible capabilities and use them. Being serious about European defence integration would mean allocating far more than 2% of GDP for defence purposes and sustaining this kind of investment for several decades (Interview with J. Karlsbergs, 3 February 2022).

A less ambitious ESA defence capability would be feasible with lesser investment, but that is of little interest for Latvia because it does not address the key security challenges Latvia faces as a neighbour of Russia and Belarus. However, there is a silver lining because the EU integration efforts are partly aimed at strengthening the EU defence industry. This is a key aspect because Europe is not just ill-prepared for a potential high-intensity military conflict, its military industry cannot fill the military equipment gap quickly. There is not enough military equipment in warehouses, and the European defence industry is not able to translate increased defence spending into tangible defence capabilities in the short term (Interview with A. Rikveilis, 7 April 2022).

Moreover, even if the EU would acquire a military capability that it could deploy during international crises, there is no guarantee that the EU would actually do so. EU Battlegroups have not been deployed even once, and the EU is unlikely to act decisively during international crises without strong backing from the US. Thus, the EU should first develop such a range of military capabilities that it could deploy if it wanted to. Such capabilities would make it easier to use them because the EU would not have to approach international crises from a position of weakness.

Regarding non-military capabilities that might be part of the ESA, Latvia is largely supportive for two reasons. First, NATO is primarily a defensive military

alliance which makes it difficult (and perhaps unnecessary) to develop non-military capabilities that could be used to address hybrid and other threats. Although Latvia would support greater NATO involvement with non-military threats, the core mission of the Alliance is the defence of its member states' territory. Second, the EU is uniquely suited to address non-military threats because of its civilian nature and deep integration resulting from 70 years of European integration. The EU has political decision-making structures that can use economic coercion. There is a common energy policy to address vulnerabilities stemming from the necessity to import a considerable share of its energy consumption. In addition, the EU has instruments that can be used for crisis and disaster management. Thus, the EU should develop an appropriate toolbox for dealing with hybrid threats (Interview with G. Brūmane-Gromula, 9 February 2022). This is not to say that the EU should not have the ability to deploy forces to deal with regional conflicts. Still, such deployable forces would contribute little to Latvia's security. These would primarily serve the interests of the southern EU MS and help project the EU's power in Africa.

Institutions, instruments, and potential allies

Defence cooperation has been one of the EU's most dynamic policy areas recently, and the institutional setup of defence integration has been part of that discussion. Latvia has been against creating new institutions because the EU's inability to act will not be solved by creating new institutions (Interviews with R. Kols, 14 December 2021 and J. Karlsbergs, 3 February 2022). Military capabilities are more important than institutions. Unless the EU member states step up in terms of military capabilities, no amount of institutions will solve its inability to defend itself and project military power, if needed, abroad. Perhaps, the post of the EU defence commissioner could be created, but Latvia has been sceptical regarding the ambitious aims to develop the Military Planning and Conduct Capability into a full-fledged military headquarters akin to NATO's Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe (Interview with G. Brūmane-Gromula, 9 February 2022). This would unnecessarily strain Latvia's limited resources because it would have to nominate representatives to MPCC. Creating an expensive institution with little utility would undermine, not strengthen, Europe's security and ability to act.

In broad terms, Latvia supports European defence integration, of which the ESA is a part of, and there is a certain level of defence-related ambitions in the EU institutions (Interview with I. Lasis, 9 February 2022). However, Latvia has expressed concerns regarding the process through which defence and security initiatives have been adopted. The process of negotiating the Strategic Compass is a case in point. The process of adopting the Strategic Compass has been divisive, and the French presidency of the Council has bulldozed its way towards adopting this document. Latvia's criticism of the French approach to the ESA has been noted by President Emmanuel Macron, but this has not resulted in greater influence on the overall direction of the initiative. Strategic Compass

is an ambitious document, but there is little emphasis on the need for the EU to work with its key partners, such as the US and NATO. There is hardly any mentioning of the important role that the EU should play in the Eastern Partnership countries where there is considerable demand on the part of local actors to use the EU's assistance to counteract multiple threats posed by Russia. Also, Latvian proposals to postpone the adoption of the Strategic Compass to fully integrate the lessons learned from Russia's invasion of Ukraine were not heeded. As a result, the document has little bearing on the realities of the worst and most dangerous military conflict in Europe since the end of the Second World War.

When it comes to instruments and projects, Latvia's aims regarding the ESA can be contemplated on two – national and EU – levels. Nationally, Latvia participates in several PESCO projects (Rostoks, 2020). The military mobility project is especially important for Latvia because the ability to get troops quickly to the Baltic states is a key component of NATO deterrence posture in the Baltic region. Also, Latvia sees some potential for its emerging defence industry to be included in the supply chains of larger Western European defence companies. Increased availability of financing for joint defence projects, thus, represents an opportunity for Latvia. On the EU level, Latvia's efforts mainly focus on righting the balance between focus on deployable forces versus military capabilities that would be needed to deter and, if the need be, defend against Russia. Latvia's position has been that not all of its EU partners have fully grasped the threat posed by Russia to European security. In this regard, Latvia's key partners are Estonia, Lithuania, Denmark, and the Netherlands. Latvia has also developed pragmatic cooperation with Germany and France. Still, it feels most comfortable working with its traditional partners from the Baltic Sea region. In this regard, Latvia welcomes the potential accession of Sweden and Finland into NATO. The ESA, however, should not be a divisive initiative that would leave part of the EU unhappy with the outcome of European defence integration. Cohesion, not fragmentation, should be the aim of defence integration (Interview with R. Kols, 14 December 2021).

Conclusions

Latvia's position on the ESA is ambivalent. On the one hand, the EU has entered a new era of great power competition woefully unprepared; therefore, a greater emphasis on defence integration is a promising development. On the other hand, however, the ESA in its current shape has been a divisive initiative that has little potential to contribute to Latvia's security needs positively. In other words, Latvia is not ready to place its security in the hands of France and Germany. The EU should get more serious on defence, but it should address the fundamental flaws in defence capabilities and military spending rather than add more institutions to the already complicated EU institutional architecture. Although the EU needs to have some ability to act autonomously during international crises, it should aim to work with like-minded partners such as the US,

the UK, Australia, and other democracies rather than act on its own. France and Germany should also keep in mind that eastern frontline states would have little interest in defence initiatives that add little to their national security. For Latvia, the US involvement in European security is a vital security interest.

EU defence ambitions are not new, and this is just the latest reincarnation of European defence integration. Thus, the ESA could go down in history as just another blip on the radar, depending on developments in national politics in the EU capitals and the impact of external events. Overall, there is much that the EU can do to strengthen the security of its member states, but in the defence realm it should start with considerably increased military spending and capabilities. The European pillar of NATO has fallen behind the US, and this should be remedied. More money, more troops, more armour, and more high-end capabilities such as strategic airlift and air-defence systems should be added, and this would almost by definition make the EU a significant player internationally. If military capabilities are available, it is more likely that they can be used to deter adversaries and project power abroad. This has once again been demonstrated in the context of Russia's aggression against Ukraine since 24 February 2022. The US once again took leadership to assure allies and bring to the table military capabilities.

In the long run, however, the involvement of the US in European security cannot be taken for granted because there might again be a different political leader in the White House. Therefore, member states of the EU would do well to step up their defence integration efforts. These should have a broad focus and include both military and non-military components. Russia's aggression against Ukraine has shaken European security to its core. In this respect, it has reinstated the role of NATO in European security, but the war in Ukraine is also likely to leave a lasting impact on European defence integration efforts and defence policies of European states. A Russia that is a dire threat to its neighbours will elicit a forceful military and economic response. However, the ultimate impact is likely to depend on the eventual outcome of the war in Ukraine and its effect on Russian domestic politics.

Interviews:

Ginta Brūmane-Gromula, Under Secretary of State – Policy Director, Ministry of Defence of the Republic of Latvia, 9 February 2022 and 19 April 2022.

Jānis Karlsbergs, former Under Secretary of State – Policy Director, Ministry of Defence of the Republic of Latvia, 3 February 2022.

Rihards Kols, Chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee at the Latvian Parliament (Saeima), 14 December 2021.

Ivars Lasis, Ambassador to the Political and Security Committee of the EU, Permanent Representation of Latvia to the EU, 9 February 2022.

Airis Rikveilis, Representative of the Latvian Ministry of Defence in the EU and NATO, 7 April 2022.

Note

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9 European Strategic Autonomy in Lithuania's Foreign Policy Discourse

Ieva Karpavičiūtė

Lithuania pursues a normative and national interest-based security policy at the same time. Lithuania's approach towards the European Union CSDP and the perception of European strategic autonomy reflects a search for a balanced normative and national security interests-driven perspective. Lithuania positively views attempts to strengthen the EU military and security dimension. At the same time, Vilnius consistently attributes its security to the need to retain a strong transatlantic bond (Miniotaitė, 2011, p. 116). Those pivotal principles lay the ground for Lithuania's attitude towards the ESA in the defence and security domain.

From its inception, the ESA marked rather a vague idea, which had to be filled with the policy content: be it practical projects, institutional arrangements, or broader normative adaptation of the EU. The analysis of Lithuania's national position on strategic autonomy reflects and contributes to studies on a broader Lithuania's approach towards security and defence. It indicates the consistency of national policies regarding regional security and helps to evaluate the interconnections between national and regional levels of security.

This chapter is based on discourse and document analysis and addresses Lithuania's perspective on the relationship between the EU defence initiatives and transatlantic cooperation. Secondly, it evaluates Lithuania's positions on the ability of the EU to develop sound defence capabilities able to counter different threats, particularly from Russia. Notably, political and practical restrictions might limit the EU's ability to have actual defence capabilities to defend the EU states and complement NATO. In addition, it takes into account the dynamic and deteriorating security environment and how Lithuania's position might be affected by Russia's war against Ukraine.

As ESA and its application is overly dynamic and covers multiple domains, Lithuania sustains a rather scattered position regarding this concept and its added value. Firstly, ESA is viewed from the transatlantic security perspective. On the other hand, Lithuania sustains a pragmatic perspective in other areas of cooperation, particularly in practical domains and projects. For instance, joint EU vaccine acquisition coordination during the COVID-19 pandemic. Against this backdrop, while sustaining the principled security and defence perspective,

Lithuania's decision-makers value this concept concerning initiatives developed or put on the table by the EU.

European strategic autonomy in Lithuania's perspective

Lithuania's approach towards the EU strategic autonomy is not studied very broadly. However, the recent works by several scholars addressing the CSDP also elaborate on strategic autonomy. Strategic autonomy is addressed by Mickus (2018, 2021), Palavenis (2019), Šešelgytė (2018), and Šešelgytė and Indrašūūtė (2020). The Baltic states' perspective is evaluated by Järvenpää, Major, and Sakkov (2019), and the defence industry was touched by Arteaga et al. (2016).

Šešelgytė (2018, p. 2) observes that Lithuania's national position towards the CSDP "was highly influenced by its security concept, which has evolved since 1991 when Lithuania has re-established its independence in the face of the imminent threat from Russian Federation and is defined by its size and threat assessment". Miniotaitė (2011) proposes a broader explanation of Lithuania's perspective on the EU CSDP. She addresses the EU by looking at normative power and liberal norms and principles that construct EU identity. These normative power principles also drive the defence and security policy of the EU. Notably, Lithuania and other Baltic states are subscribed to this normative approach by addressing the European CSDP. However, there is tension between the EU and transatlantic identities regarding ESA in the security domain. Lithuania perceives those identities as overlapping and mutually reinforcing. Therefore, the evolving ESA is expected to bring more commonalities than divergencies between the two.

Besides, Lithuania's normative approach remains quite consistent throughout many years, and it is especially visible in Lithuania's tensions with the People's Republic of China. Lithuania underlines PRC's hypocrisy and refers to its pacing challenge. This takes place in the context of Vilnius's decision to open the diplomatic representation of Taiwanese in Lithuania. In fact, the EU showed important solidarity and support for Lithuania. For instance, the EU took the case against PRC to the WTO due to its trade restrictions imposed on Lithuania. The normative dimension of Lithuania's stance might be observed in different rhetoric by senior officials. For instance, Lithuania's Minister of Defence Arvydas Anušauskas (2021) highlighted, "China portrays itself as a strategic competitor and systematic challenger to the democratic community and the international rules-based order; growing Chinese ambition poses multifaceted security challenges to the Euro-Atlantic region".

With a strong stand regarding Russia's war against Ukraine, along with the growing PRC's power and assertive behaviour in economic, cyber, disruptive technologies, and other domains, Lithuania's normative perspective at the EU becomes even more relevant. In Lithuania's view, the important factor is that the EU should acknowledge Russia as posing a long-term threat to European security and at the same time recognise the transatlantic link along with the US security assurances as most critical for European security.

Notably, Lithuania views the EU CSDP as a close connection to a transatlantic link and its NATO membership. NATO and the USA are perceived as primary security and defence providers, whereas the EU's role is supportive and complementary. The EU should not duplicate or overtake the defence and deterrence functions of NATO. The overlap of functions between the two organisations should be avoided. Šešelgyte (2018, p. 2) observes that the

Lithuanian security concept which suggests a clear division of labour between NATO and the EU, whereby NATO is accorded security provider function and the EU is considered as a source of economic welfare or the provider of so-called 'soft' security.

However, as the "soft" and "hard" security are getting closely interconnected and hardly separable, that is why the EU defence policy initiatives must not take from their radar NATO and the USA.

The European strategic autonomy in Lithuania's foreign and security policy

The idea of strategic autonomy served as a trigger for regional security change. Strategic autonomy was included in the Global Strategy for the European Union's Foreign and Security Policy in 2016. As Biscop (2018, p. 171) observes,

in 2016, the EU Global Strategy (which guides all EU external policies) added the qualitative objective of strategic autonomy. In operational terms, strategic autonomy meant the capacity to undertake certain military tasks at all times and therefore, if necessary, alone.

Naturally, "the revitalisation of the EU security and defence saw the simultaneous resurgence of concerns about its effects on the Transatlantic bond, on defence industrial protectionism and cooperation within NATO" (Drent, 2018, p. 1).

ESA development can be related to the EU reaction to Russia's aggression against Ukraine back in 2014 and the deteriorating security environment. Later, the development of ESA was intensified against the backdrop of Brexit and Donald Trump's isolationist politics coupled with signals of disengagement with the EU. Russia's war against Ukraine in 2022 served as a new impetus for ESA. It intensified debates and initiatives on European capabilities, technological sovereignty, and joint defence procurement. As a result, Lithuania was adjusting the national perspective *vis-à-vis* the ESA in relation to different regional and global security-related developments and challenges. However, the main principle – the priority of transatlantic relations has remained unchanged.

Conceptually, the ESA should reflect a readiness to act independently. Lithuania's position is twofold. On the one hand, when it comes to domains such as cyber, healthcare, resilience, civil technologies, climate change, as well as

EU relations with rival states such as Russia or China, Lithuania values strategic autonomy as a tool to sustain European independence and coordinate together many security-related policies and initiatives. Lithuania highlights strategic responsibility to prevent the EU from harmful technological and industrial influences stemming from the rival states, including the autonomy of energy policy and the protection of supply chains. It also includes strategic responsibility *vis-à-vis* transatlantic and Eastern European partners. In this perspective, Lithuanian experts highlight that strategic autonomy cannot be the end in itself, but it can help increase resilience and diminish the EU dependency on competitor/rival states. The lowering of strategic dependencies is perceived as a fundamental contribution to security.

On the other hand, Lithuania pursues a more inclusive approach towards transatlantic allies and Eastern Partnerships. The USA, a major security provider for European defence, cannot be excluded from main security and defence-related projects and initiatives at the EU. This marks quite pragmatic Lithuania's approach to improving regional security by engaging in particular projects but not limiting NATO's collective defence. Also, Lithuania highlights the need for closer engagement and support to Eastern partners, which are necessary to ensure sustainable regional security. The significance of the Eastern Partnership's role is growing in the context of Russia's war against Ukraine.

Indeed, the ESA can empower the area of foreign and security and defence policy and strengthen EU policies in "soft" security-related areas, to improve the policy-making process balancing between institutions and national foreign and defence policies. The EU perception of security includes a broad set of security threats and concepts, searching for a balance between regional, national, and human security. The most recent version of ESA refers to "open strategic autonomy" (Akgüç, 2021; Anghel et al., 2020; Botti, 2021; Timmers, 2021; Tocci, 2021), indicating further adaptations of the concept. The OSA attempts to strike a balance between geopolitical, socioeconomic, and environmental dimensions (Akgüç, 2021, p.1); it refers to a COVID-19 environment and is expanded to technological, climate change, and digital domains.

Currently, the ESA is being used in relation to the European strategic culture, which adds a normative dimension to the concept. It is seen in a new light of Russia's war against Ukraine (of 2022), the rising PRC, the fight against COVID-19, and the French Presidency of the EU, where President Macron emphasised the EU's defence domain and discussions over the Strategic Compass. The Strategic Compass (2022, p. 13), which was approved in March 2022, underscores the intention to enhance ESA and EU's "ability to work with partners to safeguard its values and interests". It acknowledges (Strategic Compass, p. 13) that "a stronger and more capable EU in security and defence will contribute positively to global and Transatlantic security and is complementary to NATO, which remains the foundation of collective defence for its members. These two go hand in hand".

Lithuania supports the more purified defence-related approach to strategic autonomy. A vice-minister of National Defence, Margiris Abukevičius

(2021), underscored, “we agree upon within the EU is that there is a shared understanding that it should become more active in terms of defence, has to increase defence spending and develop defence capabilities”, first of all, because of the serious and direct military threat stemming from Russia, which cannot be ignored. Besides, the EU’s greater resilience against the PRC and the EU’s engagement in the civilian technologies’ domain is actively supported by Lithuania.

Indeed, strategic autonomy is “the art of being strategically selective” (Timmers, 2021). It is a challenging concept to which Lithuania’s officials sometimes react cautiously, sometimes find pragmatic benefits, and sometimes remain ignorant. Although, Šešelgytė and Indrašūūtė (2020) capture Lithuania’s approach towards strategic autonomy as “a pragmatic scepticism”, sometimes this scepticism is more cautious and prudent than pragmatic. Lithuania is quite sceptical regarding the very term of the ESA because of the ambiguity, liquidity, and complexity of the concept. The ESA’s anti-USA origins also contribute to this scepticism. Therefore, the political elite in Lithuania is not overly optimistic about strategic autonomy. Still, it recognises that this concept is already operational and, to a certain extent, might practically contribute to the EU autonomy from negative rival states’ impact. It also can contribute to “soft” security, particularly in the cyber domain, to ensure cyber resilience. Also, it has the potential to improve the defence capabilities of the EU states, to enhance defence investment and minimise the negative impact of strategic dependencies.

Transatlantic relations and EU strategic autonomy

Lithuania’s officials consider NATO the central organisation responsible for the security and collective defence in the Euro-Atlantic region. From Lithuania’s perspective, ESA must strengthen NATO. The EU should strengthen its defence capabilities and be able to support NATO. It is highlighted that the very term “strategic autonomy” sends a contradictory message to NATO allies and might negatively affect the transatlantic partnership and unity. The emphasis on transatlantic relations and inclusion of the USA, the UK, Canada, and other non-EU–NATO allies in the EU defence initiatives is consistently pursued by the Lithuanian MFA, MOD, the Government, and the President.

Back in 2019, Lithuanian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Linas Linkevičius, suggested that the third countries, and the USA in particular, have to be invited “into the structural EU defence cooperation; European states must be responsible and do not harm Transatlantic relations, all the initiatives must be responsible and measured” (2019). A very similar narrative is pursued by the Ministry of National Defence three years later, as a vice-minister, Margiris Abukevičius (2021), who, in an interview with *Euractive*, highlighted, “We are not fans of the ideological discussion – everything we do in the EU should be open to our Transatlantic partners and should be done in close cooperation with them”.

President Gitanas Nausėda highlights the principles of complementarity and underlines that the EU must take more responsibility for defence (Press Release

Lithuanian President's Media Office (2019). In 2019, he stated that "NATO is irreplaceable European security guarantor, the EU and NATO capabilities must support and strengthen each other, but not dissolve limited resources" (Beniušis, 2019). There are suggestions to view ESA focusing on what unites the EU with strategic partners such as the USA, for instance, human rights, climate change, and economic cooperation interests (Pranešimas spaudai, 2021). The most recently issued version of Lithuania's National Security Strategy (2021) underscores the complementarity between NATO and the EU, underlying that NATO "remains sole and essential collective defence organisation", and that permanent NATO military presence in the region stands for fundamental security guarantee of Lithuania.

Indeed, the major issue behind Lithuania's scepticism is the notion of autonomy. The notion is perceived as divisive because it creates divisions between the EU and NATO. The terminology refers to an overly broad and complex perception and disagreement upon what "strategic" means, bringing much confusion between the EU MS and partners. But even more complicated is the word "autonomy", which refers to a sort of regional inward-looking identity. Isn't the EU autonomous enough? Does it need more autonomy from the national interests of MS, or does it feel dependent on something from outside of the region?

From a practical perspective, ESA refers to the EU CSDP policies, projects, and initiatives (PESCO, CARD, EDF, etc.). In a broader perspective, it relates to the evolution of the EU's strategic place in global security architecture, defining the EU as a security and defence actor in the international community. Lithuania is supportive of the first approach as long as it contributes to transatlantic security and common capability development, but the second approach is perceived as rather worrisome. Therefore, the Lithuanian President presents the pragmatic approach, suggesting refraining from ambiguous and divisive concepts such as strategic autonomy or the European Army (Beniušis, 2019) and focusing on the practical side of the EU defence cooperation.

This approach is consistent with "the EU's usual 'Transatlanticists' including Poland, Romania, and the Baltic States that would prefer to use newfound momentum on security issues to reinforce the credibility of NATO defence and deterrence by augmenting the European contribution to military capabilities" (Terlikowski, 2021). Lithuania believes the EU security and defence policy must be consistent and contribute to NATO. The EU defence initiatives must be open to the USA and NATO. EU's role is perceived as necessary but complementary. Ideally, there should be a clear distribution of labour, given that NATO is responsible for the military/defence side of the Euro-Atlantic security, whereas the EU can contribute by addressing a broad set of complex transnational and hybrid security challenges such as emerging disruptive security, cyber threats, and climate change.

Lithuania extends its support to the EU's security and defence initiatives such as cyber defence, hybrid, strategic communications, civil technologies, and resilience. These initiatives are expected to be inclusive and open to the USA

and other transatlantic partners and enhance capabilities. In fact, Lithuania looks cautiously at the CSDP's overlap with NATO functions and at the attempts to restrict transatlantic partners' participation in the EU CSDP-related projects. The National Security Strategy (2021) highlights the significance of the viability and unity of the EU and NATO and underscores that the most critical condition to ensure Lithuania's national security interests is the solidarity of the Euro-Atlantic community.

Lithuania's transatlantic perspective matches with positions of the other Baltic states, Romania, and Poland. Lithuania and other EU countries supporting the transatlantic perspective (see Zaborowski, 2020) are concerned that strategic autonomy can contribute to transatlantic fragmentation and hamper transatlantic security and cohesion. That is why they underscore the significance of complementarity of the EU defence initiatives. Similarly, Terlikowski (2021, p. 4) observes that "a stronger European defence capacity is closely tied to achieving enhanced cohesion in NATO" and that the EU movement ahead with the CSDP should contribute to NATO needs. As Koziol (2020) observes, the EU countries like Poland, the Baltic states, and Romania "express concerns about increasing the EU's operational capabilities at the expense of activities undertaken within NATO".

Lithuania's officials highlight the importance of the USA defence assurances and transatlantic cooperation that is the principal guarantee of European security. The USA needs to stay close to Europe. Its capabilities should remain in Europe. NATO needs to remain a cornerstone for mutual security and defence, and all the EU CSDP policies and initiatives should contribute to the greater cohesion between the two organisations. As the EU and NATO share the same geographical and security space, complementarity and strong links are necessary.

EU defence capabilities, industry, and technologies

Notably, the EU countries did not invest enough in defence for a long time, failed to develop necessary military capabilities, and did not have the means to respond quickly and effectively to conventional military, hybrid, or cyber threats in Europe. In 1999, "the EU adopted the (land-centric) Headline Goal of achieving the capacity to deploy, and to sustain for at least one year, 60,000 troops, with concomitant air and naval support, for expeditionary operations" (Biscop, 2018). The so-called 1999 Petersberg goals were never achieved. The lack of deployable, well-equipped personnel became obvious during the Balkan wars and has not been changed since that time (Šešelgytė & Indrašiūtė, 2020, p. 119). The 2014 Russia's aggression against Ukraine was a critical point to evaluate EU military capabilities. At that time, there was "a partial but significant shift away from the overall national tendencies of reducing military spending across Europe, and the decade-long trends of strategic goals towards mobilising EU military power outside of Europe" (Schilde, 2017).

Yet, defence capabilities remain the major gap for the EU. This gap restricts the fulfilment of the ESA goals. Although broad in meaning, strategic autonomy can be understood as the ability to design, develop, support, modify, and export the capabilities necessary to underpin the EU's Freedom of Action (Sabatino, 2022, p. 137). Back in 2020, Borrell recognised that “European defence suffers from fragmentation, duplication and insufficient operational engagement” (Brzozowski, 2021). Therefore, Lithuania assumes that EU MS must first increase defence spending and invest in capabilities. This will allow the EU to act when needed and strengthen the EU's position as a reliable NATO and transatlantic partner.

Philosophical and conceptual discussion on the ESA diverts attention from the main issue, the fulfilment of the EU level of ambition: insufficient defence spending, investment, and lack of defence capabilities. Coelmont (2019) points out that “strategy without capabilities is just a hallucination”. Lippert, Ondarza, and Perthes (2019, p. 6) contribute to this debate by highlighting that “military capabilities can only be assessed against the relevant strategic goals”, and the level of ambition must be appropriate, based on real capabilities and defence spending, also with clear means and timeframe to achieve identified strategic goals (see Sweeney & Winn, 2022, p. 199). This thinking aligns with Lithuania's take on the relation between ESA, capabilities, and the level of military ambition of the EU.

Lithuania's main point of departure is the appropriate funding for defence and the ability to effectively and timely react in case of a threat. Lithuania underscores the significance of defence expenditures; national defence capabilities' gaps occur due to insufficient defence spending. Lithuania's experts underline strategic responsibility, which means the EU MS must strengthen capacity to act and respond to all crises, including ones stemming from rival states such as Russia.

A new wave of optimism regarding capability development in the EU emerged in 2021. Borrell told reporters about 60 joint EU military projects for weapons and other capabilities under development (Emmott, 2021). Later, the Strategic Compass (2022, p. 3) set the target by 2025 to establish the EU Rapid Deployment Capacity aimed to “swiftly deploy up to 5000 troops into non-permissive environments for different types of crises”. The Strategic Compass was followed by the Joint Communication of 18 May 2022, presenting a new level of military ambition “to build a stronger Europe in defence” (European Commission, 2022a), with a focus on joint acquisition of military equipment, development of industrial base, and strengthening research and development and EDF.

Lithuania's approach to the EU capabilities is closely linked to threat perception. The greatest threat stems from Russia's strategic aims and military posture. The concerns originate from Russia's long-standing and systematic military aggression against neighbours, its brutal war against Ukraine (2014 and 2022), modernisation of its entire military system, large-scale exercises, and snap drills that show Russia's ability to move significant numbers of forces and equipment

within days if not hours, close to the EU borders. Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine has fundamentally changed the security environment, and the EU cannot remain ignorant. Therefore, the EU must adapt its defence policies and demonstrate unity.

In Strategic Compass 2022, the spectrum of threats is defined as diverse and unpredictable. The document acknowledges the complexity of security threats and refers to "the direct attack on the European security order, the security of our citizens and our Union is at stake" (Strategic Compass, p. 5). Although the Strategic Compass does not directly define the threat stemming from Russia, it acknowledges that Russia is violating international law and principles of the UN Charter. The Strategic Compass depicts the threat by describing the security environment and putting it into the context of Russia's war against Ukraine, highlighting Russia's *de facto* control over Belarus (p. 7).

Against the backdrop of Russia's aggression in Ukraine, Lithuania highlights the need for the EU to pay more attention to the national defence spending and capability development. Since 2008, the EU MS defence investments have been diminishing, leading to significant capability gaps and industry fragmentation. This argument can be illustrated by the Defence Investment Gaps Analysis 2022 (The European Commission, 2022c, p. 3), which underlines the stark decline in EU MS defence expenditures from 2008 to 2018 (160 billion euros). Lithuania highlights that the EU MS must increase defence spending and invest in national capabilities to be autonomous, as insufficient spending leads to capability gaps.

Lithuania, like other Baltic states and Poland has the position, that the EU capabilities should also be available to NATO because the European defence depends on it. The EU and NATO share the same security environment and face the same threats. As the security environment is deteriorating, the EU and NATO must increase their cohesion in the military domain. The Euro-Atlantic region has a single set of forces, so it is impossible to discuss the EU and NATO capabilities separately. Therefore, Lithuania envisages a strong need for close EU cooperation with the USA and NATO, which is the main cornerstone for Euro-Atlantic security and defence.

Notably, a broader perspective of strategic autonomy evolving into the domain of strategic resources, technologies, and environment in Lithuanian political discourse is seen as an opportunity. The significant advancements are related to defence technologies, industry, and procurement development. Indeed, Russia's war against Ukraine and its implications on regional security, energy prices and resources, food security, and migration contributed to the EU security and defence. Aggression sped up the development of defence procurement, industry, and new technologies.

In May 2022, the EU Commission (2022a) proposed steps to strengthen EU defence capabilities, industrial and technological base. It suggested the development of the EU framework for joint defence procurement. The Commission singled out the existing gaps in areas of the defence expenditures, defence industry, and capabilities. It proposed focusing on the European industrial base,

including strengthening the EDF. The capability gaps are also addressed in the Strategic Compass (p. 50), where the EU commits to focus on military capabilities development; to use the EU defence initiatives “to substantially reduce by 2025 critical gaps on strategic enablers” and “focus our capability development efforts on next generation capabilities”.

The European Commission (2022a) presented the intention to establish European Defence Capability Consortia, facilitating MS to procure defence capabilities jointly. Lithuania positively views the Commission’s plan to establish a short-term instrument of 5 million euros for the period of two years to reinforce defence industrial capabilities and develop joint defence procurement. From Lithuania’s perspective, the capability gaps should be filled in as fast as possible, with a priority given to the EU states that are most vulnerable in terms of security.

The EU Industry Strategy addresses the issue of strategic dependencies (European Commission, 2022b). Lithuania underlines that strategic dependencies must make clear distinctions between allies such as the USA, the UK, Canada, and strategic rival states posing security threats to the EU when evaluating strategic dependencies and technological sovereignty. The most crucial aim while developing the perspective on strategic dependencies is to diminish the impact of hostile, rival states such as Russia and strategic competitors such as China. The EU investment in defence research is also critically important as “a key to maintain technological edge and industrial competitiveness” (Knutsen, 2016, p. 9).

From Lithuania’s perspective, the EU initiatives are valuable when they can faster fill the capability gaps, are more cost-effective, and decrease administrative costs. Lithuania believes those initiatives should be aimed at more balanced and fair burden-sharing, resulting in greater European contribution to NATO. The EU capability development must contribute to EU–NATO cooperation and be coherent with capability development priorities as agreed within NATO. Lithuania’s representatives highlight that the initiatives should be open to all EU states, including small ones and meet the requirements of all EU members. The door should be open for small and medium-sized industries to participate in the procurement processes.

Lithuania highlights that EU initiatives should also be open to NATO allies. Those initiatives should not restrict small states’ participation in procurement projects with transatlantic allies. The procurement should be based on NATO standards. However, concerns remain that “EU defence integration could duplicate or undermine NATO structures, diminish US influence in Transatlantic security affairs, or hamper US companies’ participation in EU defence equipment markets” (Retter et al., 2021, p. 19).

The EU defence institutionalisation, PESCO, and military mobility

The EU defence institutionalisation intensified over the last five years. The dynamics of the security environment and the deepening and widening of

the ESA concept brought a broad proliferation of the EU defence initiatives, funds, and policies. This proliferation from one side provides opportunities to develop defence and security in the EU. However, on the other side, it creates many technical, practical, and political inconsistencies and leads to the incredible complexity of rules and procedures that sometimes are redundant.

The European Commission has become an important actor and interlocutor. The Commission's role in security and defence is significantly growing, as well as functions and funds. Notably, "recent years have seen the European Commission consolidating greater control of defence integration" (Retter, 2021, p. 19), and the most recent developments (2022 proposals for very particular practical measures in capabilities, procurement, and industrial cooperation) indicate that the role of European Commission will be increasing in the future.¹ The EU defence funds have been growing with the role of the European Commission since 2015. The launch of EDF and Directorate-General for Defence Industry and Space (DG DEFIS) was a critical step towards consolidated implementation of defence initiatives and a more coordinated approach.

The Commission is also running separate programmes such as CARD and PESCO. However, the very role of the Commission is not directly related to the defence of the EU itself. It is more like a project manager, not a capability developer. The capabilities remain in the hands of MS and NATO. Lithuania supports the EU defence financing that fills in the capability gaps and does not put additional administrative burden. Lithuania believes the EU defence funding should not be increased at the expense of national defence expenditures. In Lithuania's position, the Commission's proposed new initiatives are welcomed, but they should not restrict EU MS prerogative in the defence domain and capability planning.

Lithuania quite positively looks at the EDF evolution. It begins to contribute more to real additional capabilities, helps exploit new technologies, and allows the EU to build its defence industry. However, the defence industry cooperation area remains discriminatory for the transatlantic partners. A member of the Lithuanian Parliament Raimundas Lopata underlined that "attempts by the European Commission to introduce innovative concepts, is restricting the general evolution of the EU and might have a negative impact on the Transatlantic dimension" (Ateities komiteto pranešimas, 2021).

Lithuania expresses strong support for practical cooperation via PESCO and military mobility initiatives. It perceives them as contributing to transatlantic security. The National Security Strategy of Lithuania (2021) underlines the priority of EU defence enhancement initiatives, such as the enhancement of military mobility, cyber security, and the development of military capabilities. It also emphasises the "coherence of the EU Common Security and Defence Policy with the goals of NATO and its openness to Transatlantic partners, as well as to strengthen NATO-EU cooperation".

According to Šešelgytė and Indrašiūtė (2020, p. 124), "Lithuania perceives PESCO and its link to the EDF as an opportunity to strengthen European military capabilities and by extension of Transatlantic link". However, this extension

of the transatlantic link is not a very obvious and most straightforward task regarding PESCO projects. From the beginning, PESCO projects were not open for the third states. Only in 2020 PESCO was opened for the third parties that can, on an exceptional basis, “participate in individual cooperative capability development projects under certain conditions” (Terlikowski, 2021, p. 4).

Lithuania actively contributes to strengthening the EU’s preparedness and common coordination in case of large-scale cyber incidents and crises. Lithuania is a leading nation for one PESCO project on Cyber Rapid Response Teams (CRRTs), which focuses on responses to cyber incidents. CRRTs increase cyber resilience and mitigate the negative impacts of cyber-attacks and also carry out cyber-attacks’ investigations. Lithuania’s coordinated PESCO project is a valuable and practical tool with specific capabilities which can be activated in an operational context. For example, in February 2022, CRRTs were activated before Russia invaded Ukraine. This activation was based on Ukraine’s request to help its institutions facing cybersecurity challenges.

The EU conditions imposed on the third states are indeed rigorous. Notably, rigorousness can discourage third countries from even trying to join PESCO projects. Lithuania supports that PESCO projects would be open for NATO non-EU partners with fewer restrictions.

Lithuania also prioritises military mobility as one of the tangible defence initiatives contributing to the regional defence and strengthening the NATO–EU cooperation. Lithuania strongly supports the military mobility initiative, which is of strategic importance. The “military Schengen”, which is very closely interlinked with NATO, can help ensure fast and smooth arrival of allies to the region. As Terlikowski pointed out, “the Union’s regulatory prowess and capacity to co-fund investments in infrastructure are meant to contribute to serving the needs of the Alliance with respect to ensuring the free movement of soldiers and military equipment across the EU’s internal borders” (Terlikowski, 2021, p.4).

The Strategic Compass underlines, “Russia’s military aggression against Ukraine has confirmed the urgent need to substantially enhance the military mobility of our armed forces within and beyond the Union” (Strategic Compass, 18). Lithuania consistently seeks increased financing of the EU military mobility projects and more attention given to the security of the Eastern part of the EU. Russia’s war in Ukraine revealed the need for efficient military mobility within the EU to facilitate rapid allied movement to the region. Military mobility is vital as Russia can move significant numbers of forces in a short time. Therefore, the need for investments in military mobility infrastructure projects is the highest priority.

Eastern partnerships, European Peace Facility, and EU support to Ukraine

In December 2021, the Council of the EU agreed to establish European Peace Facility, allowing the EU to provide military assistance to the third states.

Notably, the EPF is the first-ever EU fund that “in addition to supporting partners in building capabilities and financing military operations” also includes acquisitions of military equipment (Koziol, 2020). The EPF allows the EU “to deliver military aid to partner countries and finance the deployment of its own military missions abroad, which will start providing security aid to Ukraine, Georgia, and Moldova” (Brzozowski, 2021). In late 2021, the EU allocated 31 million euros to Ukraine, assisting in areas of medicine, cyber security, engineering capabilities, demining activities, mobility, and logistics. Lithuania supported the EPF aid, especially for Eastern European partners.

Lithuania consistently seeks more attention to be given to the EU Eastern Partnerships. It prioritises assistance to Eastern partners via the EPF. Vilnius supports the CSDP tools for partner states to be used proportionally in a balanced manner giving equal attention to the south and the east. “If you really want the EU to become an important geopolitical actor, it should also be playing a role not only in Africa but especially in its Eastern neighbourhood – also through security and defence”, Abukevičius said (see Brzozowski, 2021).

Russia's war against Ukraine was a real wake-up call for the EU, which took very practical measures to support Ukraine's sovereignty, territorial integrity, and safety of the civilian population. The EU imposed sanctions on Russia and Belarus, demonstrated the EU commitment to help Ukraine in its self-defence against Russia, and showed the usefulness of the EPF. As a result, the EPF's assistance was turned into a meaningful multinational assistance framework for Ukraine. Lithuania's interest is to ensure the continuity of the EU support to Ukraine.

Conclusions

Indeed, Russia's war against Ukraine, along with implications on regional security, energy prices and resources, food security, and migration, contributed to the EU security and defence area. Furthermore, Russia's aggression encouraged speeding up the development area of defence procurement, industry, and new technologies. Also, the EU recognises the need to replenish the resources that were provided as assistance to Ukraine due to Russia's aggressive war.

Lithuania acknowledges the ESA's practical contribution to the EU autonomy from negative rival states' impact. It highlights strategic responsibility to prevent the EU from harmful technological and industrial influences stemming from the rival states, including the autonomy related to energy policy and protection of supply chains. It also includes strategic responsibility *vis-à-vis* transatlantic and Eastern European partners. The ESA also has the potential to contribute to the improvement of the defence capabilities of the EU states, enhance defence investment, and minimise the negative impact of strategic dependencies.

Russia's war against Ukraine tests many regional and national material and normative systems. The ESA is not an exception. How the EU will retain its respectability and cohesion will determine the future direction of strategic autonomy. This war will undoubtedly have a strong and direct impact on the

future of the EU security and defence policy. The EU is moving towards greater responsibility in filling the defence expenditure, defence industrial and capability gaps. It might encourage CSDP to move towards a better, streamlined, more ambitious and less fragmented policy.

Lithuania's position on ESA is twofold. On the one hand, when it comes to a broad set of "soft" security domains such as cyber, civil technologies, innovations, healthcare, resilience, or response to rival states such as Russia or China, Lithuania looks at strategic autonomy pragmatically and supports EU independence in above-mentioned areas and relations. But, on the other hand, Lithuania subscribes to a more open approach when it comes to the transatlantic dimension and Eastern Partnerships, highlighting the need to include the USA in EU security and defence-related initiatives, underscoring that the EU defence and capabilities must be developed and synchronised with NATO.

Lithuania looks quite pragmatically into the possibilities to improve regional security by engaging in particular projects but not limiting NATO collective defence. Lithuania recognised that the EU MS must first increase defence spending and invest in capabilities. This will allow the EU to act when needed and strengthen the EU's position as a reliable NATO and transatlantic partner.

Lithuania prioritises the PESCO military mobility projects and strongly supports the Eastern Partnership-related defence projects and missions. However, the most problematic are fragmentation and proliferation of the EU defence initiatives and the liquidity of the very concept of strategic autonomy. The concept is changing more frequently than the EU MS are willing to make decisions to adapt and allocate sufficient resources that can contribute to stronger EU defence capabilities.

Note

- 1 The European Commission in May 2022 suggested the establishment of Defence Joint Procurement Task Force (EPTF), European Defence Investment Programme (EDIP), European Defence Capability Consortia (EDCC), Critical Raw Material Initiative (CRM), speed up of the Space Entrepreneurship Initiative (CASSINI), and strengthening the EDF.

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10 European Strategic Autonomy

Opportunities and Threats for Denmark¹

Amelie Theussen

Despite its small size, Denmark plays an interesting role in the discussions surrounding European strategic autonomy. While Denmark is a militarily active country, it used to be the only European Union member state with an opt-out from the Common Security and Defence Policy. Until very recently, the country had stood outside of much of the cooperation on security and defence within the European Union. Consequently, Denmark has had little influence on the direction of the CSDP. Yet, the war between Russia and Ukraine has changed this fact. In the days after the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the Danish Government, together with several parties in the Danish Parliament, announced that on 1 June 2022, a referendum would be held on abolishing this opt-out. The referendum was successful, and the opt-out from the CSDP was abolished after almost 30 years. This allows Denmark to shape European security and defence policy and play a much more significant role in shaping the ESA. The election campaigns of the two sides – those arguing for abolishing the opt-out and those arguing to keep it – indicated the biggest challenges of ESA for Denmark. For Denmark, ESA might simultaneously be a necessity, an opportunity, and a threat.

This chapter explains how the unique characteristics of the Danish defence and security policy create this ambivalent position based on how strategic autonomy is understood by the country's European neighbours and allies. The “strategic cacophony” of ESA (Meijer & Brooks, 2021) could potentially threaten the cornerstones of Denmark's security and defence policy while the country recognises the need for greater contributions by European allies to the existing security architecture in Europe. Therefore, the country is cautious towards ESA, while at the same time, it was left unable to influence the discussion at the EU level because of the opt-out before it was abolished in the referendum.

To show how these elements come together to create an uncomfortable position on ESA for Denmark, the chapter looks at the existing Danish security and defence policy, introducing the country's alliance, strategic partners, and threat perceptions. It then turns to analyse the role of the EU, the Danish opt-out of CSDP, and the impact of the war between Russia and Ukraine on Danish security and defence policy. Afterwards, it presents the consequences

of ESA's strategic cacophony for Denmark. Finally, the chapter ends with an outlook on the Danish preferences for what ESA should contain and look like.

Danish security and defence policies and priorities

There can be no doubt that NATO is the cornerstone of Denmark's security and defence. It is the country's most important alliance, and the Danish Government's focus on maintaining and contributing to NATO fundamentally shapes Denmark's security and defence policy. The most recent foreign and security-policy strategy by the Danish Government mentions NATO and a strong transatlantic bond both as "the linchpin for securing Denmark's security" and the "guarantors for Denmark's security and the Danes' safety" (The Government of Denmark, 2022, pp. 6, 21). In fact, the perception that the world is becoming increasingly complex, insecure, and unpredictable and that the rules-based international order is under increasing pressure from multiple sources leads the Government to conclude that "NATO is more important than ever for Denmark's security" (2022, p. 22). This also unveils the critical role of the USA, which Denmark considers an "unrivalled and crucial" strategic partner for the country's security, welfare, values, and interests (The Government of Denmark, 2022, p. 12).

The importance of NATO and the strategic partnership with the US for Denmark's security are strengthened by Denmark's opt-out from the EU in the area of the CSDP. Despite being a long-standing member of the EU since 1973 (EEC until 1992), Denmark's ability to cooperate with other EU MS is significantly limited because of the country's four opt-outs, introduced with the Maastricht Treaty in 1992–1993. For the purpose of this chapter, the opt-outs on security and defence and justice and home affairs are most noteworthy.

Denmark has been pursuing an active military role in international missions, such as in Iraq, the Sahel region, Kosovo, the Baltic states, and the fight against Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), to name a few. Because the country has thus far been unable to participate in many of the security and defence initiatives in the EU, it has been visibly active in other frameworks outside EU cooperation. Denmark participates in the British-led Joint Expeditionary Force, the French European Intervention Initiative, the German Framework Nation Concept, and the Nordic Defence Cooperation.

Aside from the US, the United Kingdom and France serve as Denmark's other strategic partners. With the UK, Denmark cooperated very closely in the operations in Afghanistan and Iraq. However, the British decision to leave the EU created uncertainty about the UK's future role in European security. In light of the debate on ESA, which essentially takes place within the EU context, Brexit fundamentally limits the UK's possibilities for influence, and this is noticeably recognised in Denmark. Denmark and France share an active military culture and operational experience, especially from joint operations in the Sahel region. Over the course of the last years, France has increased its contributions and support to NATO, contributing to a further alignment of

Danish and French interests (Nissen et al., 2020). Also, Germany has received more attention regarding security and defence matters in recent years. Yet, while the countries share certain security interests, for example, in the Baltic Sea, Germany's historical reservation to use armed force has substantially limited opportunities for cooperation between the two countries. This, however, has slowly been changing over recent years, with Germany taking on a more active role, which increases the potential for future cooperation between the two countries (Theussen, 2018). The section below will show significant differences between Denmark's strategic partners regarding their understanding and ambition for ESA, with Denmark's view most closely aligned with Germany. This creates an expectation of deepening cooperation between the two countries.

The relevance of Denmark's participation in NORDEFECO has been debated over recent years. NORDEFECO has been plagued by diverging memberships because Norway and Iceland are not members of the EU, and Sweden and Finland have not been members of NATO – even though both countries recently applied for NATO membership in the wake of the Russian war of aggression against Ukraine. However, with Sweden and Finland set to join NATO sooner rather than later, NORDEFECO might increase in relevance, especially considering the increasing perception of threat in the Baltic Sea region.

Like many of its European neighbours and allies, Denmark increasingly perceives the world as a more dangerous, unstable, and complex place, and the rules-based international order that guarantees Denmark's interests and prosperity is under fire. In the current defence agreement, which runs from 2018 until 2023, the four main threats to Denmark are outlined:

- An increasingly challenging and assertive Russia.
- Instability in the Middle East and North Africa creates the foundation for irregular migration and terrorism by driving militant Islamism.
- Climate change and increased activity in the Arctic.
- Threats from cyberspace with serious security and socioeconomic consequences, and influence campaigns that challenge democratic principles (Danish Ministry of Defense, 2018).

Interestingly, unlike other (primarily eastern) European states, Denmark did not prioritise these threats until early 2022. There was a widespread perception that Russia did not want a direct confrontation with NATO member states and thus was not a direct threat to Danish territory. In January 2022, the Danish Government, in its foreign and security-policy strategy, described "Russia's aggressive conduct", "hybrid warfare and military escalation in our neighbouring area", as well as the "Russian military build-up in the Arctic" as "serious threat" and "irreconcilable with the fundamental principles for the European security order". The strategy notes that "Russia continues its aggressive behaviour, both with regard to Denmark, our neighbours, and in our neighbourhood region. It constitutes a security policy challenge on Denmark's,

NATO's and the EU's doorstep" (The Government of Denmark, 2022, p. 25). The war between Russia and Ukraine has further confirmed this perception, putting Russia at the forefront of Danish security concerns.

The issue of the EU opt-outs

The war between Russia and Ukraine increased the perception of Russia as a direct threat to Denmark and put into question long-standing security policies and commitments. In response to the Russian aggression, on 6 March 2022, a coalition of five parties in the Danish Parliament, including the governing Social Democrats, agreed to strengthen the Danish armed forces with an additional 3.5 billion DKK (500 US\$m) each year for 2022 and 2023. They also agreed to a commitment to reach the NATO agreed-upon 2% of GDP for defence expenses in 2033. Even though critics have noted the long timespan until the target is achieved, this is a significant change because before the Russian invasion of Ukraine there were no concrete plans to reach the 2% on defence. However, the biggest change was the agreement to hold a referendum on abolishing the opt-out from EU cooperation on security and defence on 1 June 2022 (Statsministeriet, 2022).

The decision to hold a referendum surprised many experts, as Denmark's four opt-outs have a long-standing tradition. Addressing the four areas of security and defence, justice and home affairs, the Euro, and union citizenship, the opt-outs were put in place as a compromise after Danish citizens rejected the Maastricht Treaty in the referendum in the summer of 1992. The Maastricht Treaty aimed to expand the cooperation between the MS of the European Communities beyond economic cooperation, establishing the European Union. The treaty includes (among others) provisions for a common foreign and security policy, cooperation on matters of justice and home affairs, and a common monetary union. After the Danish population rejected the treaty in the referendum – 50.7% voted “no” – the EU MS settled on a special agreement with Denmark, establishing the four opt-outs in the so-called Edinburgh Agreement in December 1992. Another referendum followed in May 1993, where 56.7% of the Danish population voted to accept the Maastricht Treaty and the exceptions laid out in the Edinburgh Agreement (Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2020). The four opt-outs mean that Denmark retains its own monetary policy and currency, the Danish krone, and remains outside of most EU cooperation regarding security and defence, as well as justice and home affairs. As a result, Denmark has largely been unable to shape ESA discussions.

In the area of justice and home affairs, Denmark could participate for as long as the cooperation remained intergovernmental, but once it became supranational with the Lisbon Treaty in 2009, Denmark became excluded. Thus, the country is generally barred from all cooperation relating to border control, immigration policy, criminal law, and policing. However, additional agreements allow Denmark to participate in some specific matters, such as access to searches in

the Europol database, visa rules, and the Schengen agreement (Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2020; EU Information Center Danish Parliament, 2022).

The opt-out on security and defence means that Denmark remains outside all military cooperation within the EU, such as the EDA and PESCO, while the country can participate in civilian missions, as well as missions where the civilian and military parts can be separated. With the push for ESA and a realisation that European states will need to do more regarding European defence and security, there is a clear expectation that the opt-out will become increasingly costly for Denmark in a future where the EU will take on a larger role in the security and defence of Europe and missions will increasingly have integrated military and civilian parts. A report by the Danish Institute for International Studies concludes that the opt-out is progressively more limiting for Denmark, which is left with no influence on decisions that directly affect its security and economic interests in the defence industry. In particular, new security challenges such as cyber and hybrid threats and the increasing need for interoperability and mobility of forces create more and more areas of ambiguity regarding the applicability of the opt-out (Nissen et al., 2020). Even in areas where the opt-out does not necessarily hinder Denmark's participation, Denmark bears reputational costs because European countries and companies often doubt the Danish commitment to European defence (Nissen, 2021).

While, in theory, it is possible to abolish the opt-outs without new referenda in accordance with the Danish constitution, a political agreement was made back in 1992/1993 that the opt-outs should not be removed without another referendum. This has proven problematic over the years: in the year 2000, the Danish population voted “no” to the Euro, and in 2015, the Danes voted against changing the opt-out from justice and home affairs cooperation into an opt-in model, where Denmark could choose on a case-by-case basis to opt-in to existing and future legislation in the field (EU Information Center Danish Parliament, 2022). While there was widespread agreement among experts and policymakers over the last years that the opt-out on security and defence matters is hindering Denmark, after the failed referendum of 2015, another referendum seemed very unlikely – until the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

Before the war between Russia and Ukraine, polls suggested that a referendum to abolish the security and defence opt-out would most likely have been unsuccessful. In 2018, a poll reported that 42% of the Danish population would like to keep the opt-out from security and defence cooperation in place, while only 30% would have voted to abolish it; 22% were undecided, and 6% did not want to vote (Møller, 2018). However, the recent Russian aggression against Ukraine has changed the Danes' minds. Before the referendum, one poll suggested that a majority of 59.6% would vote to abolish the opt-out, while 40.6% would vote to maintain it. Yet, not represented in these figures were up to 35% of the population who were still undecided or did not plan to vote; especially women and the age groups below 35 did stand out as undecided voters (Bohr, 2022). One of the latest polls directly before the referendum suggested that 42% would vote “yes” to abolish the opt-out, while 28% would

vote “no”, with a declining number of unsure voters at 22% (Svendsen, 2022). The referendum passed with surprising 66.9% votes to abolish the opt-out and only 33.1% voting to keep it, with a turnout of 65.8%. In all constituencies throughout Denmark, a majority voted to abolish the opt-out (TV2, 2022). The opt-out will thus be abolished, an outcome that will have massive consequences for the Danish position on and participation in ESA in the future.

European strategic autonomy – a necessity, a threat, and a delicate balancing act

Aside from the fact that Denmark had limited participation in the European CSDP, which substantially limited its contributions to the debate on ESA, the broader topic of ESA is a strategic challenge for the country. On the one hand, Denmark recognises that the global security situation calls for European states to do more for their security and defence, which it considers necessary. However, on the other hand, ESA is viewed as a threat if it is to compete with NATO and thus possibly results in undermining the engagement of the US in Europe and distancing European allies from North America. This results in a delicate balancing act. The decision by the Danish population to abolish the opt-out on 1 June 2022 allows Denmark to influence the discussions at the European level in the future. This will enable the country to push for a vision of ESA more aligned with its interests, keeping a clear separation between the EU and NATO and maintaining the US engagement in Europe.

The Danish understanding of ESA has always been connected to security and defence. ESA is generally understood as “the ability to act independently on the international scene and to take greater responsibility for Europe’s own security in light of changes in global security”, which arguably can be understood to include other forms of autonomy, such as financial, economic, digital, technological, and energy, beyond security and defence (Nissen et al., 2020, pp. 25–26). During a question round in the Danish Parliament in 2018, then foreign minister Anders Samuelsen explained the core of the Government’s understanding of ESA. In the Government’s view, “Europe should take greater responsibility for our own security in a more unpredictable and uncertain world” (Folketinget [The Danish Parliament], 2018). The debate about ESA in Denmark is closely connected to two topics: the security and defence opt-out from the EU (Nissen, 2021; Nissen et al., 2020) and defence industrial cooperation (Foldager, 2021; Kristensen & Byrjalsen, 2019). Yet, it seems the COVID-19 pandemic also left its mark on the understanding of ESA, which, according to the Director of Danish Defence and Security Association Joachim Finkielman, came to be understood in broader terms than just defence measures as more areas of dependency became visible (Foldager, 2021). Additionally, Denmark is increasingly becoming aware that technological innovations and developments such as cyber and artificial intelligence increasingly create an overlap between important parts of security and defence policy with other policy areas, such as industry, businesses, and innovation (Liebetrau, 2022). Generally, three different

visions for ESA are perceived by Denmark to exist within the wider debate: first, a vision of Europe as a unified and independent actor in an equal dialogue with the US, where both partners know where the other stands; second, a vision of a more partial pursuit of ESA in continued dependency on the US due to the global power distribution and disagreements among EU MS; and third, a vision of a divided Europe, where there are two speeds for defence integration – an A-team pressing forward with ESA, composed of the major European powers, and the remaining states lagging behind (Kristensen & Byrjalsen, 2019).

There can be little doubt that Denmark acknowledges the need for Europe to do more for its security; the changing security situation, but especially Brexit and the administration of Donald Trump as the US president from 2017 to 2021, have made this clear. Russia's assertiveness and aggressive behaviour since 2014 and continuing instability in the Middle East and North Africa have led to increased migration to Europe and terrorist threats. In addition, the increasing power of the PRC as a peer rival to the US has fundamental implications for European security. The US demands for more contributions from European allies for the collective security and defence posture, as well as President Trump's questioning of Alliance solidarity, have increased the pressure on European states to significantly improve their defence posture and spending (see, e.g. Nissen et al., 2020). Denmark recognises that the EU "constitutes Denmark's most important foreign policy platform" (The Government of Denmark, 2022, p. 10) and that "we must push the EU up into the global weight class so that we in Europe can better promote our own values and interests in an ever more cynical and insecure world" (The Government of Denmark, 2022, p. 9). Also, the COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated how dependent the EU is on imports from countries outside the bloc, especially regarding medicine, protective equipment, and health technology. Recent years have also shown a need to find ways to protect critical infrastructure, such as aviation, the health sector, and digital payment systems, from foreign investment, which could potentially be unwanted and dangerous (Sørensen, 2020). Already before the pandemic, the PRC's investments in critical infrastructure were a hotly debated topic in Denmark concerning Huawei and the 5G network, as well as potential Chinese-built airports in Greenland, both of which came to be seen as a threat to national security (see, e.g. Foght, 2019; Karner, 2020; Khokhar, 2019). As a close US ally, Denmark heeded the US warnings – some might say pressure – to take a stricter stance on China (Khokhar, 2019). It is thus not surprising that ESA, in some cases, is seen as a necessity from the Danish perspective.

Yet, depending on which of the three visions for ESA is pursued, Denmark also views the debate as a threat. The first vision of an independent and unified Europe is seen as a threat. Before the decision to abolish the security and defence opt-out, the existence of the opt-out would have made Denmark's participation very difficult and left the country with no means to influence the debate. While this is no longer the case after the referendum of 1 June, there is a second and even more disturbing reason for Denmark to view this vision as a threat: it risks upsetting the relationship with the US and NATO. Although

Denmark can now participate in EU security and defence cooperation, NATO and the US will remain the country's most important alliances; upsetting these is seen as a substantial risk to Denmark's national security. Denmark assumes that a close relationship with the US is essential to preserve its national security. The second vision (a vision of a more partial pursuit of ESA in continued dependency on the US) is the country's preferred approach to ESA. However, this vision of ESA might not go far enough should transatlantic relations deteriorate again under the next US president. Therefore, Denmark also participates where possible in what it perceives as moves towards vision three, such as the French-led EI2. The main problem thus far was posed by attempts to anchor these initiatives within the EU, leaving Denmark on the side lines because of the opt-out. Now that the opt-out has been removed, this problem might become obsolete. However, another problem appears. As a small state, Denmark has very limited resources in defence and security matters. Therefore, it will have to prioritise which initiatives to engage in if it wants to make an active contribution in the future and not just be a participant on paper. It is thus in the country's interest to streamline initiatives as much as possible and maintain a focus on NATO as Denmark's security guarantor.

Because of the opt-out, Denmark has had very limited abilities to influence the ESA debate until now. Denmark shares the perspective that France and Germany should be the key drivers of European defence political integration and that there is general agreement on the necessity for Europe to do more. But the French and German visions for ESA are perceived to be competing in regard to what ESA should entail (Kristensen & Byrjalsen, 2019), in particular the extent to which Europe can continue to rely on the US after the four years of Trump's presidency and the potential for victory in the 2024 elections for a similarly oriented president – or Donald Trump himself (Cox, 2020). The French view is perceived as threatening to Danish interests because it seems to advocate the EU as an alternative to NATO. Traditionally, France has been more "Europeanist" in orientation, not wanting to allow the US through NATO to hinder the development of European security and defence cooperation or the EU to be a subordinated, secondary institution to NATO. On the other hand, Denmark, alongside, e.g., the UK, is firmly in the "Atlanticist" camp, worrying about duplication of efforts and that increasing EU defence cooperation could undermine NATO solidarity and result in the US disengaging from Europe (Nissen et al., 2020, p. 42). This has led to a perception that France might be anti-American and anti-NATO in its plan for what the French now call "European Sovereignty" and interested in pushing French interests instead of European interests (see, e.g. Weber & Gourrada, 2022). Emanuel Macron's statement about NATO being "brain-dead" in 2019 (The Economist, 2019) certainly did not help convince Denmark of the viability of French plans for ESA. While Paris is making an effort to present the French view on ESA as compatible with NATO, the EI2 was born from the idea that "strategic autonomy requires a willingness and ability to deploy military forces – even without American participation – and to ensure the existence of significant capabilities with regard to

both defence industries and European intelligence services” (Nissen et al., 2020, p. 49). Additionally, the French aim is to make decision-making procedures more agile, enabling prompt security-policy decisions. Thus far, the EII lies outside the scope of the EU – consequently, Denmark was able to participate despite the opt-out – but there were fears that it might be integrated into the EU’s structures which would have left Denmark on the side-lines once more before the referendum to abolish the opt-out. Integration into the EU is preferred by Germany, for example (Nissen et al., 2020). Thus, both the perceived anti-Atlanticist motivations and the potential of incorporation into the EU’s CSDP make the French vision of ESA very much aligned with the first vision outlined above – a danger for Denmark in that it could result in disengagement from the US and a weakening of NATO. This would substantially weaken the cornerstones of Danish national security. While the abolition of the opt-out in the referendum on 1 June 2022 alleviates the fundamental problem of Denmark being left at the side-lines of deepening EU security and defence cooperation, it does not change the crucial importance of NATO and the US for Denmark – and thus the French vision of ESA remains a threat to Danish interests.

On the other hand, Germany was quick to denounce Macron’s declaration of NATO as being “brain-dead”. While former Chancellor Angela Merkel agreed that Europe needs to do more for its own security, “Europe was too weak to defend itself without Nato”, and any projects of Europe taking on more responsibility “must never be against Nato or instead of Nato” (quoted in Chazan, 2019). Also, the previous German defence minister confirmed these views, suggesting that the German and European military build-up was essential and needed to continue, but “[i]llusions of European strategic autonomy must come to an end: Europeans will not be able to replace America’s crucial role as a security provider” (Kramp-Karrenbauer, 2020). At the same time, Germany accepted that the US disengagement from Europe was not just a preference of the Trump administration but had started before President Trump and will continue into the future, independent of who sits in the White House. As German President Frank-Walter Steinmeier remarked at the opening of the Munich Security Conference in 2020:

if we want to keep this Europe together, on security issues too, then it is not enough to make the European Union alone stronger in terms of security policy and the military; rather, we must, I am convinced, also continue to invest in our transatlantic links [...] the European Union is a long way from being able to guarantee the security of all its members by itself. And to count solely on the EU would be to drive a wedge through Europe. Conversely, however, only a Europe that can and wants to protect itself credibly will be able to keep the US in the Alliance.

(Steinmeier, 2020)

This resembles the second vision outlined above and aligns with Danish interests and existing security and defence policy. Depending on the vision of

ESA that will dominate the future, ESA could thus pose a major conflict of interest with the US, which Denmark cannot afford because it relies to such an immense degree on the US and NATO for its security. Also, Denmark is more closely connected to the US and the UK in the defence industrial area than its continental European allies (Kristensen & Byrjalsen, 2019). Therefore, if the US, the UK, and the EU further diverge from each other, Danish national security interests and economic interests are threatened. From a Danish perspective, until the referendum, ESA posed a substantial threat if it results in European consolidation within the EU combined with the disintegration of transatlantic relations (Kristensen & Byrjalsen, 2019). After the referendum and the voters' decision to abolish the opt-out, ESA poses a threat if the EU is seen as an alternative to NATO, which would weaken the alliances that form the cornerstones of Denmark's security and defence policy and would risk overstressing Danish capabilities and resources.

The most recent iteration of the debate, formulated as "Open Strategic Autonomy", is understood to be a compromise between the French and German positions, combining France's focus on strategic autonomy with the German wish to maintain trade partnerships with external partners (Foldager, 2021). Yet, as noted in Chapter 2 on strategic autonomy in this volume, this seems somewhat self-contradictory and remains very vague, and thus does not seem to represent an end to the diverging priorities between the two leading nations. At the same time, it might be a suitable balancing act between ensuring independence and safeguarding national security while maintaining trade and dialogue and thus not closing itself to beneficial external relations (Foldager, 2021).

For Denmark, the position on ESA is clear. The country is terrified that increasing ESA risks detaching the US from Europe. However, this will depend on which vision of ESA will become a reality. The US is also interested in its European allies being increasingly and independently able to take care of their security interests in Europe's neighbourhood (Nissen, 2022). This is also visible in the Danish Government's foreign and security-policy strategy, where the Government notes that to guarantee a strong transatlantic bond with the US as

Denmark's most important security policy ally [...] it is important that we have a timely division of tasks with the USA. We stand side by side with the USA in many of the hotspots of the world. When the USA orients itself more in the direction of Asia, it is in our shared interest. Also when it means that Europe must take more responsibility in our neighbouring areas.

(The Government of Denmark, 2022, p. 12)

The ongoing war between Russia and Ukraine has propelled the ESA agenda forward; even though a lot of the increased activity in European defence takes place within NATO and NATO remains the main provider for security in Europe, as can be seen in recent applications for NATO membership by Finland and Sweden. It also made clear to Danish politicians and the Danish population that ESA is coming and that it is much better to have a seat at the

table, a voice, and a vote when the shape and form of ESA are decided. The results of the referendum on 1 June 2022 demonstrate this.

European strategic autonomy: what it should look like from a Danish perspective

What then is the preferred vision of ESA for Denmark, aside from not threatening NATO and the US engagement in Europe? In the context of the referendum, the election campaigns of the two sides can give an idea.

Three Danish parties recommended voting “no” – against the abolition of the opt-out. Their main arguments are that the answer to the current security crisis is not to strengthen EU security and defence but NATO. For them, abolishing the opt-out might lead to a weakening of NATO and, thus collective defence. One party even fears the creation of an EU Army, which would not be a supplement, but a competition to NATO. However, the third party follows a very different line of argument; for them, the militarisation of the EU might lead to a dangerous and expensive arms race.

Nine parties recommend voting “yes” to abolish the opt-out. Here, the arguments are that in light of the war between Russia and Ukraine, Europe is facing its greatest security challenge since the Cold War and needs to stand united, and Denmark can no longer afford to remain on the side lines. They argue that by strengthening European security and defence, NATO is also strengthened. As one party puts it, it is not about either/or EU or NATO, but both is the way forward. It is not in Denmark’s interest to remain the only country in the EU outside cooperation on security and defence. Instead, Denmark should show its commitment and take responsibility, allowing it to shape the course of EU security and defence policy in the future. However, one of the nine parties does argue that closer EU cooperation will mean less dependence on the US and its foreign policy and therefore is desirable (Danish Parliament, 2022).

The main fault line, thus, was clearly the NATO issue. Can ESA be achieved without weakening NATO and the transatlantic bond crucial for Danish national security? This remains to be seen, but the results of the referendum on 1 June show that the Danish electorate is dedicated to strengthening European security and defence through a united CSDP, which now will include Denmark. As a result, Denmark now has a say in what vision of ESA should be pursued.

A second issue received a lot of attention during the election campaigns ahead of the referendum, which also gives an indication of Danish preferences for ESA. A speech by EU Commission president Ursula von der Leyen on 9 May 2022 suggested she was arguing for changing the voting procedure in CSDP from unanimity to QMV. The statement created outrage and condemnation among Danish politicians and on social media, playing into fears of a loss of sovereignty to the EU and the creation of a European Army. The horror scenario for many was that the decision to abolish the opt-out could lead to a situation where Denmark would have no say over when and how its armed forces are

being used in the name of European security and defence, because the country could be outvoted by other EU MS. The news created such outrage that a spokesperson for Von der Leyen had to clarify that she had been misquoted by the Danish news agency Ritzau, and she, in fact, did not advocate changing the voting procedure for the CSDP (see, e.g. Engelbrecht, 2022; Ritzau, 2022; Thomsen, 2022). With 12 other countries, Denmark quickly denounced such ambitions towards treaty change in a non-paper published shortly after Von der Leyen's speech (Government Offices of Sweden, 2022). Aside from being a lengthy process, any such treaty change of the voting procedure would require another referendum in Denmark, one for which the population's support is anything but guaranteed. The public debate in Denmark is characterised by widespread scepticism towards delegating more sovereignty to the EU, particularly in the field of security and defence policy, because there is a fear that it could leave Denmark with little or no veto-options when it comes to the deployment of Danish troops and capabilities. Much of the election campaign of the parties recommending a "yes" was spent on debunking such claims.

Now that the opt-out is abolished, this debate can be seen as an expression of a Danish preference to maintain unanimity voting in the CSDP as part of the country's vision for ESA and its institutional set-up. Generally – as analysed above – Denmark shares a vision of ESA that coincides with Germany's, as well as several other EU MS, such as Sweden and the Netherlands. Summarised as "the northern approach to ESA", their preferences are "complementarity" to NATO (where ESA serves to strengthen the European pillar in NATO), a focus on crisis management tasks (where territorial defence is left to NATO), and a comprehensive approach (where the focus on the core policy areas of security and defence is supplemented with attention to other, civilian policy areas, such as industry, technology, and economy) (Nissen & Larsen, 2021).

Conclusions

This chapter has analysed the Danish perception and position on ESA. Because of its opt-out from EU security and defence cooperation, until very recently, Denmark remained outside of much of the debate. In a referendum on 1 June 2022, however, the Danish electorate decided to abolish the opt-out, finally giving Denmark a voice in shaping ESA in the future through participating fully in the CSDP. The war between Russia and Ukraine has reinforced the perception that Europe needs to do more for its security and for Denmark to be involved after a successful referendum to abolish the security and defence opt-out. With the opt-out removed, ESA will be high on the agenda for the coming years. Denmark's strong Atlanticist orientation means that it is more closely aligned with the German vision of strategic autonomy than the French, giving precedence to NATO and aiming to keep the US engaged in European security matters. This is crucial to Denmark, whose national security is guaranteed by a close alliance with the US and NATO. Now, the country can push for this vision of ESA to become the dominant one in the debate within the EU.

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11 Belgium and European Strategic Autonomy¹

Alain De Neve

As one of the smallest members of the European Union, Belgium stands out for its status as a founder of the European project. A committed and “loyal” ally within the Atlantic Alliance, the country has always expressed its preference for a balanced approach to European security and defence since the end of the Second World War. Belgium is undoubtedly among the most enthusiastic proponents of a greater role for the EU in foreign policy and deeper military integration. Moreover, as Sven Biscop pointed out, “Belgium has always been a leading theologian of European defence” (Biscop, 2014). Although European integration in the field of defence may be in Belgium’s interests, the country’s decisions have not always been taken in favour of ESA (Egmont Institute, 2007). Being torn between European idealism and transatlantic fidelity, Belgium is permanently seeking for a consociational approach on defence cooperation (Lijphart, 1969).

The first part of the chapter examines the determinants of Belgium’s foreign and defence policy. It argues that domestic variables are essential to understanding the country’s external action and its relationship to the construction of Europe in the field of defence. The balance of power between the various political and economic actors has unquestionably affected the main orientations of the country on the European and international levels, even if these domestic considerations do not seem to be perceptible by its partners or by foreign observers. The various cross-cutting cleavages that structure Belgium on the institutional, linguistic, and ideological levels can weigh in varying ways on the country’s main orientations in terms of foreign policy. It must also be observed that the country’s economic and commercial interests occupy a significant place in diplomatic relations. Belgium has always considered foreign policy as an additional tool to serve its economic prosperity. Security and defence issues, although the country never neglected them, have occupied a secondary place (except in times of crisis) (Chevalier, 2017).

The second part focuses on Belgium’s position on European military integration. It will deal with the permanent balance that the country has always sought between the European defence project and the preservation of NATO as the cornerstone of European security (Hoorickx, 2022). However, this fundamental aspect, which represents the axis of stability of the country’s foreign

policy in terms of external security since 1949, did not prevent the occurrence of periods marked by “pendulum” policies. In other words, Belgium has not always been a “docile” ally within NATO. Two examples from recent history tend to prove this allegation. First, amid the Yugoslav wars and faced with the European inability to project credible expeditionary forces to manage them, Belgium had chosen to join the Franco-British initiative of the Saint-Malo Summit, which constituted the beginning of what would be later known as the future CSDP. Then, when the United States planned to launch a military campaign against the regime of Saddam Hussein in Iraq, Belgium dissociated itself from its principal ally, the US.

We then discuss the European multinational frameworks in which Belgium anchors its foreign policy in terms of security and defence, frameworks which it envisages as “laboratories” of ESA. The last part discusses the institutional advances that Belgium envisages to move towards this European strategic autonomy.

Cross-cutting interests as the main determinants of foreign and defence policy

Before discussing the country’s approach towards ESA, it could be insightful to characterise the domestic political specificities that figure at the heart of the decision-making process. Belgium constitutes a federal constitutional monarchy composed of three communities: the Flemish (60%) of the total population; the French (40%), and the German, around 1%. Belgium also has three regions (Wallonia, Flanders, and Brussels). Each of them has its own parliamentary and governmental institutions. Given these divisions, one might expect a government to reflect these three groups, which is not always the case. Though Belgium has long been considered a stable political regime since the 1970s, it has undergone four major institutional reforms in 20 years. The establishment of the Federal State in 1993 fostered this unstable phenomenon, and today, Belgium is mainly characterised by instability and the perpetual search for a new equilibrium (Swenden, Brans, & De Winter, 2006). Moreover, Belgian federalism is confrontational; that means that Belgium is a country where federalism is, above all, a process of detachment.

The political decision-making process in Belgium aims to satisfy the different political and cultural components of its society in a relatively proportional manner. This system guarantees the representation of smaller political factions, a vital element in a parliamentary democracy, enriching debates and deliberation processes. However, the permanent search for balanced political solutions can constitute an obstacle to the expression of a coherent policy. Belgium has to manage cross-cutting cleavages (linguistical and political). Therefore, all parties have a linguistic role to fulfil, and the establishment of a new government must set up a compromise on those two main axes, even regarding foreign policy and defence issues (Joly & Dandoy, 2018). This method is often labelled “Belgian consociationalism” (Deschouwer, 2006). Since the emergence of the

right-wing party the New Flemish Alliance (*Nieuw-Vlaamse Alliantie*) (N-VA) – which is today the dominant political party in Flanders – we are witnessing the rise of a somewhat unorthodox approach to the European project that consists in alleging that the progressive and ineluctable vanishing of Belgium as a nation will empower Europe – as a “Community of Regions” – the new main and credible political entity. The leaders of the Flemish nationalist party speak in this regard of the principle of “evaporation of Belgium” (L’Echo, 2010). As far as military issues and collective defence are concerned, NATO is the sole pertinent framework.

Belgium’s defence funding in 2020 stood at 1.02% of GDP. The Strategic Vision for Defence foresees, in 2030, a budgetary trajectory that reflects a certain alignment with the average defence expenditure of the non-nuclear European countries members of NATO. Since adopting the preamble to the Strategic Vision (29 June 2016), several MS have announced increases in their investments (Netherlands, Poland, etc.). According to the general policy note published on November 4 2020, the Belgian defence effort should reach 1.24% of GDP by 2024 (This percentage is expected to rise to 1.30% of GDP by 2030). Although Belgium is working to increase its defence spending in the coming years, many uncertainties weigh on the feasibility of this objective. Paradoxically, the disproportionate cost of personnel and the atypicality of the personnel age pyramid are risks affecting the balanced defence budget. They can affect the ambitious policies recently adopted.

One could wonder about the link that may exist between considerations relating to the national defence budget and the question of European strategic autonomy. Since the end of the Cold War, the prospect of the emergence of a European defence based on ever more advanced integration of military capabilities was considered a possible solution for Belgium to reduce its defence expenditure without diminishing its international commitment. However, political elites recently realised the need to spend more and better on defence. It appeared that the defence budget could not fall below a critical threshold. Therefore, the defence sector no longer seems to be simply an adjustment criteria for the country’s overall fiscal wellbeing. For example, the Strategic Defence Review of 2016 underlines the need to reverse the trend the country has conducted (reducing defence spending) and stabilise the level of forces around some 25,000 men and women in uniform.

Belgium’s level of defence spending is particularly striking since the official strategic documents and government agreements consistently stress Belgium’s conviction to be a reliable and credible security partner within multilateral organisations like the EU, NATO, and United Nations. The “general policy note” from the Belgian Minister of Defence Ludivine Dedonder, published on 29 October 2021, states that “Belgium must remain a reliable and leading partner within the UN, the EU and of NATO”.

How can we explain that Belgium invests so little in its defence and security policy while strongly supporting multilateral defence cooperation? Belgium’s behaviour is anything but irrational. Small states have good reasons to support

international security organisations: their participation within multilateral security regimes allows them to significantly increase their security at a relatively low cost. However, they have little incentive to shoulder an equal share of the burden within these organisations and prefer to benefit from the efforts of larger partners. Small states adopting such behaviour within cooperation regimes are called “free riders”. From Belgium’s point of view, weak investments in defence budgets can be compensated through contributions to crisis management operations: a domain where the country is clearly a more reliable partner.

Belgian vision of European strategic autonomy

For Belgium, the question of ESA stems from the recognition that the country does not have sufficient political, economic, and military strength to operate alone on the international scene. Therefore, any endeavours of politico-military nature must be associated (integrated) with a multilateral framework (the UN, NATO, or the EU). In other words, the temptation towards multilateralism does not only find its source in an idealistic aspiration but also in a realistic approach to international relations that stems from the geopolitical context in which the country had to evolve throughout its history.

If Belgium cannot conceive autonomy according to a national meaning (a privilege that greater nations such as Germany, France, or the UK can grant themselves), it is at the European level that Belgium places its aspiration. ESA presupposes a certain degree of abandonment of sovereignty in favour of a European project. It would be wrong to think that Belgium has always been favourable to the principle of renunciation – be it partial or complete – of its sovereignty in favour of a multilateral project (which is today mainly embodied by the European project) (Coolsaet, 2018).

Historically, Belgium has been reluctant towards the idea that a supranational entity in charge of a collective security mission could guarantee the defence of the country against potential aggressors (Devleeschouwer, 1994). It was not until the second half of the 20th century that Belgian foreign policy started changing. Belgium has kept a delicate balance between transatlantic loyalty and the European ideal.

Since its creation, the country has learned three major lessons in less than 200 years. The first is that the surrounding powers repeatedly coveted it. The second is that neutrality never sheltered the country from such covetousness (de Wilde d’Etsmael, 2015). The third lesson, finally, is that the salvation of the country in terms of security requires its active participation within the major regional and international fora: an obligation that must go along with the modesty of the budgetary and material means that the country can offer as a pledge of the credibility of its contribution. Because ESA supposes some transfers of sovereignty and force specialisation, Belgium is very sensitive to any form of national waiver that would not be followed by a multilateral benefit. Moreover, any form of hypothetical force specialisation should not impede the country’s

commitment to NATO. This is why ESA never figured on the political agenda for many years. Belgium still favours a balanced approach that permits envisaging any capability effort at the service of the EU as a contribution to NATO missions.

Furthermore, Belgian perception of ESA is not limited to the areas of security and defence alone; Belgium places many of its policies (economic, scientific, and industrial) within multilateral frameworks. However, this approach stems, once again, from a pragmatic vision that does not necessarily and “automatically” favour Europe. The nation’s social-economic and financial ecosystem largely depends on material and immaterial international flows. This is due, to a large extent, to the country’s unique geographical location on the European continent, surrounded by leading states such as Germany, France, the Netherlands, and the United Kingdom (even after Brexit). On the industrial level, a large number of flagship industries that are present on the territory are integrated into European and international groups. Such a reality is particularly obvious concerning armaments and cutting-edge technologies (especially in the aerospace and defence sectors, pharmaceuticals, and information technology). The explanation for the dependence of Belgian industrial companies on major international and European groups is to be found in the dynamics of consolidation initiated at the end of the 1990s. The surplus of the defence industrial offer at the scale of the European continent forced multiple reorganisations to which the Belgian industrial and technological base, unable to represent a critical mass, could not resist.

The revival of European defence initiated by the Franco-British Summit of Saint-Malo in 1998 received a particularly favourable reception in Belgium. The Verhofstadt III government that emerged from the domestic political crises in the second half of the 2000s led to a more Atlanticist orientation in defence and foreign policy, even if the European defence project still figured as one of the priorities that were pursued by the new governing majority. Currently, a certain disappointment appeared among the political and military elites. The reason was simple: the absence of any real political and industrial progress in European defence. However, such cooperation is considered crucial, especially when it concerns defence capabilities. The country is aware that only a more advanced integration of defence capabilities could allow the achievement of economies of scale and lead to greater coordination among the armed forces of nations. The fact remains that a debate exists about the intensity and the deepening of such European cooperation. Disagreements between political parties also relate to the balance between the European project and the country’s commitment to the Atlantic Alliance (Biscop & Mattelaer, 2017). Belgium’s concerns about the European defence project and the hope of seeing the emergence of a real ESA are mostly shared by all the political actors in the country. In addition to these concerns, there are still differences resulting from the anti-militarist sensibility among certain elites.

The Belgian strategic community actively promotes the development of ESA which is not perceived as a rival of the Atlantic Alliance but rather as a

reinforcement of Belgium's commitment to NATO. European cooperation in the field of defence must lead to greater coherence in military expenditure, reinforcing the European pillar within NATO. The Belgian strategic community does not consider that ESA could materialise through the establishment of a European Army. Today, such a project is more of a fantasy, even if many initiatives launched within the framework of European defence (Eurocorps, EUFOR, EUROMARFOR, Battlegroups, etc.) were designated as European Army embryos. In the Belgian political debate, the idea of a European Army had regularly been put forward as a pretext for defence budget cost savings and manpower reductions.

In her general policy note of 4 November 2020, the Minister of Defence underlines that

Belgium must remain a reliable and leading partner within the UN, the EU and NATO and will continue to promote multilateralism, the integrated and global approach of the European Union and underline the complementarity between the European approach and the role of NATO.

(Note de politique générale—Affaires étrangères, Affaires européennes et Commerce extérieur, 2020)

At the same time, recalling that Belgium intends to pursue its various commitments within NATO (Readiness Action Plan, Assurance Measures, eFP, Enhanced Air Policing Measures, Adaptation Measures, Enhanced NATO Response Force Concept, and VJTF).

The General Policy Note clearly favours ESA. It suggests that

Belgium will pursue and strengthen its commitment to an effective European defence. Europe's strategic autonomy requires a military intervention capability and a solid industrial base. In this context, [the MOD] will continue to invest in [order to solve] European capability gaps and will continue to embed its capabilities with privileged European partners.

(Note de politique générale, 2020)

It explicitly mentions the continuation of discussions at the European level on the concept of strategic autonomy. It is interesting to note that, in its motion, for a resolution to promote the strengthening of the common security and defence policy of the European Union 2020–2024, the Belgian Parliament establishes a direct connection between questions relating to the ESA and those relating to the coordination of European institutional means and industrial tools. Thus, the Parliament asks the Belgian Federal Government to consider several proposals that should allow a strengthening of European cooperation in the field of defence and lead to real strategic autonomy. These proposals are, among others, the creation of a European Defence Council bringing together European Defence Ministers, a review of decision-making mechanisms with the targeted introduction of QMV, a revision of the decision-making mechanism

for the engagement of the European Union Battle Groups, or the establishment of a common planning and command capability for large-scale operations based on MPCC and the adoption of initiatives aimed at gradually reducing the diversity of military equipment used in Europe (in particular through the CARD and PESCO processes and the European Defence Fund).

Regarding the Belgian perspective on PESCO, it must be underlined that the country is not very comfortable with the words used by the Lisbon Treaty. In its English version, as Frederic Santopinto quotes, it is stated, “those Member states whose military capabilities fulfil higher criteria and which have made more binding commitments to one another in this area with a view to the most demanding missions shall establish permanent structured cooperation within the Union framework” (Santopinto, 2018). Yet, in the view of Belgium’s representatives, it is very difficult to understand what the authors of the Treaty exactly meant by “Those Member States whose military capabilities fulfil higher criteria” (Lisbon Treaty, 2008). Was it the intention of the Treaty authors to introduce a mechanism aimed at driving up European members’ military budgets? Or was the PESCO calibrated only for the benefits of those states that are supposedly the “most capable” from a military point of view? The assumption that any form of PESCO would become an initiative reserved for a very exclusive club of the most military capable states has generated some protest in Belgium because the country has always aspired to be in the vanguard of European integration. However, as Belgium has one of the lowest defence budgets in the EU, the perspective of a two-speed European defence that could exclude the country from the main initiatives has generated worries among the highest political-military echelons. This is why Belgium never ceased to make sure that PESCO was as inclusive as possible and that its accession criteria were accessible to all. Until 2014, the fear of being excluded from PESCO has led Belgium to concentrate its diplomatic efforts mainly on European defence.

Yet, from 2014 onwards, the Belgian support for the European integration process in the field of defence had progressively waned. This phenomenon was largely the result of the integration of the Flemish nationalist party into the governmental coalition. The N-VA has always marked its clear preference for the transatlantic alliance. This is the reason why the line of conduct adopted by the Belgian Government on PESCO is difficult to categorise.

Multinational military integration

Concerning military capabilities, the EU’s defence project provides an appropriate framework to eliminate some of the most pressing capability gaps, namely command and control, intelligence, communications, and strategic transport. Within this European framework, collaborations and integration initiatives may lead to greater efficiency in investments and projection capacities. Of all the MS, Belgium has always been the most convinced supporter of a deeper European military integration. Whether such integration is only possible within the framework of the political project of the EU and not within the

intergovernmental framework of the Atlantic Alliance is a very debated issue. However, such a European military integration would be complementary with NATO: EU integrated capabilities being able to be engaged indifferently in the context of NATO or in that of the UN, as soon as the MS consider one or the other most appropriate.

Although Belgium attaches fundamental importance to European cooperation in the field of defence, it also recognises NATO as the cornerstone of security and collective defence in Europe. In reality, beyond the country's membership in various regional security and defence organisations (EU, NATO, OSCE), the country's tradition of multilateralism is emphasised above all. Several cooperation frameworks can be mentioned. Thus, the country has engaged in particularly close cooperation with the Royal Dutch Navy (Peeters & Pilon, 2020). In 2016, the Dutch and the Belgian Ministries of Defence signed a Letter of Intent to co-purchase four M-frigates and 12 mine counter-measures vessels (MCMVs). According to the terms of the agreement, the Netherlands will lead the procurement of the M-frigates, while Belgium will be in charge of the procurement of the MCMVs. The overall budget for those platforms is around €4 billion (Rozendaal, 2019). It is important to underline the level of cooperation developed between both nations in the naval domain. Today, both navies are practically merged. Dutch and Belgian navies are under the commandment of Admiral Benelux, which was established in 1995 in Den Helder, and joint naval platforms allow joint maintenance and collective capability development. A NATO Naval Mine Warfare Centre of Excellence is located in Ostend, and dry docks for maintenance have been installed in Zeebrugge.

Furthermore, in a dynamic of strengthening cooperation in the EU and NATO framework, Belgium has on various occasions deployed the frigate *Leopold 1* as an escort ship for the French aircraft carrier *Charles de Gaulle* in 2015, 2020, and 2021. In the future, the new anti-submarine warfare frigates, NH-90 NFH helicopters (which will be equipped in the future with a set of sensors and weapons making them suitable for anti-submarine warfare), the four MQ-9B SkyGuardian drones (with ISR capabilities and with the possibility of adding maritime sensors), the A330 MRTT, and the F-35 will give even more substance to this dynamic of European and NATO cooperation. Still, concerning cooperation between Belgium and France, it should be noted that in 2020 the agreement between the two navies for the training and mutual exchange of naval personnel was renewed. The first concrete result is that a Belgian officer performs a key operational function on board a French frigate for three years.

Belgium's contribution to the European Participating Air Force (EPAF) as part of the multinational F-16 fighter aircraft programme is also a well-known example of cooperation between European partners. Established in the 1970s following their acquisition, the EPAF made it possible to structure the country's industrial returns to the F-16 programme but also organised joint training and decentralised and multinational maintenance of the aircraft. Furthermore, Belgium contributed to the French Helios satellite imaging system and its future

participation in its successor, the Optical Spatial Component programme. These few examples demonstrate the importance that Belgium attaches to the implementation of various initiatives which aim to ensure the credibility of collective defence within NATO and simultaneously support the development of ESA in key capability areas. Finally, the country's land forces are also represented within the European headquarters, which are the Eurocorps in Strasbourg (Dumoulin, 2018) and the Rapid Reaction Corps based in Lille.

In Belgium's view, these cooperation frameworks between forces are key enablers for better European integration and, in the long term, for a genuine ESA. Multinational integration appears to be more feasible in the naval and air domains. Although some concrete examples of cooperation exist, land forces are less prone to such a level of integration. Navy and Air Force military cultures are more adapted to jointness.

The NATO watermark

Whether these cooperation canvases better serve NATO or the EU is not a discussed question as European defence cooperation is envisaged to contribute to NATO commitment. Yet, periodically, political tensions arise on the occasion of some parliamentary debates. In September 2020, a resolution proposal aimed at reaffirming Belgium's resolute support for NATO led to considerable exchanges between the Members of the Parliament. The parliamentary debates that followed the introduction of this proposal revealed the existence of strong tensions and disagreements on priorities in terms of cooperation and alliances.

Belgium's efforts towards greater ESA never erase the country's commitments resulting from its ally's status. Regularly, Belgian political elites pay great attention to the country's obligations within NATO. Following its Strategic Vision, Belgium wishes to raise its national defence investments to figure among the non-nuclear European frontrunners within NATO by 2030. At the same time, Belgium regularly pledges to revise its approach to burden-sharing issues. In this regard, Belgium urges NATO to consider the country's contribution by taking into account the national capabilities dedicated to NATO, UN, and European operations. The Federal Government also worries about the NATO's capability goals assigned to Belgium that go far beyond the level of ambition set in the 2016 Strategic Vision. The achievement of these capacity targets remains in deficit. Whether from a qualitative or quantitative point of view, Belgium has not yet achieved a satisfactory level of readiness. That is the conclusion that has resulted from the latest NATO Defense Planning Process Report (Ponthier, 2020).

Belgium's decision in 2018 to equip its Air Force with 34 F-35 Lightning II to replace its ageing F-16 combat aircraft did generate much criticism among those who advocated for the reinforcement of the European defence industry. Belgium's decision to adopt the fighter jet solution instead of a European platform (Rafale, Eurofighter Typhoon, Gripen) sent a wrong signal to its European

partners when many voices favoured the principle of a European preference for defence equipment.

In February 2018, the Belgian Government received the best and final offers issued by the candidates. As a result, the Air Combat Capability Successor Programme unit, responsible for evaluating these offers, was set up within the Defence Staff. At the end of the procedure, the Eurofighter Typhoon and the F-35 remained the only contenders for the F-16 replacement. The choice for the F-35 was confirmed on 25 October 2018 (Mathieu, 2018).

One of the main pitfalls deplored by Members of the Parliament was the absence of any European defence consideration among the evaluation criteria taken into account within the bidding procedure (*Compte-rendu analytique de la Commission Economie et Politique scientifique de la Chambre des Représentants*, 2018). Only three aspects were privileged: the capabilities of the weapon system (accounting for 57% of the score), the cost dimension (33%), and the programme's contribution to the so-called "essential security interests", a counter-intuitive expression to designate the potential economic returns (10%) associated with the industrial project. European defence was simply not taken into account in the selection criteria for new aircraft, according to many observers (*F-35: Les députés veulent être tenus informés avant l'annonce de l'achat*, 2018). Although the choice for a European aircraft programme could foster ESA on a critical capability, Belgium's decision, without jeopardising European defence, did translate into a certain preference for the transatlantic alliance and its relationship with the United States.

Institutional perspectives

Since its launch 20 years ago, the CSDP has achieved considerable progress. However, there is a debate in Belgium whether the EU's declared level of ambition and commitments have been entirely materialised. Some experts recognise that European institutional processes have turned too complex to be readable (Dumoulin, 2016). This may have led to a loss of narrative, focus, and political momentum. The recent EU initiative regarding the Strategic Compass has been considered an interesting institutional platform to boost innovative ideas and concepts to reinforce ESA.

In Belgium's view, any upgrade of the EU's level of ambition that could lead to strategic autonomy should therefore imply an honest review of how the Lisbon Treaty provisions and the current institutional architecture serve European objectives on defence issues and whether they have sufficiently enabled the political leadership to achieve strategic results. Political and military elites tend to converge on the assumption that ESA could not be reached without a profound reform of European governance.

So far, no formal defence format exists at the level of the Council, and that is why the country pledges to a Council of Ministers of Defence. CSDP is mainly dealt with through the Foreign Affairs Council in its Defence configuration. Attempts to establish a formal Defence Council, which would require

a decision of the Council itself, have been launched in recent years but have failed so far. Reviewing the process to ensure proper political momentum might imply options such as more regular Ministerial meetings or considering the set-up of a Defence Council with decision-making capacity. In the same vein, debates have arisen on whether Ministerial meetings in the PESCO format could be more effective, taking the example of modalities developed within the Eurogroup or other formats of focused cooperation.

Several ideas have circulated among Belgian official and officious networks. For example, an annual review of security and defence matters by the European Council has been discussed. In such a forum, all relevant security and defence issues of security within the EU and its immediate neighbourhood, as well as the state of play of its capabilities to address challenges and threats could be discussed. Such a process could be supported by a yearly assessment and progress report addressed and presented by the High Representative and the Chair of the EU Military Committee to the European Council. A stronger role for the EU Military Committee has been figured in the proposals. Furthermore, the Strategic Compass could be updated at the outset of each new EU legislature as a mandate for each incoming EU leadership and possibly tied into the Multi-annual Financial Framework.

The way toward European strategic autonomy could also imply greater responsibilities for the EU's institutions, such as the European External Action Service, the European Commission (more and more invested in defence issues) and the EDA.

Conclusions

As observed, Belgium's stance towards European strategic autonomy has long depended on multiple factors that were not only determined by international relations or world systemic imperatives. Domestic politics have repeatedly influenced decisive choices regarding military issues. In this regard, the European defence project – especially European strategic autonomy – has often been considered as a “loop-hole” aimed at expunging domestic divisions regarding either the defence funding or the cooperative framework that should be preferred between NATO and the EU. Notwithstanding these considerations, Belgium has traditionally figured as one of the most resolute advocates of European cooperation in the field of defence. Yet, such “European activism” sometimes suffers from *realpolitik*, especially regarding political choices that must be made about critical capabilities, as the F-16 replacement procedure tends to have proved. The time when the “European Army” project was considered an ideal type of European cooperation is definitely over. Instead, Belgium is working to consolidate limited but structural cooperation frameworks on pragmatic issues (such as common defence programmes) that could lead to a better European strategic autonomy.

Belgium is aware of the limits of its foreign policy on European defence. Because it has one of the Union's smallest defence budgets, its position favouring

European strategic autonomy is barely heard. The number of its missions reflects the country's difficulties in mobilising staff. While the country's intentions to contribute to various European defence projects are appreciated, there is a lack of a quantitative commitment in terms of expenditure. Although it is difficult for the country to represent a critical mass given its size, an effort in terms of investments and budget is essential. This explains the recent impetus given by the government for an increase in defence budgets, particularly in the field of defence research. The Russian war of aggression against Ukraine, in all likelihood, is an accelerator of this dynamic.

Russian aggression in Ukraine could turn out into an unprecedented reversal of the continent's geopolitical equilibrium. This conflict, which completely changes the framework of European security, has led Belgium to fundamentally revise its approach to European defence. The Belgian Prime Minister, Alexander De Croo, immediately condemned the aggression as "one of the darkest moments since the Second World War". Later, he addressed the federal parliament:

What is at stake today is nothing less than peace and security in Europe [...] Together with our allies we will take all steps to increase deterrence and defence. We will only turn this around by forming a close bloc with our European partners and NATO allies. In the coming days and months, we must hold on firmly to each other in the West. And we must use this unity to stop the great injustice being done to Ukraine.

(De Croo, 2022)

However, Belgium's decisions to support the Ukrainian efforts to face the Russian invasion are cautiously defined as avoiding any form of interference that could be interpreted by Moscow as a reason for war while at the same time expressing the country's solidarity with Kyiv. Such an equilibrium did not prevent Belgium from sending 300 troops to Romania as part of NATO's efforts aimed at strengthening its Eastern flank. The country has recently admitted that it is considering providing heavy weapons and military material to Ukraine. Although such a level of assistance from Belgium is far from insignificant, it must be stressed that it is part of a global effort exclusively organised within NATO. Like many of its European partners in this affair, Belgium still perceives the EU only as an instrument of economic pressure exerted on Russia through financial sanctions.

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12 Dutch Security and Defence Policy

From Faithful Ally to Pragmatic European¹

Sabine Mengelberg and Jörg Noll

Introduction

It is fair to say that the Netherlands is slowly but surely recognising the importance of Europe and, in particular, the European Union for its security and defence policy. A decade ago, this was almost unthinkable since the country was leaning almost solely on NATO and its transatlantic partnership. This chapter shows how the Netherlands “pivoted” to Europe.

Like in official policy papers, ESA was a stepchild for the think tanks in the Netherlands. Clingendael, the Advisory Council on International Affairs (AIV), and the Hague Centre for Strategic Studies (HCSS), started to address the European Strategic Autonomy issue more seriously in 2019.² They related ESA *inter alia* to the importance of sovereignty (Faesen et al., 2021), normative power (Palm, 2021), the role of industrial and technological cooperation (Pronk, Zandee, & Stoetman, 2022), and Europe’s relations to other powers, like the People’s Republic of China, Russia, and in particular the USA and NATO (AIV, 2019). As will be seen in our contribution, the main drivers for the recent boom in publications on strategic autonomy are the Russian–Ukrainian war since 2014/2022, the Brexit referendum, Donald Trump’s election in 2016, and COVID-19, which changed the perception of the relations with the PRC. For the first time in decades, the Netherlands seems to perceive the PRC more as a threat than a trade opportunity. The dependency on China concerning strategic goods and China’s behaviour in the international realm led to this change.

Every year, Clingendael and HCSS publish the strategic monitor for the Ministry of Defence. It is meant to be a strategic foresight for the upcoming years. It is an important input for Dutch security and defence policy. The 2021–2022 publication title reflects the Dutch changed thinking about Europe and strategic autonomy: “Hanging Together: Partners and Policies for the Netherlands and EU in Turbulent Times”. Based on a quote by Benjamin Franklin, in which he urges the signatories of the US Declaration of Independence that only together the 13 colonies will survive. It echoes a changed security situation in Europe, and with that, the Netherlands’ thinking about strategic autonomy (Thompson & Pronk, 2022). Our contribution aims to show these incremental steps that have been accelerated by those recent developments addressed above.

However, and this cannot be emphasised enough, NATO remains first and the EU second in defence matters.

It is necessary to provide some background on Dutch history, its political divided elites, and its ambitions in the international realm to explain why the Netherlands had difficulties acknowledging the EU's significance. After that, we show how the thinking about NATO–EU relations has changed in the Netherlands and, with that, the country's notion of the EU's strategic autonomy.

From neutrality to alliance member: the myth of the faithful ally

The relation to the US was and is very important for the Netherlands. The US liberated the country in May 1945, and it remains the Dutch security cornerstone. Although the relationship with the transatlantic partner was changing over time, the Netherlands always considered itself a faithful ally, even if this was sometimes more a myth than reality. The Netherlands is a founding member of NATO and the predecessor of the EU, the European Economic Community. For the last two decades, the public and academic debate concentrated on the question if the country joined EEC/EU out of the drive to an ever-closer union and a liberal worldview or if membership was overall pragmatic, reflecting the spirit of Dutch merchants and the country's strive for free trade.

With the end of the Cold War, NATO's role seemed to change, as did EEC/EU. The 1990s started as a decade of optimism in the Netherlands. During the Dutch presidency in 1992, the EU was founded. After the threat of total annihilation by a potential nuclear war and economic depression in the 1980s, the country prospered due to a booming economy and stock market. As a result, the country became one of the first Western countries to transform its forces from territorial defence to expeditionary tasks. In 1993, the country already announced that decision in a White Paper (Noll, 2005, pp. 94, 95). After centuries of state-centric security approaches, it was time to strive for human security expressed in the UN "Agenda for Peace". The Netherlands postponed conscription, built expeditionary forces, and promised the UN to participate in a peace mission in the former Yugoslavia. When in 1993, the UN requested the Netherlands to join the "Blue Helmets", the Government and Parliament agreed, yet they maintained the position that the troops were equipped only with light armour (NIOD, 2002). In the spring of 1995, the Serbian army brutally forced its way through Bosnia–Herzegovina, neither impressed nor halted by the "Blue Helmets". On 11 July 1995, the enclave of Srebrenica was seized by the Serbians, and the Dutch soldiers withdrew. In the end, 8,000 Bosnian men and boys were killed in what became known as the genocide of Srebrenica.

When the news reached the homeland, they impacted Dutch security and defence policy. The Netherlands lost its innocence and, as some realists call it, naivety. It wasn't before Mali in the 2010s that the country joined UN peace missions again. But more has changed since. The country demanded from its allies or coalitions of the willing that it was involved in the military and political

decision-making process at a high-level during missions and guarantees for the protection of its forces (Noll & Moelker, 2013, p. 259).

The Dutch interests in a new European security architecture

For the Dutch, as a nation of trade, their vital interests have always been preserved by three goals on which its foreign and security policy is traditionally based: maintenance of peace and security, promotion of economic prosperity, and the striving for justice and the international legal order (Voorhoeve, 1979). According to the Dutch, these goals can best be achieved by strengthening the multilateral institutions created after the Second World War to maintain a balance of power. Within this multilateral setting, the achievement of these goals has always been strictly divided between an economic, a military, and an international legal pillar translated into the multilateral setting of the EU, NATO, and the UN.

The end of the Cold War brought a shift in European security architecture. A partial American withdrawal from European security affairs, the reunification of Germany, the creation of CFSP/CSDP, and the overall European positive attitude towards cooperation and enlargement of EU and NATO highlighted the changes further. These shifts in the European security architecture resulted in clear choices in Dutch security and defence policy: a peculiar combination of Atlanticism together with a supranational EU.

First, these supranational aspirations for the EU implied an institutionally strong developed EU with the Commission at the centre to firmly integrate Germany into the EU (Laursen & Vanhoonaeker, 1994, p. 171). This preference for supranationalism was inspired by the idea that Dutch interests could be better safeguarded within the framework of a strong supranational Commission, instead of a strong European Council that would lead to a domination of the “Big Three”. A supranational EU could preserve a counterweight towards the Franco-German axis (Segers, 2013, p. 263).

Second, as a result of the German reunification and a strengthening of the Franco-German axis in European policy, an important pillar of Dutch policy countering this axis has always been the maintenance of a good relationship with the UK. The Netherlands has always been a strong proponent of the US commitment to European security and NATO as the anchor of the European security order. This preference for the US alignment had two reasons. The first was the American hegemony and its nuclear umbrella to safeguard Europe and the Netherlands. The second was the maintenance of the balance of power between the greater European powers, France, Germany, and the UK, through the US and NATO’s presence in European security affairs. The Dutch choice for the US alignment to Europe was founded on the idea that the US could counterweight a strong Franco-German axis (Hellema, 2016, pp. 356, 357). Hence, when discussing the Dutch position towards the EU’s security and defence policy, one cannot exclude the Dutch preference for NATO to preserve and protect the Dutch security.

It was for these reasons that the country was a proponent of a strong supranational EU, on the one hand, to counterweight the “Big Three” with a possible stronger role of the European Council during the 1990s. But on the other hand, the Netherlands held that any development of the EU’s defence policy should always be linked to NATO and embedded in the NATO command structure as the ultimate security provider. Every Dutch defence strategy stated that the NATO alliance and the US interest in Europe are the cornerstones of Dutch security and defence policy and that Article 5 of the Washington Treaty is the bedrock of Dutch defence.

A new century, a new Dutch political landscape

During the 1990s, the Dutch debate on European integration was marked by a high degree of consensus among most political parties around the political centre. Some smaller political groups, like Green Left (*Groen Links*) and the small right-wing Christian parties, formed an exception, the latter due to fearing a loss of sovereignty. Until the end of the last century, these political parties of the centre regularly formed the government. However, this political landscape changed at the beginning of the 20th century.

For one, because of the spectacular rise of the right-wing populist party of Pim Fortuyn criticising Dutch immigration policy and, until then, the stable Dutch position on multilateralism and EU integration. Pim Fortuyn was assassinated on 6 May 2002, a shock in Dutch society, which exposed even stronger cultural clashes and influenced ever since the Dutch political arena with the rise of other EU sceptical right-wing populist parties like the Party for Freedom (PVV) and Forum for Democracy (FVD) until today (Hellema, 2016, p. 392).

Second, the means of a referendum, like those in Denmark, France, and Ireland for EU treaties, like the 2005 referendum about the European Constitution, had never been an option for the Netherlands as the Dutch Constitution did not offer the possibility of a national referendum. Moreover, the Constitution of Europe found no broad support from Dutch political and administrative elites. However, because of a pledge for years of some political parties, like the Liberals (D66), a first consulting referendum possibility was created on the Treaty establishing a Constitution for Europe on 1 June 2005. Unfortunately, the result was not in favour of the mainstream political elites. With a turnout of more than 60%, the referendum resulted in 61.5% against the acceptance of the proposed Treaty. That was a kind of paralysis for many Dutch political parties in advocating a stronger institutional, particularly a supranational EU.

Finally, compared to Germany, France, and Denmark, the Netherlands lacked a serious political debate about the European integration process and the future of the EU. Reasons vary from a lack of interest or knowledge to avoiding fuelling Euroscepticism and popular political parties advocating anti-EU viewpoints (IOB – Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2021). Hence, Dutch Atlanticism favouring NATO as the main security provider remained. At the

same time, however, a supranational EU with a strong Commission lost its attraction to the Dutch political elites. As a result, for about 15 years, the debate about the EU, and its role in security and defence, remained almost absent.

This absence is remarkable, considering that the country has high ambitions in the international realm formulated in the Constitution. Article 90 states that “[t]he Government shall promote the development of the international legal order”. This is also a critical task of its armed forces. Traditionally, the government is leading in security and defence policy. However, due to the experiences of Srebrenica and the new realities for the expeditionary forces, be it Kosovo in 1999, the interventions in Afghanistan in 2001, or the (political) support of the Iraq war in 2003, the decision-making process changed. Those were missions under NATO or in a coalition led by the US.

Within a decade, Article 100 of the Constitution evolved, stating that

the Government shall inform the States General in advance if the armed forces are to be deployed or made available to maintain or promote the international legal order. This shall include the provision of humanitarian aid in the event of armed conflict.

In case of war or another emergency, the government can act quickly, yet must supply information as soon as possible. In other words, the government formally has only to inform the Parliament. Informally, the article changed little of the informal practice to fathom as much parliamentary support as possible. The only exception was in 2011, with the so-called Kunduz mission. A minor police mission in the north of Afghanistan, which had to show Dutch loyalty after the quick withdrawal from Afghanistan’s province Uruzgan in 2010.

It is important to take note of this period to show two crucial developments when it comes to Dutch security and defence policy. First, for over 50 years, the Netherlands were a relatively stable and reliable partner for NATO and the US. However, due to a shift in the political landscape since 2001 and the elections in 2002, the Parliament is more and more fractionalised. Today, 150 seats of the Second Chamber are divided between 21 parties and single persons. That makes it difficult for any government to formulate policy and get a majority. Even more, at this moment, the ruling parties have no majority in the First Chamber.³ Those factions are divided about the role of NATO and EU, the role of the military, and investments in defence. Just like they are rejecting missions and the EU, the populist parties gain enormously from EU resentments in the Netherlands. The populist parties are only willing to invest in a military that defends the country.

Second, “The Dutch population cocooned after the 9/11 terrorist attacks in the USA and turned to domestic policy issues, which is mirrored in the rejection of the European Constitution in 2005 and the debates following the financial and monetary crises” in 2008 (Noll and Moelker, 2013, p. 261). Debating security and defence policy took place traditionally within a small circle of government, some military leaders, some opinion makers, and a few think tanks.

The broader public was not interested in high politics. That didn't even change with the annexation of Crimea in 2014. Then came 17 July 2014 and the crash of Malaysia Airlines flight MH17 that soon turned out to be shot down by Russians or separatists in the Donbas area supported by Russia. Probably, it is too early to tell, but it seems that the Netherlands again lost its strategic naivety. It turned out that other organisations were also crucial for its security besides NATO, the UN, the OSCE, and the EU.

Changes in the European political landscape and shifts in the Dutch security and defence policy

As shown above, mainstream political parties were paralysed to favour EU strengthening within the setting of upcoming anti-EU parties in the Dutch political landscape and the 2005 Dutch referendum. However, despite the “no” on the Treaty establishing a Constitution for Europe in French and Dutch referendums, its replacement, the Treaty of Lisbon, was signed in 2009. This Treaty gave security and defence policy a prominent place within the EU. Its probably most important part is the introduction of the concept of common defence with the mutual defence clause – Article 42.7.

At first, the traditional transatlantic EU member states, like the Netherlands, argued that the EU's mutual defence clause would undermine the Alliance. Moreover, the EU would never be able to defend its territory. However, though Article 42.7 was worded stronger in legal terms than NATO's Article 5, it was made clear that member states' commitments under NATO obligations would not be affected. This prioritised NATO over the EU regarding common defence for member states that were members of both organisations, which reassured the Netherlands. Furthermore, at the beginning of the century, a framework for EU–NATO cooperation was created with the Berlin Plus agreement in 2002. This framework linked any institutional and operational strengthening of the EU's defence to NATO. It was initiated by the US, with strong support from the UK and the Netherlands, to foresee that any strengthening of the EU's CSDP would be accompanied by close EU–NATO cooperation to regulate any autonomy of EU's CSDP. The idea behind this EU–NATO framework was based on the famous “three D's”, of the US state secretary Madeleine Albright, stating that the EU's CSDP could be strengthened if this would not lead to duplication, decoupling, and discrimination (8 December 1998). These three D's have also been at the heart of Dutch policy towards the development of the EU's CSDP (Mengelberg, 2021).

Besides the national changes in the Dutch political landscape, as elaborated above, the European political environment changed fundamentally during the last decade, which resulted in an almost paradigmatic shift in Dutch security and defence policy. As a result of the Russian annexation of Crimea, the shooting of MH17, Brexit, and the election of US President Donald Trump, the Dutch perspective on EU's CSDP changed. In contrast to the “three D's” mantra, which guided EU–NATO relations, the Netherlands gradually

became aware that strengthening the EU's CSDP could also strengthen NATO instead of being a competitive actor. Brexit was one of the drivers of this change. The Netherlands always cherished the link with the UK because of its counterweight to the Franco-German axis, strong ties with the US, credible armed forces, and its membership of the UN Security Council. Hence, the importance of strengthening the ties between the EU and NATO became even more prominent for the Dutch to keep the UK aligned to European security affairs.

One of the pillars of Dutch defence has been bilateral and multinational defence cooperation. Multilateral cooperation within Europe saw its origin in the EU Battlegroups and NATO's Combined Joint task Force and Response Force concepts, and it increased between EU and NATO member states over the last decades. The best-known example of bilateral cooperation is the establishment of the 1st German-Netherlands Corps. Military cooperation formats were established for national interest reasons, because cooperation with neighbouring countries, cultural links, efficiency, and small states' capabilities and limitations certainly applied to the Dutch armed forces (Hirsch-Ballin, Dijkstra, & De Goede, 2017, p. 154).

For the military cooperation, the Netherlands defined six strategic partners: the US, the UK, Germany, France, Belgium, and Norway (Dutch Ministry of Defence, 2018). For a small state like the Netherlands, these forms of cooperation are attractive as they offer a possibility for flexible coalitions together with strategic partners like the UK, the US, and Germany, which were in the best Dutch security and defence interests, described by Briffa as "small state strategy" of "harnessing the multilateral order" (Briffa, 2020).

An advantage for the Dutch has been that these forms of cooperation could be deployed for NATO and the EU and even coalitions of willing and able. Regarding bilateral cooperation, the Netherlands, for example, joined the Belgium-Netherlands Navy and Airforce and has a long-standing navy relationship with the UK. Regarding multinational cooperation, the Netherlands participates in the UK-led JEF, the NATO eFP in Lithuania, the Northern Group, the French-led EI2, the Arctic Security Forces Roundtable, and the Boxer User and F-35 European User Group.

Finally, NATO, as well as the EU, provided different concepts to strengthen these forms of cooperation, exemplified by the EU's PESCO. Within the EU's security and defence cooperation domain, the Netherlands has been a strong proponent of PESCO, aimed at building European capacities bottom-up, foreseeing a possibility to enhance defence cooperation. PESCO strengthens European capabilities for NATO as well. Furthermore, the Netherlands has been a driver and leading nation of the military mobility PESCO project, in which it invited Canada, the US, and Norway to participate in 2021 (Ministry of Defence, 2021). As a result, non-EU member countries are taking part in the PESCO project for the first time. Additionally, this has an added value for Dutch interests by linking the NATO partners, the US and the UK, to a European build-up of capabilities and security.

From either – or towards and – and: a new Dutch orientation towards EU

Until 2020, the role of the EU in general and how the Netherlands perceived that organisation remained somewhat vague, mainly regarding security and defence policy. Every White Paper started with the phrase or similar wording:

NATO is of fundamental importance for the security of the Netherlands and the constitutional tasks to safeguard this national security. Article 5 of the NATO Treaty is essential to deter potential enemies and is the embodiment of the trans-Atlantic solidarity between its member states.

(cf. Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2018)

Hence, the Dutch ranking between NATO and the EU has always prioritised NATO when it comes to collective defence. Any strengthening of the EU in this domain would jeopardise the strength of NATO as pursued by the Dutch.

As already stated, the referendum on the European Constitution and Brexit influenced the Dutch view: “The Brexit impasse and the inability of EU to formulate an adequate answer to other challenges put the relations within EU under pressure” (Tweede Kamer der Staten Generaal, 2019, p. 7). This was also expressed by prime minister Mark Rutte when reacting to Macron’s idea of strategic autonomy and any idea of a European Army in 2018 “[i]t is an illusion to think that the EU on its own, without NATO, could safeguard its own security” (DVHN, 2018).

As a consequence of the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2014, the Netherlands did pledge for stronger armed forces that could be deployed for NATO and the EU. However, it was concluded by the European Court of Auditors in 2019 that the European level of ambition set in the EU Global Strategy of 2016 was not achieved (European Court of Auditors, 2019, pp. 42, 43). That means that if Europe wants to be a strong player, it has to invest more in its defence. And the Dutch had to learn that European integration was not a threat but a solution.

The Dutch position towards the EU security and defence cooperation gradually changed concerning strengthening the EU’s CSDP in relation to NATO from “either-or” to “and-and”. Apart from Brexit and Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, COVID-19 and the US withdrawal from the INF also contributed to this change. The Dutch Government pleaded for strategic resilience regarding strategic goods and services and highlighted the importance of multilateralism for “international peace and security, stability, mobility and the international debts problems”, with the EU and NATO in the first place. The government planned to “proactively shape the CFSP to enable EU to take a more active role in the world around us” (Tweede Kamer der Staten Generaal, 2020, p. 6).

The Netherlands and international defence industrial cooperation

Before turning to the most recent official line regarding ESA, it is important to show that think tanks already emphasised closer defence cooperation in Europe and the necessity for capability development. It was suggested that “without adequate military capabilities Europe will never be able to become a true geopolitical player” (Pronk et al., 2022, p. 1). For the Netherlands, as a relatively small player, cooperation with countries like France and Germany is seen to enlarge its influence in international and particular European affairs (Pronk et al., 2022, p. 4).

Several important forms of cooperation need to be intensified to reach that aim. First, it is necessary for the Dutch Army, working closely together with Germany, to participate in the MGCS. Since the Netherlands operates two European-based helicopters, Cougar and NH-90, this also holds true for the Next Generation Rotorcraft Capability. The Netherlands is also participating in developing a new combat aircraft platform (FCAS) and maintaining existing ones, such as the F-35 (Pronk et al., 2022, p. 3). This last issue is also important for the ability to carry the US nuclear bombs “in case the DCA task is to be continued” (Pronk et al., 2022, p. 10). Since the DCA task is a public secret in the Netherlands, there will be little public debate. Yet, the task might influence how the Netherlands will engage in strategic autonomy in the future.

There are several examples of military cooperation in which the Netherlands is either engaged or initiated by the country. Those were the EATC, a five-nation multinational tanker-transport fleet, sharing the Dutch logistics and amphibious landing support vessel HNLMS Karel Doorman with Germany. The Dutch also participate in the integration of airborne units of the German and Dutch armies. And finally, the combined integration of a tank company into a German tank battalion (Pronk et al., 2022, p. 15).

Although there is no hard evidence, the different examples show that military drivers pave the way for further integration of military units, which can be considered an important step in strategic autonomy. This also holds for the industry. Forty-four Dutch companies and think tanks reacted to the 2021 EDF call for proposals for the defence and space industries (European Commission, 2021) that will be decided during the summer of 2022 (Ministry of Defence, 2022). However, the government is still having some difficulties going the whole nine yards, like the European Army (Ministry of Defence, 2022), or even articulating the central concept of this publication, i.e. strategic autonomy, as can be seen in the next part.

Strategic compass and strategic autonomy: “he who must not be named”

In September 2021, the government stated that the EU must broaden its geopolitical capacities to act, including strengthening foreign and security policy

instruments that must be used more geopolitically. Furthermore, it was stated that strategic autonomy, with the important addition “only if necessary”, plays an important role in a world of great power competition (Tweede Kamer der Staten-Generaal, 2021, p. 8f). Although carefully formulated – “as such not an objective in its own right” – it was the first time that the government used that phrase in its budget annexes. At the same time, the government also accentuated that NATO remains the cornerstone of the Dutch security policy, as does the partnership with its important partner, the US, but it was acknowledged that NATO and the EU are complementary: “A strengthening of the CSDP of EU also contributes to a stronger NATO” (Tweede Kamer der Staten-Generaal, 2021, p. 10). This line of argument builds along two lines of thought. For one, due to the increasing and diffusing threats, the Dutch became very much aware that the EU carries greater weight than the Netherlands. The EU also provides a broader perspective on security than NATO, including a geo-economic toolbox. Second, although the Dutch pursue an effective and capable CSDP, this will always be inseparable from NATO. Therefore, instead of strengthening the EU’s CSDP leading to competition with NATO, the Dutch changed their argument that this would strengthen the US and EU–NATO relationships. Hence, the EU’s role being complementary to NATO from the Dutch perspective means nothing more or even less than strengthening EU defence capacities will likewise strengthen the Alliance. The idea behind this argument is that these capabilities are deployable for both organisations without creating parallel structures or even a European Army.

The theme guiding the Dutch position towards the EU Strategic Compass embraced a larger ambition than ever, based on the Dutch rational approach to achievable goals. The main objectives for the Netherlands were concretisation, efficiency, and strengthening of the EU’s military and civil instruments and capabilities that would also be deployable for NATO to keep the US and the UK interested. In other words, the Dutch approach is that of “and-and”.

Concretisation refers to the operationalisation of the many EU initiatives and instruments, like PESCO, CARD, EDF, and EPF. According to the Dutch, these steps should be taken incrementally and produce concrete results. In other words, it reflected the Dutch spirit of rationality: “actions speak louder than words”. And the ruling mantra towards the much-debated ESA remained “only if necessary”. Hence, the link with NATO should always prevail and be prioritised for collective defence. Finally, concretisation also referred to a more operationalised Article 42.7 of the Lisbon Treaty, including cyber and hybrid threats.

Efficiency refers to the need for a speedier decision-making process for the EU’s missions and operations, as suggested in the final Strategic Compass of 24 March and supported by the Netherlands. However, for the Netherlands, unanimity prevails regarding military operations. Strengthening even included an institutional and capable MPCC for all EU’s military operations and in response to all threats, including cyber and hybrid (Rijksoverheid, 2022).

Finally, the Netherlands preferred a strengthened partnership between the EU and NATO on political and operational levels, especially in military mobility, hybrid and cyber threats, and technology. For the Dutch, military mobility is one of the main themes of European cooperation. The Netherlands is one of the leading nations and even chairs this PESCO project. From the Dutch perspective, one could conclude that for the strengthening of the EU's CSDP, PESCO offers more than the actual Strategic Compass, as the Netherlands favours defence cooperation with surrounding countries instead of all 27 members of the EU. This is exemplified in the new White Paper favouring deepening the Dutch Army's integration with the German Army (Netherlands Ministry of Defence, 2022).

In short, Dutch concrete measures for the Strategic Compass include:

- Enhancing basic European capacities, like strategic air transport.
- Enhancement of coordination and cooperation with neighbouring countries to develop capacities, agreements about the requirements for procurement and maintenance of material, education and training of personnel, and participation in missions.
- Enhancing international cooperation by strengthening EU's instruments like CARD, PESCO and the EDF, exemplified by procurement of the same weapon systems and coordinated European military purchases.
- Coordination of EU and NATO instruments like NATO's Defence Planning Process with PESCO, EDF, and the EPF.
- Enhancement of the Dutch leading role in PESCO by broadening and deepening the cooperation with the US, the UK, and Norway, exemplified by strengthening the dual use of transport infrastructure together with NATO.
- Striving for a leading role in EU's EDF cyber, energy, and maritime projects.
- Enhancing pooling and sharing by coordination of national capacities, exemplified by MRTT.
- Enhancing the contribution to EU institutions, missions, and operations.⁴

Finally, strategic autonomy is only mentioned once in the Strategic Compass and is directly linked to cooperation with partners to strengthen the EU's pillar in NATO (Strategic Compass, 2022). The Dutch Ministries of Foreign Affairs and Defence favour such an approach. Furthermore, there are no Dutch Government documents where ESA is mentioned as a goal, nor is there any clarification of a Dutch position towards it. The title of the recently published White Paper probably shows the government's ambiguity towards ESA – "A Stronger Netherlands, a Safer Europe: Investing in a Robust NATO and EU".

Conclusions: reflecting on war in Europe

In the light of the war in Ukraine, like many European states, the Dutch increased their defence spending. Above all, the Dutch made another step

favouring strengthening the EU's security and defence policy and advocated the idea of the "EU Rapid Deployment Capacity of 5,000 servicemen and women" in response to the war in Ukraine. With the creation of the Rapid Deployment Capacity in the Strategic Compass, the EU is capable of the operation under one command. However, although the Rapid Deployment Capacity was referred to as a watershed by the Dutch Minister of Foreign Affairs Wopke Hoekstra, he made it clear that this capacity would not lead to a European Army as this would never pass a majority in the Dutch Parliament. Therefore, the Dutch Government explicitly stated that the final decision on the availability and deployability of Dutch troops always lies with the Dutch Government and Parliament (Boven, 2022).

Additionally, the Netherlands decided to contribute more troops to eFP in Lithuania, from 270 to 350, by mid-2022. In the light of Dutch pragmatism, the concrete measures the EU has taken in the foreign, security, and defence domain, like joint financing of arms supplies and far-reaching economic sanctions, are well appreciated by the Dutch Government. According to the Dutch, these measures illustrate the potential of Europe's capacity to act, which was always one of the leading criticisms of the US towards EU's security and defence capacities and thereby embraced by the Dutch Government (Minister of Foreign Affairs, 2022).

Finally, although the Dutch public favours both NATO and the EU as the primary security providers, the EU Strategic Compass did not draw much attention in the public debate (Atlantische Commissie, 2022). Although NATO remains the cornerstone of Dutch defence policy regarding defence and deterrence, a strengthened EU and link between the EU and NATO has become highly important to the Netherlands. The first goal is to keep the US and the UK interested in Europe. Second, to prevent the dominance of the Franco-German axis in European security after Brexit: the opposite of what the Netherlands intended with their EU membership. And third, why choose when both organisations might serve the country's security for the same price. Hence, about a division of labour between NATO and the EU, NATO remains the number one collective defence provider, while the EU can step up "only if necessary".

It is important to emphasise that although defence is back on the agenda since the Russian illegal annexation of Crimea in 2014, the subsequent shooting down of MH17 in July 2014, and indeed the Russian war of aggression against Ukraine since 24 February 2022, attention for the Strategic Compass remained underexposed in the Netherlands political arena and society, as does security and defence in general. While writing this chapter, and still flabbergasted by the brutality of Russian aggression in Ukraine, many people talk about security, yet, in public debate, there is rarely a link with ESA. As one Dutch pundit puts it, "the Netherlands is essentially an unpolitical nation" (Smeets, 2022). The question remains, for how long and what role Europe will play for Dutch security and defence in the future. For now, it seems more important than it was in the last seven decades, which is quite astonishing from a scholarly perspective.

Notes

- 1 This chapter was partially funded by General Jonas Žemaitis Military Academy of Lithuania, as a part of the Study Support Projects (2021–2024) under the research programme “Security and Defence of Small States”.
- 2 The Advisory Council on International Affairs (AIV)

is an independent body which advises the Dutch Government and Parliament on foreign policy. The AIV produces advisory reports about international affairs both on its own initiative and on request. Its main areas of expertise are European cooperation, human rights, development cooperation and security policy.

Please see: www.advisorycouncilinternationalaffairs.nl/about-aiv

- 3 The First Chamber is not directly involved in foreign and security policy, yet due to trade-offs and tit-for-tat, there might exist an indirect influence.
- 4 For the Dutch position on the EU Strategic Compass, see: Vaste commissie voor Defensie der Staten General (2022) and Minister of Defence (2022).

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13 A Reluctant Supporter

The Hungarian Perspective on European Strategic Autonomy¹

Tamás Csiki Varga

Generally speaking, one can argue that political conflicts that are centred around various aspects of the illiberal democratic system that Victor Orbán's governments consolidated since 2010 in Hungary (i.e. constitutional amendments and the various rule of law, freedom of media issues, as well as transparency and accountability of the use of EU funds) have much derailed constructive discussion on European collaboration, not least European strategic autonomy. Hungary's position on European integration favours the "loose federation of strong nation-states" model, Budapest being one of the harshest critics of deeper integration. This is coupled with an internationally often criticised, not very constructive political discourse and conduct. Most recently, politically challenging some elements of joint European action *vis-à-vis* Russia following the Russian military aggression against Ukraine has furthermore distanced Hungary from many European Union member states.

In line with this general attitude, discourse on stronger European cooperation in Hungary is a visible, though not a leading, consensus-building topic. It becomes livelier when strategic shocks and major crises hit Europe, individual states simply cannot cope directly with them or their indirect effects, and wider, European action becomes desirable. Such crises had been the 2008 financial and economic crisis, the 2015 refugee and migration crisis, and the COVID-19 pandemic. Still, European cooperation is an element of political discourse mostly in connection with EU–Hungary political debates, not regarding ESA. ESA is mostly interpreted narrowly, focusing on defence, with the discussion brought forward by the Ministry of Defence and defence policy experts. When summarising the Hungarian stance on ESA based on a round of interviews involving policy-makers and foreign policy experts, combined with research into policy documents, academic discourse, media analysis, and opinion polls, Franke and Varma (2019) pointed out that there are few discussions of ESA in Hungary – a situation that still holds in 2022.

This chapter will follow a similar methodological approach. Supported by ten primer interviews with policy stakeholders and experts, an analysis of national strategic documents, a secondary literature analysis on the Hungarian positions regarding various aspects of joint European action (highlighting perceptions and discourse on foreign policy, security, and defence), the chapter

identifies those elements that already enjoy or might gain the support from Hungary, while also explaining why certain areas are excluded. It also assesses the weak conceptual and practical embeddedness of developing ESA within the Hungarian establishment. I argue that the policy establishment seems to recognise what is at stake regarding the future of pursuing European – also Hungarian – interests in the international arena when formulating options for enhancing ESA. In sum, this creates a duality of conceptually understanding the need to strengthen joint European capabilities of action on the one hand, while practically opposing many steps in policy-making that would enable EU member states and institutions to act more successfully on the other. These contradicting features, with the latter one having much stronger emphasis both in current strategic thinking and policy-making, make Hungary a reluctant supporter of ESA. Moreover, several elements of the Orbán government's response to the Russian aggression in Ukraine have strengthened criticism towards Hungary stronger than ever before, undermining cooperation efforts both at subregional and European levels.

Sources, structure, and methodology

The relevant literature on the Hungarian perspective on ESA is very limited. In this regard, even though not “exploratory” in nature, the current chapter offers a novel, comprehensive assessment of these sources. When mapping up available literature, one can rely on three main groups. First, we can use academic sources that offer assessments of Hungarian foreign policy goals, framework, and conduct (Gazdag, 2021), including the EU dimension (Hettyey, 2021; Törő, 2013) or particular aspects, such as EU enlargement (Huszka, 2017), Hungary's stance on Russia (Végh, 2015) or the People's Republic of China (Matura, 2020). A very limited number of policy analyses provide case-specific assessments in the field of defence and can offer some input to the current chapter as well (Nádudvari & Varga, 2019; Nádudvari et al., 2020; Varga, 2019). The second batch of sources is policy documents from which we can deduct primary sector-specific assessments and conclusions. Such sources are quite up to date in Hungary with the National Security Strategy adopted in 2020 and the National Military Strategy adopted in 2021 – although there is no current foreign policy or EU strategy, and the Defence Industrial Strategy (2021) is not open to the public. Secondary analysis of these strategies is also available (Csiki Varga & Tálás, 2020; Resperger, 2021). The third basket of sources includes discourse analyses that focus on narrow aspects (Etl, 2021; Hettyey, 2021) and occasional opinion polls that pinpoint snapshots of how members of the policy community or Hungarian society relate to various issues (Deák, Etl, & Felméry, 2022; Etl, 2020a,b). To add deeper expert insight to the specific research questions, ten in-person/online anonymous interviews involving foreign and security policy practitioners and experts were conducted in February 2022.

The chapter is developed as follows. First, the place and role of European integration and cooperation in Hungarian strategic thought, as well as foreign

and security policy discourse, is identified based on the National Security Strategy and National Military Strategy, as well as a sample of Prime Minister Viktor Orbán's speeches. Based on this general outline, a more precise definition follows, regarding how the political elite and the defence establishment understand the idea of ESA in Hungary. Here, the key point is the contradiction. On the one hand, Hungary supports strengthening European defence cooperation efforts. On the other hand, the Orbán government is wielding political conflicts driven by the desire to strengthen national sovereignty *vis-à-vis* any sovereignty-sharing necessary to foster European cooperation. This assessment is complemented by identifying the set of EU capabilities and potential (much limited) institutional changes that might become the objectives of ESA, as it appeared in policy analyses and expert interviews.

The assessment of the extent to which the EU should pursue autonomous action in security and defence from the Hungarian perspective follows, pointing out how such initiatives interact with the roles of the US and NATO. Hungary defines NATO as the fundamental security provider for Europe for the foreseeable future, somewhat limiting the EU's opportunities to strengthen its strategic autonomy to the potential detriment of transatlantic relations. These arguments lead to the conclusion that Hungary has limited foreign and security policy objectives to achieve in the context of ESA, leaving Hungary in the position of a "reluctant supporter" of these initiatives, while keeping some stakes in the heat of debates.

European defence integration and Hungarian strategic thought

The analysis of Hungarian strategic documents suggests that the country sees and treats the world realistically and pragmatically with a rather pessimistic outlook. Par. 45 and 47 of the current National Security Strategy see a multipolar world in the making, with transformative effects causing growing uncertainty, great power competition, and challenges to Hungarian security beyond the scale of effective nation-state response (NSS, 2020). Thus, Hungary counts on membership in multilateral alliances to counter these developments and better represent national interests through such frameworks (Par. 21, 22, NSS, 2020). However, any direct reference to the need of enhancing European autonomous capacities to act globally, even in non-military aspects (most importantly technology, energy, and cyber), is missing from the strategy (Interview foreign policy analyst, 8 February 2022). Besides NATO, the European Union has a fundamental role in enhancing the security and providing for the military and non-military defence of the country – with NATO bearing the primacy (Par. 14, NSS, 2020), especially in military security (Interview with Former Hungarian ambassador to NATO, 03 February 2022). An effective NATO–EU cooperation should support these engagements (Par. 91 and 129), particularly regarding hybrid challenges (Par. 100, NSS, 2020). The argument that the European Union should have a more capable crisis management profile is present in the

National Military Strategy as well, pointing out that “beyond providing for its own security, Europe must undertake certain roles in neighbouring (crisis) regions as security provider to prevent and tackle threats”. Also, adding that “strengthening CSDP might enable more effective crisis management on the European peripheries, as well as extending synergies in European defence industry” (NMS, 2021).

This assessment was also emphasised by former Ministry of Defence Undersecretary of State for Defence Policy, Gergely Németh and his colleagues, when they pointed out that an arc of crisis zones had arisen on the periphery of Europe, and “Hungary is affected by the so-called ‘eastern’ and ‘southern’ challenges simultaneously due to her geostrategic position” (Bak et al., 2020, p. 7). As “the security of Hungary is inextricably linked to that of Europe as a whole” <...> “Hungary is committed to assisting the EU’s crisis management efforts” (Bak et al., 2020, p. 13). Moreover, the expert interviews also reinforced these views without any exception and thus can be considered a consensual position of both the government and policy practitioners.

With specific regards to the EU, Par. 95 of the National Security Strategy notes that

Hungary is interested in developing a strong, united Europe, moving on a successful integration path, and offering an attractive integration perspective [to other countries], because the continent can only remain competitive in a transforming world order if it unites its economic and military power

(NSS, 2020)

This and subsequent parts of the strategy already highlight the internal contradiction that is present in Hungarian strategic thought and political conduct. On the one hand, it pledges interest in enhancing defence cooperation. On the other hand, it puts definite and strong emphasis on preserving and strengthening national sovereignty (Csiki & Tálás, 2020, p. 6). As Par. 96 summarises,

the foundation of a strong Europe can only be free nations and states capable of acting. Therefore, we envision the future of the European Union as an alliance and integration of sovereign nation-states, not as a federation, while agreeing to practicing some well-defined shared elements of national sovereignty together, based on their national interest.

(NSS, 2020)

This inherent contradiction becomes even more apparent when the strategy leaves the option of deepening integration in the sphere of defence in the long term open. At the same time, it insists on preserving the intergovernmental nature of security and defence cooperation “until then” (Par. 94, NSS, 2020). There is no roadmap or in-between process identified to achieve the long-term option.

“Until then”, the coordinated development of defence capabilities is identified as desirable “to empower the European Union for common defence, and independent, effective international crisis management, substantially supplementing NATO’s activities in this field” (Par. 93, NSS, 2020). Furthermore, the long-term vision articulates some openness regarding “exploring the opportunities based on Article 42.7 of the Lisbon Treaty” (Par. 129, NSS, 2020) in the field of enhanced defence capability development.

Prime Minister Orbán has a fundamental role in determining Hungary’s position on ESA, therefore his remarks deserve attention (Interview with former senior foreign policy official, 14 February 2022). Even though comprehensive and in-depth analyses of his speeches with a focus on ESA and defence cooperation are lacking, one quantitative and qualitative analysis of his 88 official speeches from 2019 (before COVID-19) was conducted by Etl (2021). Security and defence-related issues and the EU were not primary topics for Orbán. “Defence forces” or “the military” were cumulatively mentioned 73 times only, showing rather limited relevance compared to the economy (798 mentions) or migration (531 mentions) (Etl, 2021, pp. 131–135). The EU was the third most frequently mentioned actor (on 141 occasions) when talking about partners and allies, and NATO only the twelfth (54 mentions) (Etl, 2021, p. 132). “European strategic autonomy” was not singled out even once. This was highlighted by several policy analysts as well: the apparent limit of addressing ESA is talking about closer cooperation in defence, without specifying the level of ambition, and never mentioning shared decision-making competences.

Despite the general criticism towards EU institutions, enlargement in the Western Balkans, the creation of a European army, and the development of European defence industry were among topics supported by Orbán (Etl, 2021, pp. 142, 143). As early as 2016, when giving his annual programme speech for the conservative–nationalist camp in Tusványfördő, Orbán spoke about the need to create “European armed forces – one that would be a real common force, with common commanding language, common regiments and common structures” (Miniszterelnok.hu, 2016). However, the *modus vivendi* to achieve this goal was not defined, nor was the way how Hungary could be part of such a deep collaboration while retaining her national sovereignty to such a degree as the government pursues to preserve. Moreover, Orbán has never clarified what exactly he meant by “European armed forces” – an EU army, any permanent non-EU but European formation, or any *ad hoc*, case and task-specific format. Yet, this unique, relatively positive stance regarding European defence within a generally negative EU-related political discourse was pointed out by Hettyey as well (Hettyey, 2021).

Identifying and emphasising this ambivalence is of utmost importance because it draws us to three conclusions. First, Hungarian strategic thought regarding deepened European integration is not monolithic and should not be evaluated based on foreign policy debates with European institutions only. Policy practitioners and experts understand the need, the rationale, and the possible yield of enhancing European cooperation. However, discussions are

not framed around “European strategic autonomy” but “European defence” instead. Second, this ambivalence is apparent in security and defence cooperation as well, as Hungary participates in cooperative formats such as PESCO, CARD, EDF (and is not absent), but limited political and economic weight has been put behind these in practice. This makes Hungary a reluctant supporter of ESA in many ways – as I will explain in the next part. Third, some aspects can still be identified as promising and of Hungarian interest in security and defence, such as enhancing common European crisis management capabilities and developing the European defence industry. The following parts will outline these aspects.

European strategic autonomy: constraints and opportunities

As we have seen, ESA is not named or included even implicitly in Hungarian national strategic documents and is not an established topic of political discourse either. This is so, because the government favours strengthening national sovereignty to deeper integration and is much critical to integration frameworks and their functioning. Therefore, we need to rely on more direct input from the ten experts to map up how Hungarian contributions, as well as opportunities, and constraints to ESA are perceived today.

Based on the division of competences, two government branches, the Ministry of Defence and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade have more elaborate views on ESA. The current institutional role-sharing can be described as the Prime Minister’s Office providing the political guidance and setting strong boundaries in joining any mechanisms that would demand more sovereignty-sharing, with Orbán having the most powerful voice in foreign policy. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade has wider competence in policy areas like trade, energy, and technology in the European context (Interview with former senior foreign policy official, 14 February 2022). At the same time, the Ministry of Defence has been keen on sticking narrowly to defence policy and cooperation. The Ministry of Defence currently appears to have a more proactive and pro-European stance (Interview with Ministry of Defence senior official, 4 February 2022).

However, opinions are heterogenous. This was also the conclusion of Etl, based on 33 semi-structured interviews conducted in the 2019–2020 period with policy-makers and experts. He pointed out that

the Hungarian security community agrees that there is a need to strengthen European defence capabilities, but there is a lack of consensus concerning methods. There are visible perceptual differences with regards to the level of cooperation and the role of NATO as well. Similarly, the perceptions were also diverse <...> whether there is a need for establishing a joint European military force in the medium term, even if Hungary would have to delegate governance competence to the European Union.

(Etl, 2020b, p. 7)

This situation seems to hold in 2022 as well. As one expert summarised:

The main reason for this cacophony is that the inflection point in strategic considerations is national sovereignty for Budapest, and policy options are decided on a case-by-case basis. The government weighs potential short-term absolute gains every time – instead of setting the long-term goal of deepening European cooperation to foster European strategic autonomy, and harness relative gains.

(Interview with senior security policy analyst, 2 February 2022)

As Franke and Varma have also summarised, “the nature of Hungary’s attitude towards ESA will depend on an assessment of its impact on national sovereignty” (2019, p. 28). Similarly, Etl explained that “those respondents who argued that there is no need for a joint European military force, usually argued that it would affect the question of national sovereignty” (Etl 2020b, p. 8). Thus, even though closer European cooperation and particularly empowering ESA could be an adequate answer to threats and challenges to European security, the political decisions that Hungary has undertaken so far, do not place the EU in a central position as a capable actor. The policy community is of course strongly influenced by the government’s position. Therefore, practitioners are also divided on the issue of ESA. This leads us to conclude that there is no defined “end-state” or level of ambition in pursuing ESA.

It is worth to note that two surveys of public opinion commissioned by the Institute for Strategic and Defence Studies in 2019 and in 2021 gave a snapshot of popular support to European defence cooperation in Hungary.² In 2019, 65.2% of respondents agreed that “There is a need to strengthen joint European military capabilities to allow European states to act without the support of the United States”, while 23.8% did not agree and 11% did not answer. Moreover, 53.4% even agreed that “There is a need to establish a joint European military force in the medium term, even if Hungary would have to delegate governance competences to the European Union”, while 32.2% did not agree and 14.4% did not answer (Etl 2020a, p. 7). That time, these were stunning results, keeping in mind the many conflicts of the Hungarian government and the EU. By 2021, the support has waned: 49.7% supported the strengthening of European military capabilities, while 34.8% did not agree and 15.3% did not answer. Similarly, 43.4% supported the creation of a common European military force if Hungary was to hand over decision-making competences to the EU, while 39.1% opposed it and 17.3% did not answer (Deák et al., 2022, p. 12). In sum, the Hungarian public also appears to be divided on these issues, with decreasing support in the past two years.

It appears to be a sound opinion among all interviewees in 2022 that the security and defence policy establishment sees ESA defined rather narrowly, focusing on defence issues, as “operational autonomy”. This is centred on crisis management in the Southern neighbourhood (the Balkans and the Sahel region) – if required, even without the US and NATO support (Interview with

Ministry of Defence official, 4 February 2022). In this regard, concerns about the US perception of such a possible shift were also identified. According to one expert,

the European dependence on the US in defence created an entrapment situation as countries will have to choose between US security guarantees without deep economic ties to China, or weaker security cooperation with the US and better relations with China.

(Interview with retired senior HDF officer, 2 February 2022)

Currently, the effects of the Russian aggression in Ukraine have triggered both substantial US security assistance to European allies and NATO partner Ukraine and reinforced European countries' defence modernisation efforts – but global dynamics might weaken this alignment in the future.

Bak et al. highlight that “Hungary is committed to assisting the EU’s crisis management efforts in Europe’s immediate vicinity” (2020, p. 13), in which regard experts also pointed out that this should not exclusively entail EU crisis management but other formats of European defence cooperation or *ad hoc* alliances (Interviews with security policy analyst and senior Ministry of Defence official, 4 February 2022). Examples of this with Hungarian involvement are the training, advising, assisting, and counterterrorism operations in the wider Sahel region, where Hungary was also set to join Operation Takuba before the abrupt departure of European forces from Mali in February 2022. This was in line with the strong supportive Hungarian position to reforming the EU’s rapid deployment capability in the EU Strategic Compass negotiation process. However, the decision to join Takuba took a long maturing period and eventually came too late, without political gains and materialising practical contribution (Interview with retired senior HDF officer, 2 February 2022). Takuba can also be considered indicative of the size and character of possible Hungarian contribution in the future: supporting a major European country (France, Italy, Germany) as a framework nation in operation with a rather narrow mandate requiring lower-end capabilities and lightly equipped forces. Three experts defined the level of ambition to include peace enforcement operations, which could involve high-end capabilities in the long term (Interviews with senior security policy analyst, 2 February 2022; senior Ministry of Defence official, 4 February 2022, and Ministry of Defence official, 4 February 2022).

Bak et al. also pointed out that

the Hungarian defence sector is deeply involved in a number of initiatives under the aegis of the CSDP, including Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) projects, the European Defence Agency (EDA), the Coordinated Annual Review on Defence (CARD), along with the recent establishment of the European Peace Facility (EPF).

(2020, p. 13)

Especially PESCO projects have attracted attention as potential cost-effective break-out points in capability development (Nádudvari & Varga, 2019). Nádudvari, Etl, and Bereczky identified further room for development in the subregional (broader Central European or narrower Visegrad Four) context in 2020, Hungary being the ninth most involved PESCO contributor among EU member states at that time, and the third in the region behind Romania and Poland. Then, Hungary coordinated the EUROSIM project and participated in additional nine projects: four with “enabling and joint”; one with “training and facilities”; two with “land, formations, systems”; and further two with “cyber, C4ISR” profiles. Hungary’s closest PESCO partners were Germany, France, Spain, and Poland (2020, p. 23).

Beyond enhancing crisis management capabilities, there is one more area of which members of the Hungarian establishment, as well as experts and industry representatives, are supportive: strengthening the European Defence Technological and Industrial Base – while increasing Hungarian involvement. The decision to procure mostly European-manufactured arms, not US-made, was undertaken deliberately to support European defence industry (Interview with senior Ministry of Defence official, 7 February 2022). These major equipment types are produced by Hungary’s most important partners, also identified in the National Security Strategy, like Germany (Leopard-2A7 main battle tanks, Lynx infantry fighting vehicles, PzH-2000 howitzers), France (Airbus H145M and H225M helicopters), and Turkey (Ejder Yalcin armoured combat vehicles). Through executing the “Zrínyi” armed forces modernisation programme,³ Hungarian defence planners were able to increase Hungarian participation in arms production through joining European arms industry production lines, particularly through cooperation with German (Rheinmetall) and Turkish companies (Nurol Makina), and some acquisitions in the Czech Republic (Aero Vodochody) and Austria (Hirtenberger Defence Systems). The long-term vision is to go beyond arms production and providing related services for the Hungarian Defence Forces (HDF) and to invest in defence R&D. For example, the Rheinmetall Lynx factory currently developed in Zalaegerszeg is already accompanied by a test-rink for autonomous vehicles, while the Nurol Makina Ejder Yalcin armoured combat vehicles are modified and developed further under the brand “Gidrán”. The known pillars of the Hungarian defence industrial strategy (not a public document itself) include the production and development of armoured vehicles, air assets, small and light arms, mortars and ammunition, lasers and optics, as well as command and communications systems and cyber capabilities (Magyar Nemzet, 2021). These clusters will provide opportunities for extending the network of defence industrial cooperation with European allies, while also creating opportunities for Hungary to enter international arms trade with cutting-edge product portfolio.

Defence industrial cooperation clearly has a “networked” characteristic with allies, and this regionalisation of defence efforts is also present in two Hungarian initiatives aimed at creating larger formations. First, HQ Multinational Division – Centre (in Székesfehérvár, Hungary) was established in 2019 to fill a

command gap between NATO's HQ Multinational Corps Northeast (Szczecin, Poland) and HQ Multinational Division Southeast (Bucharest, Romania). Here, Hungary, Croatia, and Slovakia serve as framework nations, Poland is a participating nation, while Germany, Italy, Romania, Slovenia, and Turkey have expressed their interest in possibly joining (Honvedelem.hu, 2022). Second, Regional Special Operations Component Command will be a deployable command element provided by special operations forces of Hungary, Croatia, Slovenia, Slovakia, and Austria, fully operational by December 2024 (NATO, 2022). However, these larger formations were not specifically identified as elements supporting ESA, but to make (Central) European defence cooperation more extensive and are affiliated with NATO (Interview with senior security policy analyst, 2 February 2022).

As a possible obstacle to the future of such cooperation, some decisions in Hungarian foreign policy and particularly a seemingly more understanding position *vis-à-vis* Russia during the Russo-Ukrainian war have distanced even its closest allies – such as Poland – at a time when defence cooperation became a cornerstone of regional policies more than ever before. Surprisingly, the Hungarian government and threat perceptions still do not identify Russia as a prime threat to European security, nor call for much stronger European defence cooperation in the framework of ESA. NATO and collective defence retained their fundamental role in providing for defence, as seen from Hungary. This is the reason why collective decisions to reinforce NATO defence and deterrence on the eastern flank were supported by Budapest without raising concerns – while economic (primarily energy) policy decisions and sanctions by the EU had been debated.

Regarding the EU–NATO institutional setup, the two are seen as complementary to each other, both recorded in national strategic documents and perceived by policy practitioners. The informal balance of expert opinions appears to settle around “strengthening the European pillar of NATO, and empowering European defence as much as possible in such a way that these capabilities and capacities directly strengthen NATO as well” (Interview with Ministry of Defence senior official, 7 February 2022). Policy papers also reflect this stance: “NATO and especially the collective defence of allies remains the main pillar of Hungarian security and defence policy. The present form of European defence initiatives cannot do more than strengthen NATO’s European pillar” (Nádudvari & Varga, 2019, p. 14). All sources showed that Hungary is strongly committed to avoiding delinking, duplicating, or discriminating between NATO and the EU. While many experts emphasised even closer cooperation and alignment between the two organisations, one of them went even further, calling for a “single set of defence planners” – following upon the reformed defence planning procedures of the EU (Interview with Ministry of Defence senior official, 7 February 2022).

Future practical (or only theoretical) options for reforming existing CSDP procedures, generally, find little openness and positive prospects in Hungary. Extending qualified majority voting to become the standard procedure

or granting further competences to the European Commission will not be supported (Interview with security policy analyst, 4 February 2022). Not to mention the idea of prospectively creating the “EU Security Council” (Interview with foreign policy analyst, 8 February 2011). In these issues, small member states might be Hungary’s allies, whose influence can also be maximised through their voting and veto powers. Even with existing formats and procedures, Hungary was very cautious when they had been in their negotiating and adoption phase. For example, one expert highlighted that Hungary joined European Defence Agency only one year after its establishment as there were concerns about whether the Agency would limit the room for Hungarian national decision-making (Interview with retired senior HDF officer, 2 February 2022).

In sum, as we have seen, elaborate discussions on ESA including its political, operational, and industrial pillars take place among policy practitioners and experts, who are actively involved in defining the Hungarian position. However, they are balancing on a tightrope between a strong sovereigntist national position determined by Viktor Orbán and the need of being an active and (somewhat) constructive member of the EU community.

Conclusions

In this chapter, I argued that the options for strengthening European (defence) cooperation are not addressed in the framework of ESA in Hungary. ESA is missing from strategic documents and political discourse because the strong sovereigntist position of the Orbán Government puts limitations on the Hungarian support to deepening European cooperation since 2010. Experts have more thorough understanding of the concept. ESA is defined rather narrowly by policy practitioners and analysts, who focus more on defence, and more particularly, enhancing European crisis management capabilities. This makes Hungary a reluctant supporter of ESA in many ways, keeping NATO as the cornerstone of European (as well as transatlantic) defence, even though the current position can be characterised as a “reinforced pro-CSDP” stance, with a strong emphasis on NATO–EU cooperation. The aspects that can be identified as of Hungarian interest in security and defence are strengthening European crisis management capabilities in the Southern neighbourhood of Europe and supporting the European Defence Technological and Industrial Base. Especially, the ongoing armed forces modernisation and the development of Hungarian defence industry build on European cooperation, as well as on Central European regionalisation. At the same time, most steps that would require sharing more sovereignty, particularly institutional and decision-making reforms within the EU, have been – and most likely will be – avoided.

Interview list

Senior security policy analyst, 2 February 2022 (in person)

Retired Hungarian Defence Forces senior officer, 2 February 2022 (online)

Ministry of Defence official, 2 February 2022 (online)
Former Hungarian ambassador to NATO, 3 February 2022 (online)
Ministry of Defence senior official, 4 February 2022 (online)
Ministry of Defence official, 4 February 2022 (online)
Security policy analyst, 4 February 2022 (in person)
Ministry of Defence Senior official, 7 February 2022 (online)
Foreign policy analyst, 8 February 2011 (online)
Former senior foreign policy official, 14 February 2022 (online)

Notes

- 1 This chapter was partially funded by General Jonas Žemaitis Military Academy of Lithuania, as a part of the Study Support Projects (2021–2024) under the research programme “Security and Defence of Small States”.
- 2 Both surveys were representative, including a sample of 1,000 respondents. The first one was conducted in December 2019 (before the first wave of COVID-19 appeared in Hungary), while the second survey was conducted in December 2021 (before the Russian aggression in Ukraine), thus these strategic shocks did not “distort” the results.
- 3 The “Zrínyi” homeland defence and armed forces modernisation program was designed in 2015 as a comprehensive long-term program for modernising all branches of the Hungarian Defence Forces. Its pillars are increasing defence expenditure (to reach 2% of GDP by 2024 the latest), procuring state-of-the-art equipment throughout all branches (as resources allow), and using this opportunity to extend and modernise Hungarian defence industrial capacities with tie-in to European defence industrial production lines. Germany plays a determining role in reaching these goals.

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14 Shared Values and Common Borders

Why Greece Views European Strategic Autonomy as an Opportunity¹

Vicky Karyoti

Almost ten years after it was first mentioned, European strategic autonomy continues to pose challenges to policy-makers and scholars alike. While straightforward at first glance, the idea of a strategically independent European Union is understood differently by each member state. Especially when confronted with the EU's present and future relationship with NATO, EU members are faced with a choice and an opportunity. Greece, a member of NATO and the EU since 1952 and 1981, respectively, is a state in a geographic position of strategic importance and precariousness, with an ongoing unstable relationship with Turkey and an economy which is still trying to recover. Within that context, Greece understands ESA in its original defence-oriented meaning (Tsolakidis, 2022). This meaning puts issues of defence such as domestic and EU-regional security first, while on a secondary level includes other areas of concern: cyber warfare, climate change, and public health amongst others (Borrell, 2020).

Greece views ESA as an opportunity for promoting its interests in the Mediterranean, but always within the Euro-Atlantic framework. Focusing on developing traditional hard power capabilities and establishing bilateral armament agreements with great powers with dual EU/NATO membership (such as France), and by invoking their shared values, history, and interests in securing the union's borders, the Greek government signals its desire to promote ESA aiming towards increased interoperability and institutional integration (Pagoulatos, 2022).

Several reports support these views, but there is a lack of purely academic publications on the matter. The relevant literature consists of white papers, reports penned by academic scholars for online news outlets, and journalistic articles. The author builds on them, as well as primary sources such as speeches and posts on social media by military leaders. This chapter aims to cover a gap in the academic literature regarding Greece's approach to ESA and its position within the NATO framework. Through an examination of historical context, current economic and social trends, and speeches offered by various Greek political and military figures, the chapter provides an initial ground for the study

of Greece's approach to ESA. It also discusses the roles the EU and NATO are expected to play in the current and future security developments in the European and Eastern Mediterranean regions.

The chapter overviews of Greece's defence and security priorities over the last two decades as it coincides with Greece's 21st-century national security policy, which has a solid EU element, and these 20 years proved to be decisive for Greece's national policy due to global and domestic events. Next, it presents the Greek political and military elite's views of Greece's security and the delicate balance between the roles of the EU and NATO. It discusses how ESA can be utilised as a strategic tool, focusing on regional collaborations and deeper integration, which aspects of its national security policy Greece wants to be represented within ESA, and what it can mean for future collaboration and strengthening of Athens' ties with allies. Finally, it reflects on the Russian war of aggression against Ukraine and its relevant discussions about the future of EU security.

Defence and security priorities

Greece's geographical location is a blessing and a curse for its security. Located at the intersection of Europe, Asia, and Africa, Greece is the perfect case to observe the intersection of geography and geopolitics. That observation is only enhanced by Greece's geof ormation, with its access to both the Mediterranean waters – allowing for proximity to all three continents via its robust navy – and Eurasia's landmass through the Balkan area. The reasons why it is both a blessing and a curse are multiple and diverse. Firstly, access to all three continents allowed Greece to expand its scope by conquering lands and building and maintaining lucrative trades with its colonies and other kingdoms and states. Secondly, geographical location and a lack of physical borders – save for the mountain range on the borders with Bulgaria, North Macedonia, and Albania, and the river Evros with Turkey – have allowed for countless monarchs and states to attack, conquer, and occupy Greek territories (Hornblower, 2022). Characteristically, Greece's two national holidays represent its Declaration of Independence from the Ottoman rule in 1821 and the Declaration of War against Italian demands of surrender in 1940, respectively.

That historical memory is enhanced by the events of the Greco-Turkish War of 1919–1922 (which resulted in the loss of parts of Asia Minor, eastern Thrace and the Bosphorus), Operation Atilla (the 1974 Turkish invasion of Cyprus, which resulted in the loss of the northern half of the island), with both events also causing an unprecedented refugee wave, plays a big part towards Greece's 21st-century national security policy. Greece's fears are exacerbated by the low-intensity but nevertheless constant hostile security and diplomacy environment with Turkey (Güvenç & Özel, 2012). Furthermore, the fact that these recent hostilities have been committed by a fellow NATO member has allowed seeds of doubt about the NATO Alliance to grow amongst the Greek population (Chatzikonstantinou, 2022). That is important for the study of EU's security

policy and especially ESA, as Greece is willing to support and commit to any regional mechanism of defence integration outside of the NATO framework, a framework including Turkey.

Other factors further urge Greece to pursue whatever defence integration and coalition-building efforts are available. Such factors are the ever-present “demographic problem” (Greece’s ageing population coupled with the reduction in births) and the “brain drain” problem (young Greeks migrating to other states to pursue education or job opportunities) (Lazaretou, 2016). Such problems were heightened with the economic crisis of 2009, triggered by the worldwide Great Recession, which showcased the chronic structural weaknesses of the Greek economy and skyrocketed the youth unemployment rate to an all-time high of 58.2%, settling into a 31.4% in January 2022 (EUROSTAT, 2022). The demographic problem presents a threat to present and future military manpower and the national economy.

The economic recession and brain drain problems give birth to fears regarding Greece’s development rates and the future of its technological capabilities, especially in the sector of the defence industry. Traditionally, Greece has been a buyer, not a producer, signing big deals with the US, France, Germany, and Russia. Greece’s inability to maintain a viable industry outside of tourism is proving a significant threat to its independence in defence and weapons acquisition matters. Weapons acquisition adds to its already suffering economy and “ties” it with suppliers in the future as such capabilities require maintenance which the supplier can only provide. In the meantime, Greece is also trying to develop its capabilities by being involved in drone-development projects, which will only suffer from the aforementioned economic and social problems (Kunertova, 2019).

Some of these problems in weapons acquisition might not be as threatening as thought to be. As Greece seeks to sign deals with more European partners like France and Germany, it also strengthens its ties to these partners and its commitment to European defence. According to a 2007 report, Greece’s national security missions will be “to deter external threats and challenges to Greece’s territorial integrity and vital interests” and “to participate to the European Rapid Reaction Force and other EU and NATO’s multinational forces and in international stabilisation and peace-support operations, under the UN, EU or NATO auspices” (Dokos, 2007, p. 4). Here, it is important to note that in the same report, Greece is emphasised as a *status quo* state, which is a natural consequence of the geographical and historical factors mentioned above. As the policy of “anchoring” Turkey to NATO’s collective defence structure did not deter further threats of its aggression and expansion, Greece is looking for ways to strengthen its ties with European allies and to be involved in and contribute to any available EU defence instruments.

Traditionally, Greece has developed different types of established relations with various allies, such as Great Britain (“the old friend”), the US (“the strategic ally”), the People’s Republic of China (“the investor from Asia”), and Russia (“the Orthodox brother”) (Karatrantos, 2021, p. 5). At the same time,

the strongest ties seem to be with European and regional powers: France (“the European ally”), Germany (“the austere partner”), and non-EU states such as Israel, Egypt, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, and Saudi Arabia (Karatrantos, 2021, p. 6). Through these allies and partners, Greece tries to find the proper balance between transatlantic, European, and regional choices and prioritises its interests most effectively. Finally, Turkey is seen with concern because of recent wars in Libya and Syria, which brought new refugee waves. Turkey has utilised these refugee waves to apply pressure on the EU and Greece as one of the first states Syrian refugees enter after leaving Turkey (Baczynska, 2020).

Greece has repeatedly demonstrated its commitment to further European collaboration and integration in defence and security matters within that complexity of choices and priorities.

ESA – what does it mean for Greece?

The international strategic environment plays a decisive role in the heightened interest in regional defence tools. As some authors claim, the current polarisation between great powers – understood as the US, Russia, and the PRC – shows the way towards a more regionally focused, Europe-centric policy orientation (Blavoukos & Politis-Lamprou, 2021; Karatrantos, 2021; Tzogopoulos, 2021a). The keyword seems to be multilateralism, and the focus is on Europe to play its role as powerful regional multilateral order. Within that order, the major players in European security and defence integration are Germany and France, with some smaller states striving towards that goal. In Southern Europe, these are Spain, Portugal, Italy, and Greece. This section presents various views from Greek political and military figures regarding ESA, its opportunities for Greece and security in the European and Eastern Mediterranean regions, and how it can co-exist with parallel defence obligations.

Government representatives present the historical and geographical aspects of Greek national security policy when they introduce the concept of ESA. They also emphasise the importance of the development of a “common strategic culture” amongst the EU members, a culture which is a difficult endeavour due to the rich and turbulent European and Mediterranean history. At the same time, this history shows the way towards more collaboration, something which can protect the EU’s common borders and the shared values. The most important of these values, at least for Greece, is the respect for international law, a position that Greece has been persistently taking for decades. Additionally, Turkey’s history of interest in joining the EU as a member state should only function through a shared understanding of the concept of good neighbourly relations (Hellenic Ministry of National Defence, 1997; Nedos, 2022; Peloni, 2021).

General Kostarakos elaborated that Greece sees ESA from two perspectives: a way for the EU to be less dependent and more autonomous and an opportunity for Greece to strengthen its role in European and Mediterranean security.² Regarding this EU autonomy, he said:

It is evident that the term ‘Strategic Autonomy’ needs to be further explained. Autonomy, at its most basic, means for one to act on their own accord. The concept of autonomy transcends the concept of self-sufficiency, and we should be well aware of this distinction. Self-sufficiency is not a substitute for autonomy. Nevertheless, interdependence or interplay, even without dependence on other geopolitical global international ‘actors’, is a necessity which we cannot repeal. Europe is not alone in the world.

(Kostarakos, 2021)

Through this comment, General Kostarakos emphasised that while the EU should aim towards more independence from obligations and ties that can constrain its action, it should always think about its position within the global system and order. He talked about how specific instruments which have been developed within the EU regarding the ESA goals (CARD, PESCO, EDF, and EPF) disappointingly focus primarily or entirely on the development of the defence industry (Kostarakos, 2021; Kyriakidis, 2022). However, no matter the importance of these capabilities, ESA encompasses another fact, that of political will. His comment can be interpreted through the lens of deterrence theory: for deterrence to succeed, an actor needs not only the means and capabilities to carry through with their threats but also the political will to do so, as well as a precise signalling mechanism and a concrete map of acceptable action.

Furthermore, he claimed that the EU should emphasise that ESA transcends the area of security in traditionally presented defence meaning. Technology, public health, climate change, food scarcity, terrorism, transnational criminal networks, and international competition pose different but present national and regional security threats. As autonomy within the EU commands, the organisation should be able to act within these areas independently. The EU is the “queen of smart power”, a term coined by Joseph Nye, which entails the balanced combination of hard and soft power (Nye, 2011). If one understands hard power as capabilities – in terms of defence means, the economy, population, geography, and technology – then soft power is the attractiveness of values and culture. Such attractiveness is an essential component of ESA since not all the important sections can or should be tackled by hard power.

A similar view was presented by Alternate Minister of Foreign Affairs Miltiadis Varvitsiotis, who also emphasised the fluidity of global and regional conflicts and alliances, as well as the refugee threats in the Eastern Mediterranean which followed the US exit from Afghanistan in 2021. He claimed that the EU needs to prove its independence and autonomy in the crucial areas of security and defence within this environment:

[the EU] cannot depend exclusively on others in order to maintain peace and stability in its area. It is imperative to develop its own integrated security policy, deepen its own defence institutions and be equipped with its own means, in order to manage crises in its neighbourhood.

(Varvitsiotis, 2021)

Varvitsiotis brought attention to the ever-present threat to Greece's security – Turkey. ESA is a clear opportunity for Greece to defend its territorial rights. He sees the EU as a reliable partner against any threats to the area's stability. Varvitsiotis referred to the possible threats from climate change, claiming that the EU, through initiatives such as the ESA, should be at the forefront of the “battle” against the threat, with southern European states leading the effort. It is essential to note the emphasis the aforementioned figures give on the themes of regional and global threats, such as the refugee waves, instability in the Eastern Mediterranean region, and the ongoing multiplication of the types of threats, not only conventional but also hybrid (Panagiotis, 2021).

Other figures focus on specific alliances and collaborations within the EU, which are beneficial for Greece's security policy. Greece seeks to promote its interests by strengthening its ties with its traditional allies, especially France. Such choices are explained by emphasising shared values within the EU, especially partners such as France (Sentoukidi, 2022). On that, the Greek Minister of National Defence Nikos Panagiotopoulos talked extensively about the values of democracy, respect for international law, and national borders. At the same time, he emphasised the need for other EU states to step up their defence development and acquisition game and not let “EU border guard” states like Greece carry the burden of protecting the common EU borders on their own (Panagiotopoulos, 2022).

The Minister moved on to talk about the side of the Greco-Turkish relations, which are not often discussed by other figures, from the diplomatic side. While the “hard power” side of the defence is vital,

it is always good to maintain an open channel of communication on the level of MOD. There is mutual commitment to always activate that channel of direct communication in order to resolve any tensions which might arise in the future.

(Nedos, 2022)

By referring to the need to maintain open channels of diplomatic communication between the two states, the Minister implied that, while the EU initiatives regarding national and regional defence are an important asset for Greece, they are not the only vital component of regional security and should be viewed within a holistic approach which aims towards peaceful conflict resolution first, and deterrence second.

But nowhere are the main elements of Greece's approach to EU initiatives and NATO obligations clearer other than in the words of the Prime Minister, Konstantinos Mitsotakis. Discussing the recent defence agreement with France, which entails several fighter jets and warships, the Prime Minister discussed Greece's relations with its European and NATO allies in the next coming years. The agreement is clearly and without a doubt understood within the framework of not just NATO but of ESA. Historically, Greece has opted for a dual approach to secure its defence and domestic security vis-à-vis international

cooperation: to both maintain its position as a reliable and legitimate ally for all its partners but also to bolster its bilateral cooperation through what is dubbed “strategic agreements” with certain states such as France (Mitsotakis, 2021; Sentoukidi, 2022).

When talking about the defence agreements, Mitsotakis focused on the values that the two states share: democracy and respect towards *Rechtsstaat* and the rule of law, human rights, and especially international law. It is important to note that specifically mentioned the law of the sea, which is an indirect but clear reference to the tumultuous relations between Greece and Turkey regarding issues of each respective state’s exclusive economic zone and continental shelf in the Aegean Sea.

Turkey has persistently been objecting to the 1982 UN Convention on the Law of the Sea, going as far as voting against it on the basis of the Convention’s Articles 3, 15, and 121, which regulate the breadth and delimitation of the territorial sea, and the regime of islands. These issues have been the root cause of the tensions between Greece and Turkey for the last three decades. Greece insisted that Turkey should adhere to the Convention. On the other hand, Turkey claims that since it has not been a signatory party to the Convention, it is not bound by its provisions and maintains its own perspective. These tensions have triggered some incidents (such as the Imia dispute of 1996, as part of the larger Aegean dispute) and continue to be a big wrench in the two states’ bilateral relations (Korkut, 2017).

By referring to the law of the sea, the Greek Prime Minister allowed for zero doubt to be cast on Greece’s security priorities and concerns in the region, as well as the rationale behind its choices for partnership. It is vital to note that in the exact following sentence, he mentioned ESA and precisely how, with these agreements, Greece and France are one step closer towards ESA through “shared visions for the development of Europe’s necessary defence capabilities, and its capacity to respond to the challenges it faces” (Mitsotakis, 2021). The Prime Minister emphasised that while Greece relies on the aid of NATO and the UN in case of a regional threat, it is necessary to be able to respond to such threats autonomously and independently, and choosing an EU partner allows for the achievement of such autonomy while still moving towards a more augmented EU-based defence cooperation (Mitsotakis, 2021).

It is noteworthy that the Prime Minister claimed that enhancing Greece’s defence capabilities will also enhance European security through the protection of the “common borders” and the European defence industry. By opting for intra-European defence capabilities, European states bolster their bilateral relations and further the tightly knit web of cooperation. More importantly, they signal the desire to maintain a more independent and robust defence industry (Foy & Fleming, 2021). So far, many European states rely on defence capabilities they purchase from the US, Israel, Russia, the PRC, and Turkey (Kunertova, 2019). In the last years, many European states have initiated domestic or European-based projects to develop defence capabilities, such as unmanned aerial vehicles. Such initiatives serve multiple purposes: to enhance

European interoperability, to lower costs of arms purchase and acquisition, to bolster the domestic and European industry, to develop and maintain an innovation and technological edge – which then doubles as an excellent tool for claiming high status – and most importantly to lower Europe’s dependency on third states and parties for its defence.

The Greek Prime Minister was very adamant that NATO is and will remain central to European security, and defence agreements between Greece and France will also enhance the North Atlantic alliance. He claimed that such agreements do not antagonise the relations of Greece with the USA because they are functioning with the NATO framework as well. The choice for specifically French capabilities was influenced by multiple reasons, including Greece’s freedom to customise some of them and thus making it easier to implement the new capabilities in the state’s forces. Most importantly, the choice was made as a logical consequence of the two states’ long political, historical, and cultural ties.

Whose ally?

Having presented the background for Greece’s security and defence policy, as well as the Greek political and military elite’s position on ESA, NATO, and how Greece can benefit from these multilateral relations, I will now briefly discuss what ESA means for Greece as a partner and especially its position in NATO.

Political will is not the only determining factor for national and regional security policy – resources play a significant role. While the US – and especially the former President of the United States Donald Trump – have been criticising European NATO allies for not “pulling their weight” regarding their defence expenditure commitments. Greece dedicates 2.6% of its GDP on average to defence spending, which is higher than the 2% agreed within NATO. Taking into account the state’s recent financial crisis and an economy which has yet to recover and is still suffering from high unemployment percentages and low growth rates, Greece’s policy choices present a difficult and often politically loaded dilemma: how to prioritise its budget?

Undoubtedly, an economy that is still suffering – and suffered even more during the COVID-19 pandemic – needs attention in the shape of investments, strategic partnerships, and other market interventions. The decision to dedicate a significant amount of a shrinking GDP is a bold and politically risky choice. When France delivered six Rafale F3R fighter jets, which were part of the 2021 bilateral defence agreement between Greece and France, the public was less enthusiastic about them. Accompanied by a demonstrative flight over Athens by French aircraft of the same type as part of a bilateral military exercise, the event was not welcomed by citizens who felt that such expenses were a distasteful demonstration of wealth that the state did not have (The Newsroom, 2022). Simply put, Greek citizens do not think that such expenses are necessary, especially since the ongoing tensions with Turkey – the primary regional threat for Greece – have been a semi-permanent fixture for decades, generally do not seem to escalate, and do not warrant such extravagant demonstrations.

At the same time, Greece relies on significant help from various EU mechanisms to boost its economy and growth. Such a reliance directs Greece's choices in all aspects of its public policy choices, towards a preference for EU-based agreements and instruments (Derrien, 2021). In other words, Greece chooses to dedicate a significant portion of its budget to defence acquisitions from EU allies because of multiple reasons of historical, ideological, and cultural proximity, and the convergence of economic and fiscal policies and interests. Greece poses that EU allies have a better understanding of security in the European and Eastern Mediterranean region, and wishes to demonstrate its dedication and commitment to the EU and its initiatives (Pagoulatos, 2022).

This is evident in the statements of the various political and military figures I have discussed, all of which seem to follow the same lines: Greece is committed to its partners in NATO. At the same time, its precarious position and the developments in the international system force Greece to seek to develop its capabilities and further any EU initiative that can prove to help it maintain its vision for security and stability in the Eastern Mediterranean. Such initiatives are not limited just to the traditional hard power resources of military might and defence capabilities but extend to include the fields of technology and innovation. Cyber brings a major area of interest, but also climate change and environmental security. Finally, soft power resources come to the forefront, such as cultural ties with partners, international law and respect for human rights, public health, and overall interoperability and economic interconnectedness (Kostarakos, 2021; Tzogopoulos, 2021b).

One aspect of the economic and interdependence side of cooperation which was recently brought to the forefront is fuel: locking low prices for importers and securing access for exporters. In February 2022, Russia began a large-scale military operation against Ukraine. Following hostilities, the international society *en masse* condemned the Russian government and initiated several economic sanctions against Russia, alongside the provision of economic, military and material aid to Ukraine (Manalis & Matsagganis, 2022a).

The importance of economic sanctions for ESA is evident when one considers the reach of their effects on European states. The sanctions drove fuel prices up, which also impacted the cost of travel, transportation, food, and commerce at large (Manalis & Matsagganis, 2022b). At the same time, these imports from Russia used to be financially beneficial for European states through customs and usage fees for various harbours (Port News, 2022). Such effects weaken the European finances and economies, which in turn might affect European security. In the meantime, they also establish the disapproval of Europe towards Russia, which limits the chances for future cooperation and peaceful conflict resolution. Moreover, because Russia is considered a threat to both Finland and Sweden, they initiated the process of becoming NATO members, which might impact the ESA (NATO Newsroom, 2022).

Furthermore, Greece promised to provide Ukraine with armaments – including firearms and rocket launchers – as well as humanitarian aid (Elias,

2022). This decision was made within the context of the EU providing the Ukrainian government and armed forces with similar aid, including the dedication of EU funds for the purchase of military capabilities (von der Leyen, 2022). The Russian war of aggression against Ukraine did not change Greece's position towards the EU security structure or NATO, a decision that might come at the cost of soft power. Greece has a long history of cultural and religious ties with Russia. Being the country with the largest Eastern Orthodox population, Russia shares the same predominant religion as Greece (Pew Research Center, 2017).³ Regardless, Greece and Russia share a recent history of turbulent relations, following Russia's opposition to the 2018 Prespa Accord, a bilateral agreement between Greece and the Republic of North Macedonia regarding the latter's official country name. The agreement marked a domino effect in diplomatic tensions between Greece and Russia, as well as negative reactions from the Greek public (Ekathimerini Newsroom, 2018).

The Accord was a pivotal moment for Russia's policy in the Balkan region because it ended a decades-long veto by Greece to North Macedonia's NATO membership. With the Accord, North Macedonia signed a NATO accession protocol, which Russia described as an action which "is undermining security in the region" (Emmott, 2019). These tensions between Russia and Greece eventually subsided, leading to the Greek Prime Minister's visit to President Putin in Moscow in December 2021. Within the context of his visit, the Greek Prime Minister emphasised the need for more robust EU-Russia relations, with Greece acting as a mediator in that dialogue.

Conclusions

As more European states become entangled in the North Atlantic structure, they might be less inclined to boost a more autonomous Europe in security and defence. At the same time, it might reinforce ESA and other EU security initiatives as many EU states – such as Greece – view their defence obligations to NATO and the EU as parallel and synergetic. As Greece unequivocally condemned the actions of the Russian government and announced its support for Ukraine, it sided alongside the rest of the EU sanction-wise and doubled down on its position that a more autonomous Europe, with a robust defence industry and tightly interoperable forces, will continue to be a favoured option for Greece in the future.

The speeches and public declarations by the Greek political and military elite confirm the state's commitment to support ESA and other EU-related initiatives. Regarding ESA, there is a united front by the elite: defence matters are vital, but other sectors are vital as well. This position comes as a response to the multiplicity of international developments. Traditional defence and security matters trigger a domino of non-defence but security-oriented effects. Public health, economy and growth, technology and innovation are sections that can suffer due to international instability and become more important in the hierarchy of security matters.

Greece knows the importance of a robust economy and strong trade, as it has experienced the near-catastrophic effects. With NATO being a guarantor of traditional defence and security in Europe, as well as the general public's dissatisfaction and lack of trust towards the Alliance, EU initiatives such as the ESA become attractive. Greece continuously confirms its commitment to both NATO and the EU and seems to view ESA within the context of the EU as a political and economic union and, therefore, suitable for more soft power aspects of security. ESA promises to implement a multiple-front approach to security. Therefore, for Greece, that is an opportunity to promote its interests as a small state in a precarious position in the Eastern Mediterranean.

Notes

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- 2 Honorary Chief of the Hellenic National Defence General Staff and ex-Chairman of the EU Military Committee.
- 3 As of 2017, Greece had a 90% Orthodox population, with Russia at 71%.

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15 Conclusions

Domination of Pragmatism towards the European Strategic Autonomy

Giedrius Česnakas and Justinas Juozaitis

The debate on European strategic autonomy re-emerged as a disruptive phenomenon in the transatlantic community, reminiscent of old cleavages between the Continentalist and Atlanticist geopolitical thought. The proponents of the former encourage the European states to pursue their own destiny either by deliberately limiting the presence of the US in Europe or by preparing for its supposedly inevitable disengagement from European affairs. The latter camp believes that the US has an indispensable role in the European security architecture and therefore suggests maintaining and strengthening the linkage between the opposite shores of the Atlantic wherever and whenever possible. Even though Continentalist and Atlanticist approaches are somewhat convenient for structuring intellectual discussions on ESA, the book shows that they ultimately fail to grasp the nuances of national perspectives. The case studies presented in the book suggest that national approaches towards ESA mainly stem from pragmatic national security and foreign policy considerations while largely ignoring highbrow strategic ideas.

Following the theoretical premise of the book, the closing chapter firstly summarises small states' perceptions of ESA, highlighting their expectations, concerns, and areas where their interests contradict or converge. At the same time, it distinguishes the most pronounced sceptics and enthusiasts regarding the ESA and explains their reasoning. After establishing where small states stand, the chapter presents the systemic circumstances surrounding the development of ESA and the interests of the powerful states, which either belong to the European Union (Germany, France, and Poland) or have an important say in European security architecture (the United States of America). Conceptualising the systemic conditions and the interests of the powerful states as variables enabling or constraining the realisation of small states' national interests, the chapter eventually contrasts small states' approaches to the ESA with the macropolitical circumstances beyond their control, shaping the development of EU's role in security and defence.

In the end, the monograph argues that the constellation of interests among the powerful states and contemporary systemic conditions enable forging a delicate compromise between the scepticism and enthusiasm among the small states' political and military elites. On the one hand, Russia's war of aggression

against Ukraine clearly shows that the US will remain a fundamental pillar of the European security architecture, and NATO's collective defence is functional and relevant as ever. Even Finland and Sweden are joining NATO, while the transatlantic Alliance is strengthening its collective defence pillar by reinforcing its presence on the Eastern flank. Against this backdrop, the pursuit of the ESA can hardly produce outputs that would unintentionally weaken NATO or facilitate the US disengagement from Europe, making the sceptics' fears somewhat overblown.

On the other hand, the systemic imperatives dictate that the EU as a whole and its individual members cannot resort to half-measures in dealing with the most serious international security crisis of the 21st century. As Winston Churchill once encouraged never to let a good crisis go to waste, so can the ESA rally the EU member states' efforts in strengthening the EU positions *vis-à-vis* systemic rivals by replenishing national armies, expanding industrial base, and building the EU's capacity to act in diplomatic, economic, energy, trade, financial, healthcare, cyber, and digital domains. In the military dimension, the pursuit of the ESA can lead to a stronger European pillar of NATO, provided that it focuses on the national capability development. In other domains, it can strengthen the Alliance by increasing the resilience of its European members and providing a diverse foreign policy toolbox for the EU. Given the constellation of interests and the contemporary security environment observed in the book, it seems that the international environment is permissive for the EU and NATO to move towards an enhanced and better-structured cooperation in addressing the contemporary security challenges as opposed to drifting apart.

Small states' expectations and concerns

The case studies on small states show that their perspectives on ESA are generally shaped by shelter-seeking behaviour (for shelter theory and examples, please see Thorhallsson, 2018, 2019; Thorhallsson et al., 2021). Having limited capabilities, small European states perceive memberships in the EU and NATO as sources of national security, economic prosperity, and legitimacy on the one hand, and enablers of a more assertive foreign policy on the other. Building on such a perception, the small states assess how the potential development of ESA might strengthen or weaken their "shelters". Depending on their threat perception, European "Lilliputians" arrive at different conclusions.

For some small EU members, ESA presents a window of opportunity to achieve their national security interests without articulating clearly pronounced concerns for the transatlantic partnership. Due to its complicated relations with Turkey (territorial disputes, the instrumentalisation of migration, historical memory, etc.), Greece stands out as the leading enthusiast of ESA among the analysed small EU members. Karyoti argues that Greece cherishes its NATO membership, but it does not provide adequate security guarantees against Turkey, which is also a member of the Alliance. As a result, Greece aims to strengthen national security and promote its interests in the Mediterranean

through the European Union, where the Greek *de facto* adversary does not have a say in the decision-making. For Athens, ESA is about strengthening the traditional defence pillar of the EU, where developing hard power capabilities comes first, while such security sectors as cyber, environment, health and others play a secondary role. Greece aims to empower the EU's capacity to act by developing multilateral force projection instruments, welcoming such initiatives as the emerging European Rapid Deployment Capacity and its predecessors.

De Neve argues that Belgium is also enthusiastic about ESA and supports building a stronger military intervention capability within the EU and developing its industrial base. The Belgian political and military elites maintain that deeper integration of defence capabilities in Europe would allow achieving economies of scale in the defence-industrial sector and greater coordination amongst the national armed forces, especially in the air and naval domain, gradually reducing capability gaps and the variety of military equipment used by the European armies. From the Belgian perspective, ESA cannot be achieved without reforming the EU's governance structures: creating the European Defence Council, introducing QMV in CSFP/CSDP, and establishing common planning and command capabilities for large-scale operations. It seems that Belgium is not concerned about limiting its sovereignty by giving away its veto power in the Council and does not believe that strengthening the EU's capacity to act might damage transatlantic relations or weaken NATO.

While Belgium and Greece champion ESA, other small states scrutinise the term with greater detail and find it more or less threatening, depending on how the pursuit of ESA will unfold. Their perceptions of ESA mainly depend on the potential development of the EU's institutional structure, and its geopolitical positioning in the international politics and relations (based on complementarity or competition) *vis-à-vis* NATO.

For example, Theussen argues that Denmark sees three possible development scenarios of ESA that are also discussed by other authors, at least to some degree. First, the EU eventually becomes a unified and independent actor from the US. Second, the EU increases its capacity to act but maintains its dependence on the US security guarantees, and this balancing act serves as a compromise between the sceptics and proponents of the ESA. Third, the EU members fail to reach compromises on ESA, and two speeds for defence integration emerge with the continental powers and the like-minded small states, such as Belgium and Greece, pushing for greater ambition, and the remaining states, lagging behind them.

From the Danish perspective, fully autonomous Europe is seen as a threat because it undermines NATO and complicates Copenhagen's relations with the US, while the second option is desirable and the third one – tolerable. Theussen explains that fixation on the US stems from its capabilities to ensure Danish security and strong ties in the defence industry. Therefore, even though the referendum of 1 June 2022, regarding the removal of the Danish opt-out from the CSDP, might indicate Copenhagen's enthusiasm about ESA, at least to a certain degree, Theussen argues to the contrary. She claims that Denmark

wants to obtain a seat at the table not because it supports the development of ESA but because it wants to influence European defence initiatives by making them compatible with the US and NATO roles in the European security architecture wherever possible. Moreover, Theussen notes especially stark scepticism towards the potential introduction of the QMV procedure in the EU CSDP and argues that it is not acceptable neither to the elites nor to the Danish society.

The Baltic states also belong to the sceptic's camp as they believe that pursuing ESA might be risky if NATO and the EU eventually fall out of sync. Here, the sharpest criticism comes from the Latvian political and military elite. Rostoks draws our attention to the fact that the European Union cannot ensure the Baltic states' security needs in the foreseeable future due to the limited military capabilities of the European countries and, consequently, instruments not suited for collective defence scenarios. For example, the EU's Rapid Deployment Capacity envisages 5,000 troops for various crisis response operations, but such a capability falls short in the event of a Russian conventional attack against the Baltic states, i.e., the European Union.

Simultaneously, Latvia's scepticism towards ESA is largely influenced by the mistrust of the EU's major powers. Rostoks bluntly notes that Riga is simply not comfortable with putting its national security "in the hands of Germany and France". This Latvian perception was significantly amplified by the Russian war of aggression against Ukraine, where the efforts of Germany and France in supporting Ukraine with heavy weapons were overshadowed by the respective assistance from the US, the UK and even Poland.¹ In the end, Rostoks argues that for the ESA to go forward, European countries first need to establish adequate defence funding and acquire more military capabilities, and only then start discussing potential institutional reforms expanding the EU's role in security and defence.

Veebel and Ploom present similar arguments from the Estonian perspective. Their chapter shows that, except for the staunchest supporters of EU's integration, Estonian political and military elites largely perceive ESA as "either useless glittering initiative or a bothersome functional competitor to existing NATO capabilities". Estonian deterrence and defence efforts rely on the military deployments of the UK and the USA, and Tallinn does not believe that these deployments can be replaced by joint EU efforts. At the same time, Veebel and Ploom remain doubtful wherever EU's members would show the political will to defend Estonia without the US leadership and its firm presence in Europe. Disagreeing with the Belgian enthusiasm for institutional reforms and a broader mandate in defence and security, Veebel and Ploom suggest that the EU's efforts in the defence domain should focus on national capability development based on the existing institutional structures.

Karpavičiūtė highlights that the Lithuanian political and military establishment mostly shares the scepticism expressed by their Latvian and Estonian counterparts but notices somewhat more pragmatic attitude. Recognising that ESA is already firmly established on the EU's political agenda, Vilnius aims to include Lithuanian national interests in the formation of EU's policies even if

the political and military elites frown upon hearing the notion of “European strategic autonomy”. First, Lithuania supports the EU’s steps contributing to practical capability development, such as PESCO (especially military mobility and cyber projects), CARD, CDF, EPF, and others, while opposing the increased EU’s operational capacity (MPCC) duplicating NATO’s functions and reconfiguration of its institutional structure. Second, Lithuania advocates for inclusivity within the EU’s practical instruments mentioned above. Vilnius gives special attention to the involvement of the US, the UK, and Canada, but it does not forget advocacy to include and support the Eastern Partnership states. Finally, Lithuania seeks shelter under the powerful EU’s diplomatic and economical roof. Given its complicated dispute with the People’s Republic of China over the Taiwanese diplomatic representation, Lithuania aims to instrumentalise the EU in dealing with the clear power asymmetry between the two countries. Moreover, Lithuania perceives the pursuit of ESA as a potential opportunity to increase the EU’s resilience in cyber, healthcare, technology, trade, energy, and others. Vilnius expects that the EU’s engagement in these security domains will diminish the strategic dependency of its members on the competitors and rivals. As Karpavičiūtė summarises, Lithuania will not mind the term “autonomy” if it produces results corresponding to the country’s national security interests.

Analysing the Hungarian approach to ESA, Varga offers a slightly different perspective from the Baltic states and Denmark. Even though Hungary defines NATO as the fundamental security provider for Europe and envisions EU’s role only as complimentary, it aims to strengthen EU’s capability to conduct crisis management operations. Beyond crisis management efforts, Budapest is rather sceptical towards other developments related with ESA (except for the development of defence industry). Emphasising its sovereignty, Budapest is opposing EU’s institutional reforms, especially regarding the introduction of the QMV in CSDP. Further elaborating the sceptical Hungarian attitude towards ESA, Varga shows that Budapest was reluctant to support a more ambitious EU’s response to the Russian military invasion in Ukraine.

Even though the book finds diverging small states’ perspectives on the ESA positioned across the spectrum of opportunity and challenge, their approaches to the fundamental outputs of autonomy are surprisingly similar at their core, albeit differing on the margins. First, none of them believe that the pursuit of ESA should distance the EU from the US or that reformed EU’s mandate in security and defence and its potentially reconfigured institutional structure could somehow replace NATO’s security guarantees. To be clear, some small states (Estonia, Denmark, Latvia, and Lithuania) are afraid that ESA might risk upsetting the US, while others (Belgium and Greece) do not see such risks, but none of them conscientiously subscribe to the Gaullist Continental geopolitics.

On the contrary, sceptics and optimists articulate ideas on how the road towards ESA could benefit their security, provided that NATO and the EU clearly share their responsibilities in the European security architecture. Although the small states do not agree on wherever the European Union should bolster its military deployment capabilities, expand its joint command structures or reform the

decision-making procedures on the highest political level, they suggest venturing into other areas important for national security and foreign affairs. For example, Latvia suggests that the pursuit of ESA should facilitate the reindustrialisation of Europe. In a similar vein, Denmark supports such proposals by drawing one's attention to the lessons learned during the early phases of the COVID-19 pandemic, where supplies of healthcare equipment were dwindling due to the lack of domestic production and broken global supply chains. One finds much support for beefing up the European defence-industrial complex and PESCO projects, especially the ones on military mobility and cyber. In addition, there are proposals to strengthen the EU's economic, energy, technological, digital, financial, and economic autonomy, especially *vis-à-vis* its systemic rivals, i.e., Russia and the People's Republic of China.

Perhaps, the Netherlands offer the most compelling case that a stronger European Union also means stronger NATO and leads to a more equal partnership between the two shores of the Atlantic. With the re-emerging great power rivalry, the Dutch no longer believe that European Union should distance itself from security and defence policy, even if they were a sceptic at first. For the Netherlands, NATO provides hard security guarantees, but the EU can offer the best toolkit for safeguarding economic resilience and protecting the principles of free trade. Economic prosperity enables greater military capability and increased resilience allows for a greater freedom of action in using one's armed forces. It goes without saying that a more capable and resilient EU creates necessary preconditions for a stronger European pillar of NATO. Recognising that ESA might strengthen NATO, Mengelberg and Noll argue that the Netherlands will proactively shape the development of the EU's CFSP and strengthen the link between the EU and NATO where possible.

Finally, the small EU member states are collectively not interested in grand strategic debates about the conceptual meaning of the ESA that were once exemplified by the much-publicised quarrel between the French President Emanuel Macron and the German Defence Minister Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer (for their positions, please see: Karrenbauer, 2020; President of France, 2020). The case studies show that the European "Lilliputians" perceive the notion of ESA as an umbrella term. For them, it is not important how it is defined, but what is hiding under the umbrella (what instruments it has to offer for their security?). As Karpavičiūtė insightfully summarises: "Philosophical and conceptual discussion on the ESA diverts attention from the main issue, the fulfilment of the EU level of ambition: insufficient defence spending, investment and lack of defence capabilities". In this context, all the analysed small states agree that Europe should assume more responsibility for its security, with some contributions associating the pursuit of the ESA as strengthening the European pillar of NATO.

Systemic stimuli and the interests of the powerful

Indeed, it seems that the underlying circumstances shaping the debate on ESA favour a balanced approach, whereas the EU's pursuit of the so-called

autonomy ends up strengthening both the EU and NATO due to the following reasons. First, the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022 has disrupted the international security architecture and increased demands for rapid reinforcement of European defence. In this context, only NATO has capable politico-military structures to respond to the Russian challenge effectively. It is the US that currently has the necessary capabilities to protect NATO's Eastern flank and is willing to increase its military presence in Europe (Vandiver, 2022). Moreover, the Finnish and Swedish quest for NATO's membership and the overall upgrade of its collective defence instruments shows that the Alliance is irreplaceable in the military domain. However, there is only so much that NATO can do beyond the military level, and the EU's institutional framework could be easier adapted to deal with the soft or hybrid security threats.

Second, it seems that the old continental powers are either incapable of building a strong military pillar within the EU reminiscent of NATO's defence and deterrence posture or do not even have such ambitions. For example, the French perspective on the ESA is often presented as a grandiose attempt to strengthen its influence in the European Union and limit the US role in the European security architecture, but Kuokštytė provides a fundamentally different perspective. She maintains that the promotion of strategically autonomous Europe does resemble long-term French geopolitical interests (independent state action and decoupling Europe from the US), but argues that the resemblance is observed only on the rhetorical level. In practice, the French behaviour towards ESA is mainly influenced by the interests of its defence industry, aiming to instrumentalise the EU in securing a larger market share and gaining better access to its financial resources. At the same time, the French remain supportive of European defence integration, but not at the expense of their own sovereignty. Building on Kuokštytė's reasoning, it seems that the French interests in developing the EU's operational assets are mostly driven by the quest for increased enablers for its military deployments.

Having a strong defence industry of its own, Germany shares the defence-industrial sentiments and maintains that European nations should procure European arms wherever possible but opposes anti-transatlantic political rhetoric. Analysing the German perspective, Banka argues that Berlin's interests in the development of ESA primarily emerged from its complicated relations with former US President Donald Trump. Speaking of the scope of autonomy, Germany initially emphasised a version of the open strategic autonomy, including techno-digital, trade and climate domains. Banka believes that after the Russian war of aggression against Ukraine, Germany will focus more on its military domain, not forgetting other domains. For Germany, strengthening the European pillar of NATO remains the most crucial task as it does not have sufficient capabilities to guarantee European defence.² In the end, Banka argues that Germany does not see any "contradiction between stronger European commitment and strong transatlantic ties. They are considered mutually reinforcing".

Looking at the German foreign and security policy more broadly, one can clearly observe that the German support for the ESA is mostly focused on the

political level, while its factual military engagement is predominantly geared towards NATO. For example, in the coalition agreement drafted in late 2021 by the social democrats, liberals and the greens, Germany aims, among other things, to establish QMV procedure in the CFSP, strengthen the crisis prevention and civilian crisis management missions, and establish joint civilian-military headquarters. In doing so, Germany is interested in maintaining “interoperability and complementarity with NATO command structures and capabilities” (Koalitionsvertrag, 2021). In NATO, German engagement was far more serious, moving from political priorities to concrete steps. Despite facing difficulties with maintaining its armed forces due to chronic underfinancing since the 1990s, Germany became the first state to lead NATO’s VJTF in 2015. Two years later, the Bundeswehr took over the leadership of NATO’s eFP (a battalion-sized force) in Lithuania, expanded its military presence in 2022 and is preparing to further increase it to the brigade level at the moment of writing (Gemeinsames Kommuniqué, 2022). Not to mention establishing a joint NATO’s Baltic Maritime Component Command in Rostock and a Joint Support and Enabling Command in Ulm (for more German efforts in NATO, please see Juozaitis, 2022).

At the same time, Brexit resembles a double-edged sword. On the one hand, many suggested that the withdrawal of the UK from the EU allows for a more ambitious pursuit of the ESA, potentially leading to deeper military integration. As the argument goes, Brexit will facilitate the EU’s defence integration because one of the staunchest sceptics will no longer be capable of blocking the construction of the defence pillar in the EU. But, on the other hand, the departure of the UK does not change the principles of basic math: European Union lost one of its two states wielding full-spectrum military capabilities, significantly weakening the collective military potential. Hence, Brexit strengthens the freedom of action for developing the EU’s new policies, instruments, and institutions within the security and defence framework, but it deprives the EU of already scarce military capabilities.

Third, Gajauskaitė shows that Poland will stubbornly oppose initiatives that might jeopardise transatlantic relations, alter the fundamental principles of the European security architecture, or transform the EU’s decision-making structure. Poland champions the concept of open strategic autonomy, especially in the fields of the single market and international trade. Warsaw aims to facilitate the reindustrialisation of Europe by returning the production from the third countries to the EU: “Poland’s idea of autonomy is primarily linked to reducing barriers, increasing competitiveness through the circular economy, and creating the digital market”. At the same time, Poland welcomes the further development of the EU’s CSDP if this policy field creates favourable conditions for strengthening the Polish defence industry, acquiring or developing new technologies, increasing national military capabilities, or supporting the local economy. In the end, Poland maintains that the desired outputs of the ESA should lead to the increased resilience of the EU as a whole and its individual member states, such as independently withstanding various disruptions in global

supply chains, shortages of raw materials and energy resources, or fluctuations of their prices.

Fourth, it seems that the United States of America is also interested in finding a proper division of labour between NATO and the EU. Jakštaitė-Confortola argues that Washington's position on the potential enlargement of the EU's role in security and defence has remained fundamentally unchanged since the Saint-Malo declaration in 1998. Back then, the contemporary US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright welcomed European aspirations of becoming a more capable partner to the US but warned that the EU's defence initiatives should not decouple the US from Europe, duplicate NATO's function and discriminate against NATO members that have not simultaneously belonged to the EU. Today, the US President Joseph R. Biden Jr. follows the footsteps of his predecessors and encourages the European countries to spend more on their defence and become a more responsible partner of the US. Having to deal with the rise of the People's Republic of China, the US hopes that the European pillar of NATO would become stronger, while also supporting enhanced cooperation with the EU in the areas of the economy, trade, technological development, and support for democracy.

Concluding remarks

After analysing the national perspectives on the ESA and the underlying systemic circumstances, the book concludes that the pursuit of such autonomy provides more opportunities for strengthening the national security of small states than challenges. The contemporary security environment is not permissive towards the emergence of the "autonomous European Union" that would drift apart from the US or weaken NATO. The willingness to build such a union is weak, while the opposition is strong. The military capabilities needed for its emergence are insufficient, while their build-up requires substantial financial investments and might take decades to develop (IISS, 2019). Finally, the Biden administration is interested in maintaining the transatlantic bond, depriving the proponents of autonomy from their "Trump" card. However, it is impossible to be sure if this card with a different name will not return and will not contribute to the discussions for the greater EU's self-reliance.

For now, the Russo-Ukrainian war pressures European Union as a whole and its individual member states alike to find ways to strengthen their position concerning the systemic rivals of the transatlantic community. One has already witnessed many significant developments that national security experts deemed as very unlikely before 24 February 2022. First, the European Union members started increasing their military spending. Second, the European Union started substantially cutting its economic ties with Russia, imposing various sanctions, including the seaborne oil trade embargo. Third, its members have finally recognised the issue of energy dependence on Russia and have taken practical steps to mitigate such vulnerability. For example, Berlin suspended Nord Stream 2 and started developing liquefied natural gas infrastructure not because of the

external pressure from its allies but due to Russia's aggressive actions. Fourth, the war revitalised the debates about the purpose of armed forces in European societies having pacifist attitudes and offered a clear window of opportunity for the decision-makers to justify the need for defence spending and explain the importance of such sensitive topics as nuclear deterrence, arms exports, and others for maintaining international security. It goes without saying that these developments mostly correspond to the small states' national security interests presented in the case studies. If such processes continue, the EU will strengthen its resilience *vis-à-vis* Russia, while its national military forces will grow stronger, reinforcing the European pillar of NATO.

The archaeology of ESA suggests that the concept might take different shapes as small and powerful countries alike will try to advance their national interests, but the need for collective security and defence instruments will remain. Living in the shadow of power, the small states will rely on those states and organisations that possess sufficient capabilities and inspire trustworthiness. The transatlantic community hangs together because all other alternatives are worse, and for most EU member states, their military security is best ensured by NATO, while the EU is best at providing additional sources of security. It seems that such division of labour largely serves the national interests of most EU's small members, and it is here to stay for the years to come.

Notes

- 1 The Ukraine support tracker developed by Kiel Institute for the World Economy offers a timely and objective empirical insight on the military, humanitarian, financial and other support to Ukraine (please see: Antezza et al., 2022).
- 2 With the establishment of 100 billion euros defence fund, Germany aims to rebuild its military strength. However, the initial budgetary planning indicates that the funds might dry-up as early as 2025–2026, making the further rearmament process of the Bundeswehr uncertain at the moment of writing (please see: Mölling & Schütz, 2022; Deutscher Bundestag, 2022).

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