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The Quest for European Strategic Autonomy Can the European Union overcome political and industrial fragmentation amongst its Member States?

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Introduction

The European Union is currently undergoing times of profound conceptual transformation. This transformation has its roots in the recent past, as it started in 2019 when the newly elected President of the European Commission Ursula Von der Leyen made a speech enunciating a qualitative shift in the work of the European Commission. In that speech, Von der Leyen stated that she had a Geopolitical Commission in mind, one that would be engaged in the world as a positive power capable to bring peace in the global order. In addition, in 2020 the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and Vice-President of the Commission of the European Union Josep Borrell declared in front of the European Parliament that the European Union "must learn the language of power" and not only rely on soft power. In fact, the EU was born as a regulatory power dealing with economic affairs falling under its Single Market. As it will be argued, it evolved over time and started to gradually address hard power matters. Several international developments led those two European institutional figures to embrace such approach. Among those, there is the renewed aggression of Russia in Eastern Europe, the withdrawal of the United Kingdom from the European Union and the deterioration of transatlantic relations under the presidency of Donald Trump.

This shift in the understanding of the duties of the European Union entails the centrality of a concept that is central to the present work: European Strategic Autonomy. This dissertation defines European Strategic Autonomy as the European Union's ability to define its priorities and to implement them in cooperation with others, when possible, and on its own, when necessary. It is conceptualized as a continuum rather than a dichotomy, as something to. achieve gradually. Furthermore, it is not an end in itself. On the contrary, it is a mean to reach multiple, interlinked, objectives that essentially have to do with the ability of the European Union to make his own choices and implement them in order to exert its influence on the global stage and reduce dependencies on third countries. This work seeks to clarify the meaning of European Strategic Autonomy and to analyse the dynamics behind it, trying to unveil the elements it is composed by and the obstacles to the achievement of a greater degree of it. In doing so, this work aims at answering the following research question:

RQ: is a noticeable degree of strategic autonomy achievable in a short to medium term?

In order to operationalize this research question, a noticeable degree of strategic autonomy is considered to be achieved with any initiative successfully managing to enhance cooperation and integration between Member States in the field of the defence, be it under a political or industrial point of view. For example, the Permanent Structured Cooperation launched in 2017 is considered to be such an initiative, as it allows Member States to develop common weapons systems thus enhancing

the interoperability and standardization of capabilities and standards. Another example is represented by the European Defence Industry Reinforcement through common Procurement Act, an initiative by the European Commission to allocate €500 million of EU budget over the period ranging from 2022 to 2024 to reinforce European defence industrial capacities through common procurement, aiming at addressing Ukraine's most urgent and critical needs resulting from the ongoing conflict with Russia. The temporal framework in which to achieve this greater degree of strategic autonomy is a more shifting element. We will probably need to wait decades to witness a completely self-sufficient and independent Union, if it happens at all. However, as the research question does not aims at assessing the possibility of full-fledged autonomy, the short period is defined as the end of the War in Ukraine, while the medium one is 2027, the final year of the current Multiannual Financial Framework financing relevant instruments as the European Defence Fund. The research question will be answered in the conclusion of this dissertation.

The choice of placing this temporal constraint is due to the fact that we are currently witnessing a critical juncture. The Russian invasion of Ukraine of February 24, 2022, has acted as a wake up call for European countries, which found themselves obliged to provide assistance to Ukraine in order to secure their eastern flank. This is a unique opportunity to make significant steps toward the achievement of a greater degree of strategic autonomy. Arguably, should Member States miss this opportunity and not capitalize on the season of greater defence spending began with the war, the whole European experiment will lose credibility and the project of a more active and independent European Union in the field of security and defence will crumble.

This work is divided into three chapters, each one divided in turn into three section except the last one which is divided into two. The first chapter, titled "History of European Defence" will reconstruct the history European defence since the Second World War until today. It will show how and why the United States became the main security provider for European countries after the war and how this feature survives even today. It will also present the European Defence Community, the most ambitious attempt to European integration in the field of defence. After its failure, a period of stagnation where Member States stopped pursuing greater integration in security and defence started. Then, thanks to political will of the two most relevant countries in terms of both political and military clout, namely France and the United Kingdom, new initiatives gave new life to the project of pursuing greater defence integration. This momentum determined a series of reforms in the European Union, which led to the current treaty arrangement.

The second chapter, titled "Framing European Strategic Autonomy" is the most relevant one. Its first section will provide a useful guidance in the debate regarding European Strategic Autonomy

that, as it will emerge, is a contested concept which does not have a single definition and there is no agreement on the elements it is composed of. In order to solve this conceptual conundrum, it will provide a new conceptualization of the concept which takes into account the two most important elements that strategic autonomy depends on: the political will of Member States and the capabilities at their disposal. Then, in the second section, the chapter will discuss the tools available to Member States to pursue strategic autonomy within the European Union framework. It will mainly looking at instruments that allow Member States to better integrate their capabilities, as the industrial component of strategic autonomy is the one which provides more ground for cooperation. On the other hand, the last section will look at the obstacles that hinder the achievement of a greater degree of strategic autonomy. It will be argued that divergent strategic cultures and defence-industrial fragmentation are the main obstacles toward greater integration in the field of defence.

The last chapter, titled "The Way Forward", will deal with the most relevant international developments and tries to make predictions about their impact on European Strategic Autonomy. It will argue that the two most impactful international events we are currently witnessing are the war in Ukraine and Sino-American competition. Regarding the Ukrainian war, it will explain why it is a critical juncture and how Member States can take advantage of it in order to boost European Strategic Autonomy. However, it argues that the war in itself is not enough to boost capabilities and generate an alignment of strategic cultures. In fact, Member States will have to commit to the cause and seize the opportunity. Otherwise, greater national defence spending will fall into a void. Regarding Sino-American competition, the chapter analyses its dynamics and it will argue that European Strategic Autonomy will also allow the European Union to not being crushed in the clash between the two superpowers. The Union has dependencies on both countries that cannot be eliminated from day to night. However, thanks to strategic autonomy, it will be able to it will be able to not entirely constitute an object in their relationship. On the contrary, it is predicted that if the European Union manages to achieve a significant degree of strategic autonomy in the future, it will constitute both a subject and a object in the framework of Sino-American competition.

History of European Security and Defence

1.1. The post World War II era and first attempts towards Common Defence

World War II left the European continent ravaged under both a material and socio-political point of view. Indicative of the degree of devastation brought by the War is the 1941 Britannica Book of the Year[1] account of the destruction of historical buildings in London following "The Blitz", the 1940 German bombing campaign against the United Kingdom. The more than one hundred buildings reported are a partial, but significative, picture. Beside material wreckage, but inherently linked to it, two subsequent World Wars showed how fragile European societies were and how easily political actors could exploit their weaknesses. Thus, the main effort after World War II regarded building resilient democracies which would not succumb under the structural flaws of this form of government which, among other factors, led to war[2].

Eventually, European countries managed to recover and gave birth to arguably the most successful integration experiment ever known: the European Union. However, the path has not been simple, and they did not achieve these objectives by themselves. The United States of America played a fundamental role in the making of contemporary Europe. The European Recovery Plan, also known as the Marshall Plan, represents the most direct American economic intervention in the continent. Lasted for a period of three years, from 1948 to 1951, the Marshall Plan consisted of direct economic aid to European countries to rebuild their economies. Quite modest in the quantity of the aids, amounting to about 135 billion in 2018 dollars[3], it did not help rebuilding European economies from scratch, as they were already showing symptoms of recovery in the first post war years[4]. On the contrary, it worked more as a stimulus to support those first signs of growth, allowing European countries to focus on rebuilding their democratic base.

Yet, the Marshall Plan also served other purposes. Firstly, through the capitals transfused in Europe, the United States ensured that European countries were wealthy enough to buy American goods without increasing the massive dollar deficit which characterized their economies[5]. Secondly and more importantly, the Marshall Plan was one of the instruments the United States deployed in

[1] Yust, W., 1941. *Britannica Book of the Year: a Record of the March of Events of 1941*. I ed. London: Encyclopaedia Britannica.
[2] For an analysis of the flaws of European democracies, and their overcoming after the Second World War, see Maier, C. S., 1981. The Two Postwar Eras and the Conditions for Stability in Twentieth-Century Western Europe. *The American Historical Review*, 86(2), pp. 327-352.
[3] Steil, B. & Della Rocca, B., 2018. *It Takes More Than Money to Make a Marhsall Plan*. [Online]
Available at: https://www.cfr.org/blog/it-takes-more-money-make-marshall-plan
[Accessed 25 October 2022].
[4] Tarnoff, C., 2018. *The Marshall Plan: Design, Accomplishment, and Significance*, p. 2. [Online]
Available at: https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/RL/97-62/3#:~:text=The%20Plan%20had%20contributed%20to,U.S.%20trade%20with%20Europe%20boosted
[Accessed 25 10 2022].
[5] *Ibidem.*

Europe to shield the continent from the threat coming from the other side of the iron curtain: the Soviet Union. History is well known. Inspired by Truman Doctrine, the United States pledged their commitment to the security of democracies threatened by the spectre of communism. With Eastern Europe already under Soviet influence, the Marshall Plan ensured that Western European economies were strong enough not to fall under Soviet influence, also considering the strength communist parties were gaining in the first post war decade.

In order to further ensure the defence of Western Europe from the influence of the Soviet Union, the United States has devised and then contributed to the establishment of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, also known as NATO[6]. The organization came to life on April 4, 1949, with the signing of the North Atlantic Treaty. From that date, NATO provides States party with a common security framework characterized by a mutual defence clause, which allows NATO members to respond to an armed attack carried out against another State party either in Europe or North America, in exercise of the right of individual or collective self-defence recognised by Article 51 of the Charter of the United Nations. The founding of NATO cemented the division of the European continent into spheres of influence, a process which has been completed with the establishment of NATO counterpart, the Treaty of Friendship, by the Soviet Union in 1955. This brief overview of the division of Europe after World War II shows how the United States turned into a security provider for Western Europe through economic aids and a pervasive political and military[7] presence, thus creating a transatlantic bloc ideologically opposed to the Soviet one.

Nevertheless, analysing the dynamics of the Cold War and how American commitment to Western Europe evolved over time throughout its different stages is not the focus of this work. However, it is useful to highlight that the United States did not invest that amount of material resources in a surge of altruism towards its transatlantic allies. On the contrary, they had a precise strategic interest in denying the Soviet Union in Western Europe. In fact, allowing the Soviet Union to expand its influence in that part of the continent would lead to an increase in American defence spending, since the Soviet Union would be able to exploit Western European resources thus increasing its military capabilities[8]. Furthermore, as Western Europe progressively managed to

[6] President Truman once defined the Marshall Plan and NATO "two halves of the same walnut", implying both contributed to stability and security in Europe.
[7] The number of United States military personnel allocated in Europe touched an all time high in 1957, amounting to 430,643. Since the end of the Cold War, that number has progressively decreased. For reference, see Statista Research Department, 2022. *Number of United States military personnel in Europe from 1950 to 2021*. [Online] Available at: https://www.statista.com/statistics/1294309/us-troops-europe/
[8] Williams, P., 1983. The United States' Commitment to Western Europe: Strategic Ambiguity and Political Disintegration? *Royal Institute of International Affairs*, 59(2), pp. 195-209.

recover from World War II, its dependency from the United States turned into interdependence and it became one of the major markets for American goods[9].

Despite the aforementioned American interest in Western European security and stability, the United States has not always been satisfied with the degree of commitment and collaboration of Western European countries. Soon after the start of the Cold War, the United States realized that Western Europe was not the only area threatened by the risk of a conflict with the communists. In fact, in 1950, war entered the Korean peninsula. It was the first military confrontation stemming from the dynamics of the Cold War and directly traceable back to great power competition. According to an agreement between the Allies at the end of World War II, Korea was divided along the 38th parallel, thus ending 35 years of Japanese occupation. After the division, the United States supported the nationalist southern government, while a communist regime led by Kim Il Sung governed the northern part of the country. After a series of border incidents, and in an environment of growing tension due to both parties claiming sovereignty over the whole territory[10], the North Korean army, funded by the Soviet Union, crossed the 38th parallel and invaded South Korea. In response to that, the United States deployed in the peninsula a large number of troops which pushed back the North Korean army and crossed the border in the process. At this point, Mao's China sent several volunteers which helped freeing North Korea from American troops. In 1953, the parties agreed to restore the previous situation and to return to the pre-war border.

The Korean War had deep consequences on transatlantic relations and European defence. The United States realized proxy wars could emerge in any corner of the globe, thus requiring them to step up their effort in containing the communist advance. The two superpowers were in the middle of a challenge consisting in bringing as many countries as possible under their respective sphere of influence. In this context, the major consequence regarding transatlantic relations was the United States calling for a major contribution to collective defence, at least in their neighbourhood, from their Western European allies[11]. A seemingly simple request, which in turn had far from simple implications. In fact, every request for a more autonomous Western Europe in the field of security and defence inherently entailed West Germany's rearmament. At the time, West Germany's rearmament was a controversial topic since the memories of two World Wars, both caused by

[9] Lundestad, G., 1986. Empire by Invitation? The United States and Western Europe, 1945-1952. *Journal of Peace Research*, 23(3), pp. 263-277.
[10] Sabatucci, G. & Vidotto, V., 2008. *Storia Contemporanea. Il Novecento*. XVIII ed. Bari: Laterza, p. 228.
[11] Imlay, T. C., 2017. *The Practice of Socialist Internationalism: European Socialists and International Politics, 1914-1960*. I ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press, p. 365.

Germany, were still vivid in European countries which, for this reason, were anxious about the idea of rearmament just a few years after the end of World War II.

The first attempts to reconcile Western European anxiety with the United States request for Germany's rearmament did not take long to appear. On May 9, 1950, the French Foreign Affairs Minister, Robert Schuman, issued, on behalf of the French Government, what became known as the Schuman Declaration. Supported and endorsed by Jean Monnet, then General Commissioner of the French National Planning Board, the Declaration called for the pooling of the French and German coal and steel production under one single authority. The idea behind the Declaration was that, by integrating those two key industries of the two main actors of the two World Wars, it would reduce the possibility of a future war between the two and in Western Europe. Eventually, in 1952, France, Germany, Italy, Belgium, Luxembourg, and the Netherlands signed the Treaty of Paris setting up the European Coal and Steel Community, marking the first experiment at European integration.

The European Coal and Steel Community did not contain any provision about European defence. As argued in the introduction, the European Union was born as a "civilian power", dealing with economics and not with "hard power" related matters. However, in the first half of the 1950s, one of the most ambitious attempts at pursuing European integration in the field of defence developed in parallel with the changes that led to the establishment of the European Coal and Steel Community. In fact, in the late 1950s, just a few months after the Schuman Declaration, the French Prime Minister Rene Pleven submitted to the National Assembly the so called Pleven Plan[12].

Despite the text[13] of the Pleven Plan being rather vague, as it does not thoroughly state how to achieve its ambitious objective, it successfully manages to convey the idea behind it. The Plan proposed «the creation, for the purposes of common defence, of a European army tied to the political institutions of a united Europe». The Plan initially envisaged the European army being composed of 100.000 units. Each country would equally contribute to that number, including West Germany. Recognizing that common tasks can only be addressed by common institutions, Pleven advanced the establishment of a European Minister of Defence appointed by the governments of the Member States that would be accountable to the latter and to a European Assembly. However, the army would be placed under the supreme command of NATO.

[12] Journal officiel de la République française. Débats Parlementaires. Assemblée nationale. 10.1950. Paris: Imprimerie nationale. "Déclaration du Gouverneur français René Pleven le 24 octobre 1950", p. 7118-7119.
[13] Available at: http://www.cvce.eu/obj/statement_by_rene_pleven_on_the_establishment_of_a_european_army_24_october_1950-en-4a3f4499-daf1-44c1-b313-212b31cad878.html

The European Minister of Defence would be tasked with similar duties as every national Minister of Defence and, in particular, would be responsible for the implementation of the directives issued by a hypothetical Council made of Member States Ministers'. The European army would be financed by a common budget and once a participating country armed forces are incorporated in the European army, they cannot be used by their national State anymore. In fact, the wording of the Plan is the following: «the European Minister for Defence could, with the authorisation of the Council of Ministers, place back at the disposal of a member government a part of its national forces forming part of the European force in order to meet requirements other than those of common defence». Thus, the Pleven Plan entailed an almost total surrender of the sovereignty of Member States in the field of defence.

As already argued, the Pleven Plan was inherently linked to the issue of Germany's rearmament. Thus, it is at least surprising that the proposal of a European army including Germany came from France so soon after the last clash between the two countries. This element further shows the degree of European dependency from the United States. In fact, France was surely not a supporter of Germany's rearmament. However, it could not influence the debate on whether the rearmament would happen, as the United States imposed its view on his European allies to counter the growing Soviet threat[14]. Therefore, France focused its efforts on influencing the modality of the rearmament. With the Pleven Plan, France pursued the least-worst option: if German rearmament was inevitable, it would only happen within the framework of a European Army[15].

The Pleven Plan paved the way for the creation of the European Defence Community (EDC), the first structured attempt at European integration in the field of defence. Negotiations to build the EDC began in February 1951 between the six countries of the European Coal and Steel Community and eventually ended in May 1952 with the signing of the Treaty Establishing the European Defence Community[16]. Eisenhower, then NATO's Supreme Allied Commander Europe (SACEUR), considered the EDC project as a successful mean to maximize European military capability, and the United Kingdom eventually agreed to the program despite its initial scepticism[17].

As will be shortly argued, the European Defence Community did not come to life. However, it is useful to highlight its main characteristics. The EDC was a collective defence supranational

[14] Martin, L., 1963. The American Decision to Rearm Germany. In: H. Stein, ed. *American Civil-Military Decisions: A Book of Case Studies*. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press.
[15] Kanter, A., 1970. The European Defense Community in the French National Assembly: A Roll Call Analysis. *Comparative Politics*, 2(2), pp. 203-228.
[16] Available at: https://aei.pitt.edu/5201/1/5201.pdf
[17] European Defence Agency. *Our History*. [Online]
Available at: https://eda.europa.eu/our-history/our-history.html

organization assimilable to NATO regarding this main task. However, by comparing article 5 NATO with article 2 EDC, it can be seen how article 2 EDC has a more far-reaching scope as the action it prescribes cannot be subject to reservations. The only limitation the EDC mutual defence clause is subject to is a geographical one, since the envisaged European Defence Forces could only respond to attacks carried out on the territory of EDC Member States. Here a potential problem could have arisen since Member States were not allowed to recruit or maintain national armed forces outside the ones in the European Defence Forces. Article 10, however, states that Member States can recruit and maintain national armed forces «intended for use in the non-European territories with respect to which they assume defence responsibilities, as well as units stationed in their countries which are required for the maintenance of these forces and for their relief» and when «required for international missions assumed by them in Berlin, in Austria or by virtue of a decision of the United Nations».

The EDC was composed of four main institutions: The Board of Commissioners, the Council, the Court, and the Assembly. The Board of Commissioners was the main EDC supranational institution and the only body not shared with another organization. It had administrative and executive powers and, to exercise them, it was able to emanate: Decisions, which were entirely binding; Recommendations, which granted discretionary powers to the Member States on how to achieve the objectives they laid down; and Opinions, which were not binding. Beside the Board of Commissioner, the Council, which was the Council of the European Coal and Steel Community, was the other legislative organ. Differently from the Board of Commissioner, the Council was an exclusively intergovernmental body. According to article 39 EDC, its main duty was to coordinate the Board of Commissioners' acts with the national governments' policies. As almost any other intergovernmental organ, the Council could take decisions by simple majority, qualified majority, and unanimity. In order to better distinguish between the functions of these two organs, it is useful to highlight that The Council was only supposed to deal with the more political choices. The Council's role decreases in favour of the Board of Commissioners when a decision becomes more administrative and less political[18].

For the purpose of this work, the Assembly and the Court represented less relevant bodies. They were both borrowed from the European Coal and Steel Community, a further indicator of the connection between the latter and the EDC, and thus of the linkage between the European integration process and the Community. The indirectly elected Assembly was by far the weakest organ. It could not issue binding decisions and it could not nominate the members of the Board of Commissioners.

[18] Trybus, M., 2007. The Vision of the European Defence Community and a Common Defence for the European Union. In: M. Trybus & N. White, eds. *European Security Law*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 13-42.

Consequently, the EDC would have suffered a democratic deficit. The Court held the classical powers of a supranational court, namely authority over the interpretation of the EDC Treaty and secondary legislation and it could review appeals by the Member States, the Council or the Assembly against the Board of Commissioners' Decisions or Recommendations. Noticeably, there was no possibility for an individual claim before the Court.

A further interesting element of the European Defence Community was its relationship with NATO. Article 5 laid down a general principle of cooperation, as it provided that «The Community shall cooperate closely with the North Atlantic Treaty Organization». Alongside this general principle of cooperation, there were other several provisions regulating specific aspects of cooperation. Generally speaking, those specific provisions aimed at fostering interoperability between the two organizations. Finally, the main point of contact between NATO and the EDC was the SACEUR, which according to article 18 EDC «shall […] be empowered to satisfy himself that the European Defence Forces are organized, equipped, trained and prepared for use in a satisfactory manner». In other words, the SACEUR would ensure the quality of the European Defence Force and would be appropriate to carry out their demanding tasks.

As anticipated above, the EDC project failed. To enter into force, the treaty had to be signed by the parliaments of the participant States. Four out of the six initial members of the EDC ratified the treaty swiftly. In 1954, a strong ideological conflict afflicted the French political debate[19]. The magnitude of the debate was so large that Italy, despite being ready to ratify the treaty, waited to see how the events in France would unfold[20]. On August 30, 1954, the EDC was brought to vote after only two debates. Then, the majority of the National Assembly passed a motion to postpone the discussion, a procedural institute which marked the *de facto* failure of the EDC through a non-substantive vote and without a proper discussion[21].

[19] For a reconstruction of that debate, see H., G. L., 1952. The European Defence Community. *The World Today*, 8(6), pp. 236-248.
[20] Centre virtuel de la connaissance sur l'Europe, 2013. *The refusal to ratify the EDC Treaty*. [Online] Available at: https://www.cvce.eu/en/education/unit-content/-/unit/803b2430-7d1c-4e7b-9101-47415702fc8e/c23dd653-ba51-4f7e-9bf1-2c33b347d339 [Accessed 03 11 2022].
[21] Kanter, A., 1970. The European Defense Community in the French National Assembly: A Roll Call Analysis, p. 206.

1.2. European Defence after the failure of the EDC and the end of the Cold War

The non-ratification of the EDC Treaty by France and, consequently, Italy, gave a devastating blow to the project of European integration in the field of defence. After the failure of the EDC, European countries started to explore different paths of integration, with mixed results. As it will be argued, no initiative has ever matched the degree of integration envisaged by the EDC. On the contrary, those institutions and agreements did not live up to their original objective and, those that did, were quite modest in scope or took place outside of European institutions and thus outside of the European integration process. The aim of this paragraph is to analyse those initiatives in order to show how, after the failure of the European Defence Community, the process of European integration in the field of defence did not produce meaningful results until the establishment of the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) by the Maastricht Treaty in 1992.

Despite the failure of the EDC, European countries did not give up their goal of integration in the field of defence and security and they utilized a previous agreement to make a further attempt, although less ambitious and outside Communitarian institutions. Shortly after the French Parliament postponed the vote to ratify the EDC Treaty thus making it fail, the 1948 Treaty of Brussels, a defensive treaty between France, the United Kingdom, Belgium, Luxembourg and the Netherlands aimed at preventing a new German aggression by, as stated in the preamble, taking «such steps as may be held to be necessary in the event of a renewal by Germany of a policy of aggression»[22], was modified in order to allow for Federal German Republic and Italian access, giving birth to the Western European Union (WEU). In turn, the Treaty of Brussels already modified the 1947 Treaty of Alliance and Mutual Assistance which was a defensive bilateral treaty between France and the United Kingdom.

The Paris Agreements, this was the name of the treaty and the protocols establishing the Western European Union as an international organization in 1954, also dealt with the most pressing issue of the time, namely Germany's rearmament. With the failure of the EDC, the idea of a German rearmament within the framework of a European army also failed. However, it was impossible to envisage any Western European common commitment in the field of defence without German involvement for the reasons already discussed above. Thus, with less difficulties and less ideological debates than the years before the EDC Treaty, the Paris agreement allowed Germany to have its own army under its control, although it could not manufacture or acquire weapons of mass destruction,

[22] The text of the treaty is available here: https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_17072.htm.

and ended its foreign occupation[23]. France's major fear, that is Germany being capable to build its own army after only ten years after the end of the War, became reality and it was France's fault due to its refusal to ratify the EDC Treaty which, at least, would have integrated the German army within a European framework. Finally, the Federal Republic of Germany joined NATO in 1955, which triggered the establishment of the Warsaw Pact by the Soviet Union as a response.

Here, a paradox arises. As stated above, the original purpose of the Brussels Treaty was to create a mutual defence agreement between Western European countries in order to contrast a potential German aggression. However, with the Paris Agreement, Germany is granted access to the same organization born out of the necessity to build a common defence framework against it. Thus, the very birth of the WEU deprives it of its initial *raison d'être*. Surely, German rearmament was kept in check by its contemporary membership to NATO. However, the WEU was only left with a residual objective, which was allowing the functioning of NATO in Europe[24]. The newly established European military arm was born ideologically ill and that is reflected in the marginal role it played throughout the Cold War.

Despite the establishment of the WEU, European security during the Cold War was still in the hands of the United States and NATO. Beside the already discussed ideological flaws, other explanations lay in the text of the 1954 modified Brussels Treaty[25], which established a close link with NATO. As stated by article 4, The Supreme Allied Commander Europe, of which WEU was an integral component, wielded most of the military authority. Integration of independent national armed forces thus happened at NATO level, and WEU Protocol n. III on the Control of Armaments only provided for supervised, and not integrated, arms production. Furthermore, the WEU suffered the risk of duplication with other international organizations in fields not strictly related to defence, namely the Organisation for European Economic Cooperation (OEEC), the Council of Europe, and the European Political Cooperation after his emergence in 1970[26]. This led the participating States to insert, in article 1, another clause similar to the one in article 4 stating that cooperation in the economic

[23] Centre virtuel de la connaissance sur l'Europe, 2016. *The Establishment of the Western European Union (WEU)*. [Online]
Available at: https://www.cvce.eu/en/education/unit-content/-/unit/803b2430-7d1c-4e7b-9101-47415702fc8e/6d9db05c-1e8c-487a-a6bc-ff25cf1681e0
[24] Siousiouras, P. & Nikitakos, N., 2006. European Integration, the Contribution of the Western European Union. *European Research Studies Journal*, 9(1-2), pp. 113-124.
[25] Available at: https://www.cvce.eu/en/obj/modified_brussels_treaty_paris_23_october_1954-en-7d182408-0ff6-432e-b793-0d1065ebe695.html.
[26] Historical Archives of the European Union, *Assembly of the Western European Union*. [Online]
Available at: https://archives.eui.eu/en/isaar/121

and political fields should proceed avoiding duplication and without prejudice to the work of other organizations which Member States may be represented in.

The WEU limited scope and intergovernmental character is reflected in its institutional arrangement, which is simpler that the EDC one. Being based on cooperation rather than supranational integration, the WEU had no organ such as the Board of Commissioners, the Assembly or the Court of Justice. Instead, it is only comprised of a Council resembling the one of the EDC, an Agency for the Control for Armaments and a largely disregarded Assembly. The Council is the only decision-making organ and it can exercise its powers through simple majority, qualified majority and unanimity. Since the organization lacks a common budget, every vote has the same weight and every State has the same rights[27]. Naturally, the more sensible the issue at stake, the more burdensome the voting procedure. For example, the Council could decide by simple majority the strategic weapons stationed on the European territory, while applying changes to the number of internal defence forces or admitting new members required unanimity.

The Agency for the Control of Armaments was the body tasked with monitoring the level of stocked armaments by the Member States, thus enforcing the prohibition of stockpiling of strategic weapons against the Federal Republic of Germany. The Agency was subject to the authority of the Council, which addressed matters submitted by the Agency by simple majority vote. Hence, no Member State object of the Agency's control powers could muster the Council decision's regarding its infractions. However, the job of the Agency was seriously undermined by the fact that, under the Paris Agreements, no sanction could be imposed upon a State infringing its obligations. Consequently, this lack of enforcements measures made the implementation of any decision rely on the political will of the interested State. Coming to the Assembly, its powers, or rather the lack thereof, further testified for the intergovernmental character of the WEU. In fact, as it will be argued below, the Assembly has only acted as a forum of discussion. Finally, the lack of a supranational court implied that Member States had to solve controversies through diplomatic means or by referring to the Court of Justice, should it be conferred competence by the interested States.

The dependence from NATO in the field of defence and from other organizations in different, but related, fields and being characterized by unimpactful intergovernmental institutions resulted in an increasing marginalization of the WEU in its first thirty years of activity. In fact, in those years it mainly worked as a forum of discussions regarding the most pressing issues related to defence of the

[27] Bebr, G., 1955. The European Defence Community and the Western European Union: An Agonizing Dilemma. *Stanford Law Review*, 7(2), pp. 169-236.

time, such as the presence of nuclear armaments on the European territory[28]. Another element showing the irrelevance of the Western European Union is that, until 1993, it did not have its own military staff, except for a small number of officers in the Agency for the Control of Armaments[29]. On the other hand, a merit of the intergovernmental organization has been fostering European integration. In fact, even though it was largely irrelevant with regards to its initial objective, which was being the military arm of Western Europe, it acted as a bridge between the latter and the United Kingdom playing a role as a mediator in its access to the European Economic Community in 1973[30]. Furthermore, the integration of the United Kingdom into the project acted as a security guarantee for France against German rearmament, as the former would compensate the military and political influence of the latter.

To compensate for the weakness and limited scope of the WEU, Member States established a number of bilateral and multilateral agreements outside of its framework. In particular, in 1963 France and Germany signed the Elysée Treaty[31], a bilateral agreement aiming at, among other objectives, fostering cooperation in the armament's domain. The brief treaty did not contain specific provisions or duties except for the general commitment by both countries to harmonize their doctrines in the fields of security and defence by holding periodical meetings between the respective Ministers of Defence. In 1998, the treaty has been utilized as a legal basis for the establishment of the Franco-German Defence and Security Council, a permanent forum of discussion regarding the most pressing security and defence issues. However, in the 35 years preceding the institution of the Council, the Elysée Treaty did not produce meaningful results. On the contrary, it represented more a first step towards Franco-German reconciliation rather than a move towards integration, also because when Germany ratified the treaty it inserted a preamble confirming West Germany Atlanticist stance to the detriment of De Gaulle's Europeanist preference[32].

In 1976, European countries took a new initiative, this time with a multilateral character, by establishing the Independent European Program Group (IEPG). The Group was formed by all 13 NATO European members and was intended to serve as an international coordination organization with the primary goal of promoting cooperation in the acquisition of armaments. The IEPG was born

[28] European Defence Agency. *Our History*. [Online]
Available at: https://eda.europa.eu/our-history/our-history.html
[29] Roper, J., 1997. The Working Relationship between the EU, WEU and NATO. *Revista CIDOB d'Afers Internacionals*, 1(38-39), pp. 77-88.
[30] Siousiouras, P. & Nikitakos, N., 2006. European Integration, the Contribution of the Western European Union, p. 119.
[31] Available at: https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/natosource/text-of-the-elysee-treaty-joint-declaration-of-francogerman-friendship/.
[32] Bozo, F., 2020. The Sanctuary and the Glacis: France, the Federal Republic of Germany, and Nuclear Weapons in the 1980s (Part 1). *Journal of Cold War Studies*, 22(3), pp. 119-179.

after eight years of transatlantic debate on armaments standardization stemming from Czechoslovakia invasion in 1968 by the countries of the Warsaw Pact. As happened with the Korean crisis, following the invasion, the US asked its European allies a major commitment regarding its defence. The presence of US troops in Europe had, despite European fears, never been questioned, but now Washington was asking European countries to enhance their contribution in their neighbourhood. In turn, as shown by the previous initiatives, Europe already started to explore, although not with the best results, the political and economic benefits of cooperation, especially regarding production of armaments.

The main problem was that the United States and European countries, mainly France, had different solutions to the same problem. The United State was aiming to make its European commitment more economically efficient, thus pushing for complete standardization under American conditions, while France was striving for the construction of a purely European defence industry not subject to external interference in order to maintain its sovereignty, even at the cost of reduced economic efficiency and technological quality[33]. Since European defence integration could not, and still cannot, be pursued without France, the IEPG institutional arrangement had to accommodate its view at the expense of efficiency and unity. However, since European countries alone could not achieve a competitive and technological advanced defence industry, the focus was shifted from standardization to interoperability and the idea of a structural cooperation was abandoned in favour of case-by-case collaboration. Divergences among European countries and the imposition of the American doctrine of standardization sanctioned the failure of the IEPG, making it a more of a forum of discussion whose contribution towards its goals of strengthening the role of European allies within the transatlantic alliance, improving European technological base, and balancing the US-European trade deficit, was limited[34]. Finally, in 1992, the IEPG was absorbed by the Western European Union.

As already anticipated, under an operational standpoint the WEU spent its first thirty years of life without implementing any military activity. The organization obtained some relevance only in the late 1980s, when in 1987 was used as a mechanism to deploy a mine countermeasure force in the Persian Gulf in the Iran-Iraq war, thus overcoming the geographical limitations any NATO force would have suffered from, when during the Gulf War it enforced a naval embargo on Iraq and, finally,

[33] Kirby, S., 2008. THE INDEPENDENT EUROPEAN PROGRAMME GROUP: THE FAILURE OF LOW-PROFILE HIGH-POLITICS. *Journal of Common Market Studies*, 18(2), pp. 175-196.
[34] For a thorough analysis of the IEGP projects, see Brendley, K., Covington, T. G. & Chenoweth, M. E., 1987. A Review of European Arms Collaboration and Prospects for Its Expansion under the Independent European Program Group. *Rand Publication Series*.

in 1992 it implemented an embargo against former Yugoslavia[35]. It is worth noting that none of the abovementioned operational activities has been ideated and implemented by the WEU alone. On the contrary, the WEU either carried out those operations in collaboration with other organizations, namely NATO and OSCE, or implemented their decisions[36].

In the same period, the WEU had the merit of laying down what became known as the Petersberg Tasks. In June 1992, WEU Foreign and Defence Ministers met in Bonn in order to better define their relationship with the newly instituted European Union and with non WEU members, as well as to strengthen their operational capabilities. At the end of the meeting, a document named the Petersberg Declaration[37] was drafted. Part II, paragraph IV of the Declaration stated that, apart from contributing to the common defence mechanism provided for by art. 5 of the Washington Treaty and of the Modified Brussels Treaty, member of the WEU could, under the organization's authority, use their forces for humanitarian and rescue tasks, peace-keeping tasks, and tasks of combat forces in crisis management, including peace-making. However, the Petersberg Tasks followed the same disappointing pattern of other initiatives undertaken in that period. In fact, in the years following their establishment the WEU only implemented the Petersberg Tasks in the limited framework of civilian police activities, as in Mostar within the European Union administration of the city and in Albania[38].

While European countries were experimenting, with mixed results, different integration patterns in the field of defence, the world was changing. The major international development that verified is constituted by the end of the Cold War in 1991. With the defeat of the Soviet Union, the United States became the sole global superpower of the time, imposing its values and its norms on the international system, especially in the economic domain[39]. A major consequence of the end of the Cold War has been the collapse of the previous international security system based on bipolar superpower competition and opposing blocs. For the purposes of this work, the end of the Cold War had three relevant consequences: the disappearance of NATO initial and most fundamental *raison d'être*, namely the Soviet threat; the United States gradual disengagement from Europe, in favour of

[35] Missiroli, A., 2000. CFSP, Defence and Flexibility. *Institute for Security Studies: Chaillot Papers*, Issue 38, pp. 16-17
[36] *Ibidem.*
[37] Text of the declaration is available at: https://www.cvce.eu/content/publication/1999/1/1/16938094-bb79-41ff-951c-f6c7aae8a97a/publishable_en.pdf.
[38] Pagani, F., 1998. A New Gear in the CFSP Machinery: Integration of the Petersberg Tasks in the Treaty on European Union. *European Journal of International Law*, 9(4), pp. 737-749.
[39] For an account of how American values shaped the post-Cold War international system, see Katzenstein, P. J., 1997. Identities, Interests and Security: American-European Security Relations. *Amerikastudien / American Studies*, 42(1), pp. 25-34.

a renewed focus on domestic politics; and the emergence of regionalism as the new security focus. Clearly, these three consequences are inextricably linked to each other.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, many scholars and government officials on both shores of the Atlantic started to question the usefulness of NATO as, despite also being an alliance of shared values and economic interests, it was the presence of a common threat that held it together even during times of divergences, with the numerous crises occurred between the United States and European countries[40]. Eventually, the Alliance did not fade away and managed to adjust to the new emerging challenges, the analysis of which is beyond the scope of this study. It is however worth noting that, in the period immediately following the end of the Cold War, NATO adapted to the new international security environment shifting its focus from being an exclusively defensive organization to have a proactive role mainly through peacekeeping and military operations in different regions of the world, mainly the Middle East, North Africa and the Balkans[41]. However, its commitment to the stability of those areas, mainly of the Balkan region, must be framed within the United States will to support former Warsaw Pact countries in their democratic transition by filling the security vacuum left behind by the dissolution of the Soviet Union, rather than testifying a still strong and unconditional commitment to European security[42]. In fact, as outlined by the Tarnoff Doctrine, the economy was now the paramount focus of United States policies, which were not to be subordinated to foreign policy goals anymore, especially when the latter are an answer to the security concerns of Western European countries.

The security vacuum left by the Soviet Union also determined the initially unforeseen emergence of new security problems, largely linked to regions of the world wielding high potential for conflict. The receding commitment of the United States to scenarios it does not have a direct interest in is the product of this new security environment. Hence, the need for European countries to address the crises emerging in their neighbourhood without necessarily relying on American intervention[43]. Among those crises, the most relevant one, due to its consequences on European defence, has been the Bosnian conflict stemming from the dissolution of former Yugoslavia. At the

[40] Gordon, P. H., 1996. Recasting the Atlantic Alliance. *Survival: Global Politics and Strategy*, 38(1), pp. 32-57.
[41] North Atlantic Treaty Organization, 2022. *Operations and missions: past and present*. [Online]
Available at: https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_52060.htm
[Accessed 09 11 2022].
[42] Kistersky, L., New Dimensions of the International Security System After the Cold War, *Center for International Security and Cooperation: Working Papers*, pp. 14-16.
[43] Gnesotto, N., 1996. Common European defence and transatlantic relations. *Survival: Global Politics and Strategy*, 38(1), pp. 19-31.

dawn of the Yugoslav crisis, Jacques Poos, the Chair of the EC Foreign Affairs Council and Foreign Minister of Luxembourg, famously declared:

> This is the hour of Europe—not the hour of the Americans. […] If one problem can be solved by the Europeans, it is the Yugoslav problem. This is a European country and it is not up to the Americans. It is not up to anyone else.

As it will be argued in the following sections, he was sorely mistaken.

At the time of the explosion of the conflict, the European Community did not have any treaty-based instrument to carry out a military intervention. In fact, the conflict started in the midst of political negotiations regarding the Maastricht Treaty. In 1987 the Single European Act[44] amended the Treaty of Rome introducing, for the first time in primary law, a reference to security. However, this reference was rather limited. All the provisions regarding European security were contained in article 30(6), which stipulated that:

a) The High Contracting Parties consider that closer co-operation on questions of European security would contribute in an essential way to the development of a European identity in external policy matters. They are ready to coordinate their positions more closely on the political and economic aspects of security.
b) The High Contracting Parties are determined to maintain the technological and industrial conditions necessary for their security. They shall work to that end both at national level and, where appropriate, within the framework of the competent institutions and bodies.
c) Nothing in this Title shall impede closer co-operation in the field of security between certain of the High Contracting Parties within the framework of the Western European Union or the Atlantic Alliance.

The first noticeable element of these provisions is that Member States are defined as "High Contracting Parties", a formula normally attributed to States in traditional international treaties which is not used, however, in European documents. This wording is a clear reminder of the intergovernmental character of this particular policy field[45]. Furthermore, there is no reference to defence and reference to security is only made regarding its political economic aspects, without any reference to security policy. Generally speaking, the vague provisions of article 30(6) did not lay down any specific right or duty for Member States, which found themselves without any pressure to act. As it will be shortly argued, however, the more specific norms contained in the Maastricht Treaty did not lead to coordinated action during the Yugoslav crisis either. Thus, the lack of a comprehensive institutional framework is not the reason why European countries did not intervene.

[44] Available at: https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:11986U/TXT&from=EN.
[45] Koutrakos, P., 2013. *The EU Common Security and Defence Policy*. I ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press, p. 14.

In relation to its approach to the crisis in the Balkan region, the EC had been subject to criticism for its delayed response to the conflicts, lack of a shared political posture and, under an operational point of view, lack of military capabilities. The main political deadlock experience by European countries was related to the recognition of the independent republics created from the initial phase of former Yugoslavia's dissolution. In fact, after the partial success of the 1991 Troika diplomatic mission by the Italian, Dutch and Luxembourgish Foreign Ministers which made the Serbs leave Slovenia, the subsequent peace conference at The Hague did not produce positive results, as the twelve countries of the EC were divided on whether to intervene military or to recognize the Slovenia and Croatia[46]. Before asking for NATO intervention, they solved the conundrum with a sub-optimal compromise. Regarding recognition, they set up a timetable and conditions mainly linked to the respect of human rights, while, for what concerns military intervention, the European Union gave mandate to the WEU to enforce the already mentioned oil embargo through the deployment of 300 custom officers and 12 patrol boats[47].

After this weak response, a mortar attack stroke Sarajevo causing a high number of casualties and leaving the world under shock. This attack made the European Union and the United States realize that it was time for a stronger commitment, but again the EU did not speak with a single voice. In fact, even though the Contact Group on Bosnia intensified its efforts to reach a settlement of the conflict, France, the United Kingdom and Germany were the only European countries part of it. The remaining nine Member States did not manage to solve their divisions and thus did not participate in the negotiations. In parallel, NATO carried out air strikes and military operations against the Former Yugoslavian Army[48], commanded by Milosevic. Eventually, this combined effort paved the way for a peaceful settlement of the Bosnian war in 1995 at Dayton.

As already stated, when the conflict broke out, the then European Community had no treaty-based provision to carry out military operations. In fact, the Maastricht Treaty[49] has been signed in the midst of the Bosnian conflict, in 1992. However, despite the introduction of the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP), the new-born European Union found itself unable to intervene after the 1994 mortar attack that stroke Sarajevo. The reason why, even with a new institutional framework, European countries did not manage to play a role in the conflict is that, while on paper Title V Article

[46] Arikan, H., 2012. The European Union Policy towards the Balkan States in the Post-Cold War Era. *SDU Faculty of Arts and Science Journal of Social Sciences*, 2009(2), pp. 24-31.
[47] Anderson, S., 1995. EU, NATO, and CSCE responses to the Yugoslav crisis: Testing Europe's new security architecture. *European Security*, 4(2), pp. 328-353.
[48] For an account of the United States internal debate regarding involvement in the Bosnian War, see Larrabbee, S., 1994. Implications for Transatlantic Relations. In: M. Jopp, ed. *The Implication of the Yugoslav Crisis for Western Europe's Foreign Relations*. Brussels: Institute for Security Studies, pp. 14-24.
[49] Available at: https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex%3A11992M%2FTXT.

J of the Maastricht Treaty established CFSP, Member States hid in the text several provisions to impair the pursuit of common goals and objectives in the field, thus weakening the whole institutional infrastructure.

Article J.1(2) lays down the general objectives of CFSP, which are:

- Safeguard of the common values, fundamental interests and independence of the Union;
- Strengthening of the security of the Union and its Member States in all ways;
- Preserving peace and strengthening international security, in accordance with the principles of the United Nations Charter as well as the principles of the Helsinki Final Act and the objectives of the Paris Charter;
- Promotion of international cooperation;
- Development and consolidation of democracy and the rule of law, and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms.

Furthermore, article J.1(4) states that:

> The Member States shall support the Union's external and security policy actively and unreservedly in a spirit of loyalty and mutual solidarity. They shall refrain from any action which is contrary to the interests of the Union or likely to impair its effectiveness as a cohesive force in international relations. The Council shall ensure that these principles are complied with.

As it emerges from those provisions, it appears that Member States, in pursuing CFSP objectives, must direct their efforts towards the general interest of the Union in a spirit of loyalty and mutual solidarity, abstaining from any action that would be detrimental to said interest and objectives. In doing so, Member States even surrendered unanimity as a voting procedure, establishing a qualified majority vote for joint actions in areas in which they have a common interest. However, as article J.3 states, the decision to adopt qualified majority vote is subject to consensus. Hence, every country holds veto power. Furthermore, even if Member States decide to vote through qualified majority, they still have an exit strategy in article J.3(6) which contains an emergency clause that can be invoked in cases of "imperative need" allowing Member States to question qualified majority vote. With all the analysed loopholes characterizing the Maastricht Treaty, it does not surprise that the internal divisions between Member States during the Bosnian War led to a deadlock within the European Union.

Matters with defence implications are not governed by the aforementioned provisions. Article J.4 relates said issues to the Western European Union, which is considered to be «an integral part of the development of the Union»[50] with the power to elaborate and implement decisions and actions with defence implications. Even though article J.4 has the merit of mentioning for the first time the

[50] Article J.4(2)

word “defence” in European primary law, it is not done in a constructive and proactive way, since the rather vague wording of the provision does not define a specific policy direction to be taken in the area. In a similarly vague fashion, article J.4(1) states that CFSP includes the “eventual” framing of a common defence policy, which “might” lead to a common defence. Even in this case, the lack of a specific policy direction or specific responsibilities with regards to the WEU condemned the latter to have a purely ad-hoc character. In addition to that, the WEU lacked the military capacity to carry out military operations more complex than an embargo, due to lack of military staff and resources, with the latter problem exacerbated by the fact that, because of its ad-hoc character, Member States could decide the amount of funds to allocate towards defence within the WEU framework. Hence, as showed by the Yugoslav crisis, NATO was still the main security provider for Western Europe even for out-of-area crises, with WEU borrowing its assets in the best-case scenario[51].

As article J.4(6) provides, an Intergovernmental Conference started in 1996 with the objective of reviewing and refining provisions on common defence. The product of this Intergovernmental Conference has been the so called Amsterdam Treaty, which brought few but relevant modifications to Treaty on European Union in the field of defence. Firstly, it transferred the Petersberg Tasks from the WEU to the EU, thus integrating part of the functions of the former to the latter. This decision reflects the debate within the Intergovernmental Conference regarding the relation between the two organizations. In the end, a compromise has been found between who supported the gradual but total absorption of the WEU into the EU and who, on the contrary, supported the maintenance of the separation of the two[52]. Practically speaking, however, this transfer did not solve the aforementioned problems that afflicted the WEU.

Secondly, further negotiations within the Intergovernmental Conference related to the introduction of elements of flexibility in the three pillars in order to weaken the veto power Member States held thanks to the use of unanimity as a voting procedure. For instance, the Amsterdam Treaty introduced mechanisms of enhanced cooperation, which allowed willing Member States to pursue further integration, in the first pillar. However, in the final stages of the Intergovernmental Conference, Member States decided not to introduce mechanisms triggering flexibility in the second pillar, opting instead for constructive abstention. Arguably, Member States considered that, due to the very nature of CFSP, largely characterized by an ad-hoc approach to crises management, a specific

[51] Anderson, S., 1995. EU, NATO, and CSCE responses to the Yugoslav crisis: Testing Europe's new security architecture, pp. 338-339.
[52] Pagani, F., 1998. A New Gear in the CFSP Machinery: Integration of the Petersberg Tasks in the Treaty on European Union, p. 740.

flexibility clause was superfluous, if not detrimental[53]. Through constructive abstention, Member States could abstain from voting on a certain policy without impairing its advancements while, at the same time, recognizing that the decision bound the EU as a whole. Despite the good intentions behind constructive abstention, whose rationale lies in the fact of not allowing a single Member State to block initiatives of a numerous group, in a historical moment when Member States were struggling to leave a mark in international affairs and to speak with one voice, this mechanism of defection further undermined the credibility of European initiatives in the field of defence. In fact, it showed once more lack of internal cohesion. Finally, another drawback is represented by the fact that Member States are not all politically equal, and thus initiatives where countries like France, the United Kingdom or Germany abstained, would not be significant, if not an outright failure.

[53] Missiroli, A., 2000. CFSP, Defence and Flexibility. *Institute for Security Studies: Chaillot Papers*, p. 10.

1.3. The revival of European Defence

The Amsterdam Treaty entered into force in 1999. Just one year prior that date, France and Germany signed an important document which signalled the first step towards a more prominent role of the European Union in the field of security and defence. The St. Malo Declaration[54] was a bilateral document signed by the United Kingdom Prime Minister Tony Blair and the French President Jacques Chirac, where they concurred that the European Union must be given the ability to act independently and decisively, supported by credible military capabilities, in order to respond to global crises when NATO was not involved. In doing so, NATO assets would be taken into consideration to avoid costly duplication. Again, the impulse for reform of the European *acquis* came from the combined effort of two of the most politically and militarily relevant European countries, demonstrating once again that integration in this field could only proceed on an intergovernmental basis and through the involvement of these two fundamental actors.

If France had always advocated for a stronger European integration in the field of security defence, the same cannot be said for the United Kingdom, which held a more Atlanticist stance entailing a robust commitment to the security of Western Europe by the United States. However, with the St. Malo Declaration the United Kingdom gave up its traditional posture in favour of a partially Europeanist approach. The reasons behind this change are a combination internal and external elements: internally, the New Labour government was keen to show engagement and to transfer its leadership onto the European stage, a task at risk because of the marginalization the United Kingdom confined itself to due to the opt out from the monetary union and the Schengen Area; externally, Blair declared to be upset about Europe's continued military incapability over the Balkans[55]. In fact, in that period the Yugoslav war was witnessing a resurgence of hostilities due to the unfolding of the Kosovo crisis. As for the Bosnian one, European countries failed to play a meaningful role in its settlement.

The St. Malo Declaration generated political momentum that determined a renewed interest in CFSP, as showed by the greater attention attributed to this policy area by the Amsterdam Treaty just one year after it. Then, in 2001, the Nice Treaty has been ratified, but it did not add significant changes to the CFSP machinery. However, just ten months after the Nice Treaty, the European Council adopted the Laeken Declaration[56], which aimed at reforming it. The wording of the Declaration was rather broad, but it contained significant considerations on the international role of

[54] Available at: https://www.cvce.eu/content/publication/2008/3/31/f3cd16fb-fc37-4d52-936f-c8e9bc80f24f/publishable_en.pdf.
[55] Missiroli, A., 2000. CFSP, Defence and Flexibility. *Institute for Security Studies: Chaillot Papers*, p. 24-25.
[56] Available at: https://www.cvce.eu/content/publication/2002/9/26/a76801d5-4bf0-4483-9000-e6df94b07a55/publishable_en.pdf.

the Union, as well as on the need for simplification of the institutional arrangements and on the establishment of a European constitution. After the Laeken Declaration, an Intergovernmental Conference was set up in 2003 and led to the drafting of the Treaty Establishing a Constitution for Europe. In 2005, however, the Treaty was rejected through referendum by France and the Netherlands, mainly because of its constitutional character and the consequent constitutional elements attached to it. This development produced another Intergovernmental Conference in 2007, which led to the to the drafting of the Reform Treaty[57], also known as the Lisbon Treaty, which entered into force in December 2009. It is noteworthy that the provisions relating to security and defence remained mostly unchanged between the Treaty Establishing a Constitution for Europe and the Lisbon Treaty, attesting their large degree of approval by Member States[58].

The Treaty of Lisbon introduced important changes to the European Union. Generally speaking, it abolished the pillar structure introduced by the Maastricht Treaty giving thus birth to a unitary organization, at least on paper. Although eliminating the formal division into pillars, the EU is still composed of two souls: a supranational and an intergovernmental one. The division is reflected in the two different decision-making regimes institutionalized in Lisbon. The supranational Commission still have the monopoly on legislative initiative over issues comprised within the first pillar, with the European Parliament and the Council giving life to a perfect bicameralism. Moreover, the ECJ has total jurisdiction regarding those – legislative – acts. On the other hand, policies outside the single market are discussed and voted within intergovernmental institutions. The Common Foreign and Security Policy and the newly established Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) make no exception. In addition, as provided by article 24(1) TEU, CFSP is subject to specific rules and procedures that do not apply to other policy areas, outlining once more the distinctive nature of CFSP.

Contrarily to the previous treaties, which dedicated to CFSP just one article, the Lisbon Treaty reserves a whole section, Section 1 of Chapter 2 in Title V, to the topic. Furthermore, CSDP, which will be analysed after CFSP, is addressed in the subsequent Section 2. This already shows the increased importance given to security and defence, with the related provisions being much more detailed. Despite the specificity of the provisions relating to CFSP and CSDP, the TEU mixes in a single article the principle and objectives of all strands of the European Union external action. Article 21(1) TEU states that EU external action must be guided by:

[57] Available at: https://eur-lex.europa.eu/resource.html?uri=cellar:2bf140bf-a3f8-4ab2-b506-fd71826e6da6.0023.02/DOC_1&format=PDF.
[58] Koutrakos, P., 2013. *The EU Common Security and Defence Policy*, p. 24.

> the principles which have inspired its own creation, development and enlargement, and which it seeks to advance in the wider world: democracy, the rule of law, the universality and indivisibility of human rights and fundamental freedoms, respect for human dignity, the principles of equality and solidarity, and respect for the principles of the United Nations Charter and international law.

The objectives of the EU external action are listed shortly after, in article 21(2) TEU, and are:

a) safeguard its values, fundamental interests, security, independence and integrity;
b) consolidate and support democracy, the rule of law, human rights and the principles of international law;
c) preserve peace, prevent conflicts and strengthen international security, in accordance with the purposes and principles of the United Nations Charter, with the principles of the Helsinki Final Act and with the aims of the Charter of Paris, including those relating to external borders;
d) foster the sustainable economic, social and environmental development of developing countries, with the primary aim of eradicating poverty;
e) encourage the integration of all countries into the world economy, including through the progressive abolition of restrictions on international trade;
f) help develop international measures to preserve and improve the quality of the environment and the sustainable management of global natural resources, in order to ensure sustainable development;
g) assist populations, countries and regions confronting natural or man-made disasters; and
h) promote an international system based on stronger multilateral cooperation and good global governance.

As can be seen, the objectives laid down in the TEU are remarkably vague, especially with regards to CFSP. This reflects the distinctive nature of CFSP, largely dependent on the political will of the Member States which are tasked with adding content to the general provisions. Despite article 23 TEU stating that CFSP shall be guided by the abovementioned principles and objectives common to all strands of EU external action, article 24(1) subparagraph 2 underlines once more the distinct character of this policy field. In fact, it affirms that CFSP is subject to specific rules and procedures which are disjointed from the rules and procedures stemming from the division of competence between the European Union and the Member States[59]. Then, article 24(1) subparagraph 2 lays down the voting procedure for CFSP acts, namely unanimity, excludes the adoption of legislative acts and, consequently, rejects jurisdiction of the Court of Justice of the European Union except regarding the application of article 40 TEU and for CFSP acts adopted by the Council entailing restrictive measures against natural or legal persons[60].

CFSP instruments remained untouched in their content in the transition from the Nice Treaty to the Lisbon Treaty. What changed is their nomenclature. In fact, prior to the Lisbon Treaty, Member States could adopt operational acts named joint actions, acts defining the EU's stance on a specific

[59] Article 40 TEU.
[60] Article 275 TFEU.

geographical or thematic matter named common positions and acts dealings with issues and areas where the Member States have an important strategic interest named common strategies. After Lisbon, the instruments at disposal of the Union to conduct CFSP are: definition of general guidelines, decisions, and strengthening systematic cooperation between Member States in the conduct of policy[61]. As article 26 TEU provides, general guidelines are implemented by the Council which then, on their basis, adopts decisions. Decisions are divided into three types, which essentially resemble the previous arrangement. The first type of decision is one that defines actions to be undertaken by the Union. These are measures of operational character, similarly to joint actions. Then, under article 28 TEU, the Council defines the relevant objectives, scope and means. Secondly, there are decisions identifying positions to be taken by the Union on a specific matter. These measures do not require action by the Union as they apply the previously defined strategic guidelines to a particular issue, similarly to common positions. Lastly, there are decisions defining arrangements for the implementation of the first two types of decisions. Whether the new terminology, which does not bring any change in content, successfully conveys a simplified view of CFSP instruments is, at best, arguable.

Several political and administrative institutions are involved in CFSP decision making and implementation process. Article 22 TEU (1) attributes decision making power to the European Council, which can define the strategic interest and objectives of the Union. In doing so, it acts unanimously on recommendation of the Council. These kinds of acts are the former common strategies under the Maastricht legal arrangement. Furthermore, the need of the Union to speak with one voice is addressed with the establishment of the President of the European Council, whose duties are listed by article 15(6) TEU in a purposedly vague manner, thus allowing for the personality of the President to shape them. However, the President of the European Council is not the only figure responsible for external representation. In fact, the Lisbon Treaty establishes the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy (HR/VP), which is also the Vice President of the European Commission and President of the Foreign Affairs Council, and tasks it with international representation of the Union. Thus, these two institutional figures have to share the stage with the risk of, depending on their personal attitudes, jeopardising one or another in relation to this task.

The HR/VP has several other fundamental duties and responsibilities. Firstly, he is mandated with ensuring that Member States comply with the CFSP principle, namely loyalty, mutual solidarity, unity, consistency and efficiency[62]. Secondly, he holds executive powers as he is responsible for the

[61] Article 25 TEU.
[62] Article 24(3) TEU.

implementation of the decisions taken by the Council and the European Council[63]. Thirdly, he shares with Member States the right of initiative, as he can issue to the Council initiatives or proposals[64]. Fourthly, he is responsible for CFSP management. In particular, if a rapid decision has to be taken, he can convene an extraordinary Council meeting within 48 hours or a shorter period in case of emergency[65]. Then, he can propose to the Council the appointment of a special representative to a particular policy issue, with the latter fulfilling its mandate under the authority of the HR/VP[66]. Furthermore, within CSDP he is involved in the management of group of Member States willing to carry out CSDP missions[67] and he can propose to establish start-up funds financed by Member States'[68]. The HR/VP is aided in its tasks by the European External Action Service which liaise with the diplomatic corps of the Member States thus fostering a culture of cooperation between them.

The European Parliament and the European Commission have a marginal role. Regarding CSDP the European Parliament is not even mentioned in the treaties. Article 36 TEU only provides for a recommendation power in the hands of the Parliament in relation to CFSP, without the duty for either the Council or the HR/VP to follow up on that. Furthermore, the provision states that the HR/VP has to regularly consult the Parliament on the main aspect and choices relating to CFSP, with the latter that will hold twice a year a debate on the progresses made in the field. The Commission shares a common fate with the Parliament. In fact, as CFSP/CSDP acts do not have legislative character, it holds no powers. However, both the Parliament and the Commission have an indirect power of influence over those policy fields as they are both responsible for the implementation and approval of the Union's budget, which has a component relating to the financing of CFSP and CSDP activities.

With the European Commission out of the picture, the Council is the only decision-making body in this particular policy field. The decision-making procedure is rather simple. As already emerged from this analysis, the HR/VP and the Member States have the power to make a proposal to the Council, which then takes the consequent decisions unanimously. There are a few exceptions to the general rule of unanimity. According to article 31(2) TEU, the Council can act by qualified majority when adopting a decision implementing a previous Council decision taken by unanimity and relating to a Union's strategic interest, objective, action or position; when adopting a decision defining a Union action or position, on a proposal of the HR/VP following a specific request of the European Council; and when appointing special representatives. The same article recalls the

[63] Article 26(3) TEU.
[64] Article 30(1) TEU. The same holds true also for CSDP, as provided by article 42(4) TEU.
[65] Article 30(2) TEU.
[66] Article 33 TEU.
[67] Article 44(1) TEU.
[68] Article 41(3) TEU.

procedure already set out in the Amsterdam Treaty allowing for Member States to avoid qualified majority vote upon invoking vital and stated reasons of national policy. If a country avails itself of this clause, the HR/VP is tasked with searching for a solution and, in case they fail, the Council may decide by qualified majority to refer the matter to the European Council for a unanimous decision.

The list of matters to be decided by qualified majority vote contained in article 31(2) is non-exhaustive. In fact, paragraph (3) allows for more issues to be decided with this voting procedure. However, this mechanism is triggered by a unanimous decision of the European Council. Thus, before allowing the Council to decide by qualified majority vote, another intergovernmental institution must give its unanimous consent, thereby allowing member States to block the process. In any case, the parachute represented by the invocation of vital and stated reasons of national policy would be still appliable. Moreover, any decision with defence or military implication cannot be taken with qualified majority vote even if they fall within either the list in article 31(2) or the mechanism in article 31(3). Finally, Member States have an additional protection mechanism from decisions they do not want to take part to, namely constructive abstention, which, as already stated in the previous paragraphs, allows for Member States not to be bound by a decision, while at the same time recognizing that said decision binds the Union as a whole.

Provisions on the Common Security and Defence Policy take up the successive Section to the one dealing with CFSP. Article 42(1) TEU defines CSDP as an integral part of CFSP aimed at providing the Union with an operational capacity made of military and civilian assets that can be used to attain the objectives of strengthening international security, for peace-keeping operations and for conflict prevention. These objectives are pursued using capabilities provided by Member States. Article 42(2) defines the scope of CSDP, which includes the progressive framing of a common Union defence policy that will lead to a common defence. Compared to the wording of previous treaties, which provided that the progressive framing of a common defence police might have led to common defence, the Lisbon Treaty is much more committed to this objective. However, the second subparagraph of article 42(2) underlines that the eventual progresses in the field do not take place in a vacuum. On the contrary, the policy of the Union in this field is subordinated to the security and defence policy of Member States and to their obligations within NATO, which is still portrayed as the enabler of the European Union common defence despite the introduction of a mutual assistance clause[69].

[69] Article 42(7) TEU.

At a first glance, the scope of the mutual assistance clause seems quite broad. It in fact provides Member States with the capacity to respond to an armed attack with all the means in their powers, thus allowing for military intervention. However, there are some caveats. In fact, the clause must be applied in accordance with Article 51 of the United Nations Charter, it must be consistent with NATO commitments and it must respect the neutrality of certain States and their national security and defence policy. Finally, military intervention is only one of the options available to Member States to respond to an armed attack and its triggering is not, as shown, automatic. It is noteworthy that the insertion of a mutual assistance clause was the final step towards the integration of the WEU into the European Union, a process that ended on December 31, 2010, when the States party to the Modified Brussels Treaty decided to dismiss the organization.

The tasks that the Union can carry out in relation to the abovementioned objectives shall include: joint disarmament operations, humanitarian and rescue tasks, military advice and assistance tasks, conflict prevention and peace-keeping tasks and tasks of combat forces in crisis management, including peace-making and post-conflict stabilisation[70]. As the wording "shall include" suggests, this is a non-exhaustive list purposedly vague and broad in content, allowing the Member States to shape them at their will. Furthermore, it is the first time that Petersberg Tasks are mentioned in primary law. In carrying out these tasks, Member States have three main duties: a general duty of loyalty[71]; a duty of consultation with other Member States and European institutions, in order to ensure convergence of their international posture[72]; and a duty to progressively enhance their military capabilities[73].

In order to design and implement CSDP missions, the Council has created a series of distinct administrative bodies through CFSP decisions. Alongside them, article 38 TEU establishes the Political and Security Committee (PSC), which has the power to monitor international developments, to give his opinion on CFSP policies and to monitor their implementation. More importantly, it is responsible for the political control and strategic direction of CSDP missions and operations. The European Military Committee (EUMC) is tasked with the military direction of the missions through the EU Operation Commander, which is responsible for the operational execution of the mission. The Military Staff of the European Union (EUMS) duties include early warning, situation assessment, strategic planning, liaising with NATO and working in close cooperation with the European Defence Agency (EDA) to enhance defence capabilities. Finally, the EEAS has two units that contribute to

[70] Article 43(1) TEU.
[71] Article 24(3) TEU.
[72] Art. 32 TEU.
[73] Art. 42(3) TEU.

the design and implementation of CSDP missions. The Crisis Management and Planning Directorate which is responsible for the political strategic planning and review of CSDP missions, while Civilian Planning and Conduct Capability deals only with civilian missions.

As reconstructed by Koutrakos[74], the decision-making process within CSDP is characterized by the constant interaction between the abovementioned bodies. In brief, the Crisis Management and Planning Directorate elaborates a Crisis Management Concept, a document which contains an evaluation of the situation, states the EU's objectives and proposes a strategy. The document is drafted in collaboration with the Committee for Civilian Aspects of Crisis Management (CIVCOM) and the EUMC. Then, the PSC agrees on the concept and forwards it to the Council for approval. Once approved, The Committee on Civilian Planning and Conduct Capability and the EUMS lay out the civilian and military strategies to achieve the aims of the Crisis Management Concept. Following, the PSC outlines the various options and submit them to the Council, which will have to take a decision on whether to make the action military or civilian in nature and the consequent strategy. With the decision to establish the operation or the mission, the Council also appoints the Operation Commander or the Head of Mission, and it addresses financial matters. Finally, the operational planning document are drafted by the EUMC in case of military operations or by the Committee on Civilian Planning and Conduct Capability for civilian missions.

The last innovative element introduced by the Lisbon Treaty with regards to CSDP is represented by flexibility clauses allowing for willing Member States to seek further integration and, on the other hand, eliminating the veto power of unwilling Member States which can instead not take part to certain actions. There are two ways to trigger flexibility. The first one is through article 42(5) TEU which allows the Council to entrust the execution of a task to a group of Member States. In order to be entrusted of such task, the group must satisfy two cumulative criteria, namely they must be willing to carry out the task and they must have the necessary capabilities to do so. The second flexibility mechanism is permanent structured cooperation (PESCO). Article 42(6) allows for States whose military capabilities fulfil higher criteria and which have made more binding commitments to one another in this area to establish permanent structured cooperation. The cooperation is governed by article 46 TEU, which lays down a number of requirements essentially linked to the development of Member States capabilities and the fostering of their interoperability. PESCO is characterized by the principles of openness and continuity: a State satisfying the requirements can join or leave in any moment and, for the time he is involved, he must satisfy the requirements in a constant way. The Treaty of Lisbon provides that PESCO must be established with a Council decision. This happened

[74] Koutrakos, P., 2013. *The EU Common Security and Defence Policy*, pp. 64-67.

only in 2017[75] when thanks to a series of international developments, namely the hostility of the former United States President Donald Trump towards Europe and NATO, the renewed Russian aggression in Ukraine and Brexit[76], which removed the strongest opposer to common European defence, CFSP and CSDP gained new momentum.

[75] Council Decision 2017/2315 CFSP OJ L 331.
[76] Graf von Kielmansegg, S., 2019. *The Historical Development of EU Defence Policy: Lessons for the Future?* [Online]
Available at: https://verfassungsblog.de/historical-development-lessons-for-the-future%ef%bb%bf/.
[Accessed 03 11 2022]

Framing European Strategic Autonomy

2.1. Navigating the debate on European Strategic Autonomy: what does the concept entail?

The concept of European Strategic Autonomy is relatively new in European discourse. It is not present in primary law and it has been mentioned in an official document for the first time in December 2013, in the European Council conclusions of its first thematic debate on defence[1]. The document opens with a precise statement: defence matters. At the time, the European Union was anxiously looking at the unfolding of events in Ukraine following the announcement by the then President Yanukovych that he would not proceed with the long-anticipated association and trade agreement with the European Union[2]. Following that event, mass protests erupted against the pro-Russian government in Ukraine, eventually managing to topple it, and Russia invaded Eastern Ukraine and Crimea as a response. It is in this context of renewed Russian assertiveness that the European Union firstly introduced the concept of strategic autonomy.

The term appears only once in the document, when in paragraph 16 it stresses that:

> Europe needs a more integrated, sustainable, innovative and competitive defence technological and industrial base (EDTIB) to develop and sustain defence capabilities. This can also enhance its strategic autonomy and its ability to act with partners.

As already emerges from this first rudimentary introduction of the notion, defence capabilities are an integral part of European Strategic Autonomy. In order to develop and maintain those, a strong, sustainable, and integrated technological and industrial base is required. Thus, it can be affirmed that the development of European Defence Technological and Industrial Base (EDTIB) is an enabler of European Strategic Autonomy. The Conclusions then list several elements that would strengthen Europe's defence industry, namely opening the market to subcontractors from all over Europe to achieve economies of scale and enhance circulation of products, boosting Research & Technology expertise especially in relation to dual use technologies, developing standards and certification procedures to harmonise demand and boost interoperability and involving Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs). Despite the concept of EDTIB existing since 2007, it gained some momentum only from 2013, when European institutions recognized for the first time the need for a more autonomous Union.

[1] European Council Conclusions of 19/20 December 2013, *Conclusions of Common Security and Defence Policy*. Available at: https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-217-2013-INIT/en/pdf.
[2] Fisher, M., 2014. *Everything you need to know about the 2014 Ukraine crisis*. [Online] Available at: https://www.vox.com/2014/9/3/18088560/ukraine-everything-you-need-to-know [Accessed 29 11 2022]

The next official document mentioning European Strategic Autonomy is the 2016 European Union Global Strategy[3] (EUGS), which uses the expression four times. Despite using the term more often than the 2013 European Council conclusions, the EUGS fails to precisely define it. In fact, the document only highlights how important strategic autonomy is in order to allow the European Union to promote its values and enhance security both within and outside its borders. Nevertheless, the EUGS contains important indications and recognizes the centrality of concepts strongly related to the one of strategic autonomy, as resilience and capabilities development. In particular, it recognizes the need to strengthen the European Union as a defence actor, thus living up to the solidarity and mutual assistance clauses contained in the Treaties, and to have the necessary capabilities to pursue the general objectives laid down in the Strategy in the multilateral, collaborative and open fashion which has always characterized the European Union external action.

Having the capabilities and political will to act autonomously does not necessarily equal to embracing an inward-looking stance. In fact, the EUGS underlines multiple times that the process leading to a more autonomous Union does not entail independence from NATO, which remains the core partner in the field of defence and the main actor. On the contrary, fostering strategic autonomy would enhance the European pillar of the Alliance to the benefit of both entities. In addition, the European countries will develop their capabilities in a coordinated manner and by liaising with NATO, as to boost interoperability and to build capacities. However, strengthening cooperation with NATO must not prejudice the security and defence policies of those Member States which are not part to the Alliance. This element shows how Member States, whether or not members of NATO, remain sovereign with regards to their defence policy decisions.

The fact that European Strategic Autonomy and inherently linked concepts constitute the main focus of the EUGS is not by accident. In fact, in 2016 two main international development granted European Strategic Autonomy a central position in the European Debate. In addition to the already mentioned renewed Russian assertiveness, the election of Donald Trump as President of the United States and the withdrawal of the United Kingdom from the European Union, following the trigger of article 50 TEU, had profound consequences on the international system and, especially, on the European Union perception of its own role. The election of Donald Trump acted as a wake-up call for Europeans, while Brexit had a mixed impact on European defence. It is important to analyse those two developments to grasp the context in which the concept of European Strategic Autonomy developed, and to understand why it initially had a strong defence connotation. Indeed, as it will be

[3] European Union External Action, 2016. *Shared Vision, Common Action: A Stronger Europe. A Global Strategy for the EU's Foreign and Security Policy*.
Available at: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/eugs_review_web_0.pdf.

argued later in this section, other developments had equal, if not greater, impact on the development of the discourse around strategic autonomy. However, Trump's election and Brexit played a specific role with regards to security and defence.

Trump's presidency has arguably been one of the most controversial in the history of the United States. Despite the historical frictions in transatlantic relations, some of which have been analysed in chapter one, they hardly reached a point as low as the one they experienced during Trump's office. From the outset, the former United States President has embraced an isolationistic and inward-looking stance in both internal and external affairs, with his "America First" slogan often amounting to protectionist policies damaging European economies and to a retreat from the global stage, as testified by the American withdrawal from Afghanistan which, despite not being characterized by a linearity, knew its decisive days under Trump's presidency. Rather than retreat from the global stage, it would be more accurate to talk about a recalibration of the American engagement, directed with greater energy where its interests are directly at stake[4]. Consequently, Trump's term was characterized by a growing hostility towards Europe with regards to security and defence, especially within the NATO framework, calling for a stronger commitment in the shape of a higher defence spending. Additionally, the Transatlantic Alliance was further undermined by the President's approach to Russia. In fact, beside alleged Russian interference into the United States' electoral process, Trump employed a softer stance towards the United States historical enemy, failing to contain its growing assertiveness[5].

The other international event which had an impact on European defence was the United Kingdom withdrawal from the European Union, a process initiated in 2016 with a referendum and which came to conclusion December 31, 2020. As emerged from the analysis carried out in the previous chapter, the United Kingdom played a fundamental role in shaping the history of European security and defence. Once the biggest military power in the European Union along with France[6], it holds a permanent seat in the United Nations Security Council and it is amongst the five nuclear weapon states designated by the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons[7]. However, its contribution to the cause of a common European defence has been mixed. On the one hand, it

[4] Tocci, N., 2021. European Strategic Autonomy: What It Is, Why We Need It, How to Achieve It. *Istituto Affari Internazionali*, pp. 11-12.
[5] Cohen, M., 2020. 37 times Trump was soft on Russia. *CNN*, 4 August. [Online]
Available at: https://edition.cnn.com/2019/11/17/politics/trump-soft-on-russia/index.html.
[6] Statista Research Department, 2022. *PowerIndex score of military forces in Europe 2022, by country*. [Online]
Available at: https://www.statista.com/statistics/1293634/most-powerful-militaries-europe/#:~:text=PowerIndex%20of%20military%20forces%20in%20Europe%202022&text=Russia%20had%20the%20most%20powerful,the%20UK%2C%20and%20then%20Italy.
[Accessed 20 12 2022].
[7] Along with China, France, Russia and the United States.

provided crucial political momentum by signing, together with France, the St. Malo declaration, the basis of the current CFSP arrangement. On the other hand, its Atlanticist stance has never been abandoned in favour of a more Europeanist one, thus hindering the development of a true EDTIB due to fear of duplication with NATO. The impact of Brexit has to be evaluated under this conceptual framework. As the United Kingdom played an ambiguous role when it was a member of the European Union, its withdrawal entailed mixed consequences. On one hand, the Union lost one of its mightiest military and political power. On the other, the United Kingdom used its relevance also to hamper the development of a common security and defence policy[8].

Indeed, after 2016 other factors determined an acceleration in the processes leading to strategic autonomy, as well as a redefinition or, more accurately, broadening of its meaning. Firstly, and partially linked to the disengagement of the United States from Europe, China assertiveness is becoming a defining feature of the international order. As a consequence, the relations with the United States are year after year more standoffish, also with a view to the Taiwan problem whose resolution is far from being found. At the same time, China is trying to fill the power vacuum left by the United States, especially during Trump's presidency, through aggressive economic policies in Europe and his neighbourhood and through attempts at increasing its political relevance by securing critical posts in United Nation agencies[9]. Secondly, and perhaps more importantly, the COVID19 pandemic acted as a catalyst and accelerator of the dynamics briefly outlined above. In particular, it showed how dependencies on even common items, for example face masks, can have a strategic dimension. European dependencies on China also allowed the latter to better recover from the pandemic, gaining a comparative advantage vis-à-vis other economies and allowing it to further affirm its central role in the world's economy.

It is within this new, interlinked and fluid context that the European Union realized it had to learn the language of power. In this new confrontational international order, primarily characterized by competition between the United States and China, the Union laid down a series of instruments to better navigate and assert its presence on the global stage. Those instruments will be analysed in the following section of this chapter. Here it suffices to underline how, despite having lost the defence capabilities and political influence of the United Kingdom, the European Union managed to develop a series of tools to coordinate their defence and security efforts, as well as to boost resilience in other sectors beside defence. In fact, when comparing the already discussed impacts of Trump's presidency

[8] Puglierin, J., 2021. Sovereignty and Strategic Partners. In: D. Fiott, ed. *European Sovereignty: Strategy and Interdependence*. Institute for Security Studies: Chaillot Papers, pp. 23-30.
[9] ART – Analysis and Research Team, 2021. Strategic Autonomy, Strategic Choices. *Council of the European Union – Issues paper*.

and of the loss of the obstructionist United Kingdom on the one hand with the loss, on the other, of Britain's capabilities and political influence, the formers hold greater weight. In short, the negative consequences of Brexit on European defence are not enough to counterbalance its positive impact added to the discussed consequence of Trump's election.

The events of 2016 brought the concept of European Strategic Autonomy at the center of the European debate. Beside the already discussed Global Strategy and several others official documents mentioning it, scholars have strived to define the concept. In fact, as already mentioned, the first European official documents on the topic failed to precisely define it, giving rise to misinterpretation and debate which, it is safe to say, granted European Strategic Autonomy the character of an essentially contested concept[10]. As such, the first scholarly production was principally concerned with either criticizing the notion of strategic autonomy or to define what it is not, rather than what it is. Hence the need to reconstruct part of that debate, as to show what is the real content of European Strategic Autonomy and to avoid the risk of politicizing an expression which, due to the attention it received in the last years, runs the risk of becoming a catchphrase devoid of any specific meaning.

The main criticism of the concept has to do with concerns regarding a hypothetical isolationist turn that the European Union would take should it achieve strategic autonomy. Semantic analyses of the expression "strategic autonomy" have led scholars to state that «Europeans want to act alone in the world and [that the concept] implies a desire to free Europe from the interdependent world it has co-created in the last few decades»[11]. Under the cloak of strategic autonomy, the reasoning goes, the European Union will implement isolationist policies that will make it more inward-looking in all policy domains at the detriment of the countries who benefits from its openness[12]. The same reasoning is applied to security and defence, where the same fears that pushed the United Kingdom not to fully support the development of a common European defence are still present. Those fears, namely regarding competition and decoupling from NATO, were in turn boosted by the United Kingdom withdrawal from the European Union as it was the stronger opponent to integration in the field of defence. As it will be shortly argued, European Strategic Autonomy does not entail any of the above

[10] The notion of essentially contested concept can be traced back to Plato, Xenophon and Aristotle. However, for a comprehensive and modern analysis of the concept see Gallie, W. B., 1956. Essentially Contested Concepts. *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, Volume 56, pp. 167-198.
[11] Leonard, M. & Shapiro, J., 2019. Strategic sovereignty: How Europe can regain the capacity to act. *European Council on Foreign Relations*, p. 5.
[12] Guinea, O., 2022. *The EU Stuck Between Trade Openness and Strategic Autonomy*. [Online]
Available at: https://www.ispionline.it/en/pubblicazione/eu-stuck-between-trade-openness-and-strategic-autonomy-36534.
[Accessed 15 12 2022]

and these negative understandings can arguably be traced back to either a general aversion against European integration or to misconception regarding its content.

In order to overcome these conceptual drawbacks, there have been attempts by both scholars and European institutions to redefine strategic autonomy. These attempts concern both the form and the substance of strategic autonomy. Concerning the form, the term "strategic autonomy" has been almost totally eliminated from the discourse, being substituted by other expressions such as "Strategic Sovereignty" or "Open Strategic Autonomy", which are used interchangeably. At the same time, this semantical change has been accompanied by a parallel change in substance. However, the change in substance is only apparent, as the new expressions do not entail a real modification of the content of European Strategic Autonomy. Again, the reasoning leading to consider expressions as "Strategic Sovereignty", "Technological Sovereignty" or "Open Strategic Autonomy" fundamentally different in their substance from "European Strategic Autonomy" is ill-advised. Rather, it would be more accurate to talk about a broadening of the fields of application of strategic autonomy.

Strategic Sovereignty became the new standard in European discourse especially after COVID19. In the first period after the outbreak of the pandemic, the dependencies of European countries on China were unveiled and, with its supranational character, COVID19 has shown Member States that none of them could tackle a global problem of such a magnitude alone. As already argued, even common items such as face masks or medical equipment became "strategic" during the pandemic. However, after the first months, the criticalities characterizing the supply of medical equipment extended to more items. In general, supply chains proved to be more vulnerable than expected, with the raw materials and semiconductors markets being particularly disrupted. These dynamics led to the association of the debate on strategic autonomy to concept such as resilience and solidarity, with the latter being used as a guiding principle for EU measures aiming at reducing the economic drawbacks of the pandemic. Beside modernising the European Union, measures such as "Next Generation EU" aim at increasing economic resilience, thus making the Union less vulnerable to future shocks and thereby strengthening strategic autonomy[13].

Generally speaking, the expression strategic sovereignty is seen less adversely than strategic autonomy. Arguably, the former conveys a more positive message than the latter, highlighting what the European Union can do rather than placing the focus on independence from others[14]. However,

[13] Borrell, J. & Breton, T., 2020. *For a united, resilient and sovereign Europe*. [Online]
Available at: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/united-resilient-and-sovereign-europe-thierry-breton_en
[Accessed 22 12 2022]
[14] Damen, M., 2022. EU strategic autonomy 2013-2023: From concept to capacity. *European Parliament Think Tank*, p. 5.

this work argues that this view is mistaken. Whether the label attached to the concept, it does not alter its substance. If there has to be a difference between strategic autonomy and strategic sovereignty, it is in the scope of application of the two, as strategic sovereignty can be seen encompassing several policy fields while strategic autonomy is more fitting to the security and defence area, which is the focus of this dissertation.

European Strategic Autonomy can be defined as the European Union's ability to define its priorities and to implement them in cooperation with others, when possible, and on its own, when necessary[15]. As such, European Strategic Autonomy is not about autarchy or independence from the EU partners. Rather, it is about strengthening the European Union in order to allow it to better navigate a world characterized, as already argued, by growing competitiveness and conflictuality between its major players and within different regions. It has to do with the recognition by Member States that they cannot tackle global problems, be those pandemics, energetic crises or wars in their immediate neighbourhood, alone. As simple as it is, they just lack the capabilities to do so. Under this point of view, the task for a more autonomous Europe goes hand in hand with the very *raison d'être* of the European experiment which, as recalled in the first chapter, began by pooling resources in order to avoid war on the continent and then evolved into an international organization *sui generis* which integrated the economies of its Member States under the Single Market. European Strategic Autonomy can be seen as the next step of the integration process.

A mistake that must be avoided is the one to consider European Strategic Autonomy as an end by itself. Failing to do so would imply emptying the concept of any meaning, making it, on the one hand impossible to pursue, and on the other, even detrimental to do so. On the contrary, European Strategic Autonomy is a mean to achieve the ambitious goal of advancing its interest and values in the multilateral world it contributed to build over the years, pursuant to article 3(5) TEU. European Strategic Autonomy is not even a binary concept, thus allowing only for two scenarios: full autonomy or full dependency. Rather, it encompasses a range of choices depending on contingencies and allowing the European Union to adapt it based on the specific case at hand[16]. Again, the reasoning accusing strategic autonomy to lead to protectionism is difficult to support as its flexibility allows the European Union to decide how to act in the specific instance based on, for example, the costs (both economic and political) of greater integration.

[15] Grevi, G., 2020. Fostering Europe's Strategic Autonomy - A question of purpose and action. *European Policy Centre*, p. 5.
[16] Grevi, G., 2019. Strategic autonomy for European choices: The key to Europe's shaping power. *European Policy Centre*, p. 11.

In this framework, European Strategic Autonomy is conceptualized as being composed of two main elements: a political one and an industrial one. The first has to do with the construction of a shared strategic culture between Member States and with the common recognition of the need of a more autonomous Union. The industrial one, on the other hand, regards capabilities development and their employment to attain common objectives deriving from political consensus. This approach partially draws on Morillas[17] one, which envisages European Strategic Autonomy as composed of two dimensions: a geopolitical one, resembling what this work labelled as "political" and an operational one, resembling the "industrial" one. The difference is that the Morillas considers those two dimensions as opposed and mutually exclusive, which means that strategic autonomy can be pursued following either one of those paths. On the contrary, this dissertation deems both elements necessary to foster European Strategic Autonomy, as political will without capabilities cannot be implemented while capacity to act without a political direction lacks substance.

It could be reasonably argued that a third element, institutional in character, would be required to achieve a satisfying degree of strategic autonomy. After all, the European Union is often conceptualized as a regulatory power which bases its external action on rules and procedures. However, as shown in the first chapter, the major step in the integration process came after historical events, also known as critical junctures, which provided the political momentum or material capabilities for institutional reform. In the security and defence field, the Balkan crisis is a case in point. Furthermore, top-down reforms are unlikely to, first of all, be implemented and, even if so, to be followed. Member States must firstly agree on the need for institutional reforms, which in turn is a difficult task for reasons that will be explored in the final section of this chapter. Nevertheless, the institutional element of strategic autonomy here is considered as dependent from the other two. In other words, it will be achieved once the political will and material capabilities are in place.

Indeed, a more strategically autonomous European Union in the field of defence necessarily entails less dependence on the United States in this policy area. The United States is one of the major European partners when it comes to arms trade. However, their relationship is profoundly uneven. While the United States enjoys the high degree of market openness in the European Union, the contrary cannot be affirmed. In fact, Washington is the first beneficiary and supporter of globalization in arms production, as it allows it to exploit its advantage and monopoly in system integration to boost its political influence[18]. At the same time, the United States government has implemented a series of

[17] Morillas, P., 2021. An Architecture Fit for Strategic Autonomy: Institutional and Operational Steps Towards a More Autonomous EU External Action. *Foundation for European Progressive Studies*.
[18] Caverley, J. D., 2007. United States Hegemony and the New Economics of Defense. *Security Studies*, 16(4), pp. 598-614.

regulations, some of them tracing back even to the 1950s, to better defend its defence industry and leverage its strategic advantage. Some of these acts have a distinct impact on the European defence industry, as the International Traffic in Arms Regulations (ITAR) which gives the United States discretionary powers over defence exports. The US applies the ITAR also outside the territory of the country, allowing it to restrict the circulation of certain armaments subject to the Regulation within the European Union to protect its national interest[19]. This and other approaches are detrimental to European Strategic Autonomy, which in its industrial and capabilities component is based on lowering the barriers to intra-EU defence equipment trade.

On the contrary, the European Union defence market is far more open to US access. A plausible reason would be that the European Union has not the same degree of discretionary powers of the United States government, especially in CSDP matters where unanimity is the rule and each and every Member States can hinder the decision-making process. Thus, it cannot take decisions with the same swiftness of the United States, nor it can easily find a common stance reconciling the different positions of Member States. In any case, Directive 2009/43/EC on defence transfers and Directive 2009/81/EC on defence procurement which seek to reduce the cost of sales within the EU and to apply the principle of non-discrimination, do not apply to joint programmes or intergovernmental sales outside the European Union framework. Nevertheless, in May 2019 two US undersecretaries sent a letter to the then HR/VP Federica Mogherini expressing their concern about the recent approval of the European Defence Fund (EDF) and the Permanent Structured Cooperation, stating that they would «produce duplication, non-interoperable military systems, diversion of scarce defence resources and unnecessary competition between NATO and the EU»[20].

The letter was conceptually wrong. As it will be argued in the next section of this chapter, neither the EDF nor PESCO alter the defence procurement legislation of the European Union, which remains regulated by the two Directives quoted above. Instead, both projects aim at strengthening the EDTIB by giving a choice to European countries between developing the technology and capabilities they need within the EU or to buy off-the-shelf American products. As the United States has a legitimate security interest in Europeans purchasing their products, so does the European Union in developing, when possible, its own capabilities. Furthermore, not only the United States have no ground to complain about a possible exclusion of their firms from the European market, but they

[19] Fiott, D., 2019. The Poison Pill: EU Defence on US Terms?. *European Institute for Security Studies*, p. 5.
[20] Brzozowski, A., 2019. *Pentagon warns EU against blocking US firms from defence fund*. [Online]
Available at: https://www.euractiv.com/section/defence-and-security/news/pentagon-warns-eu-against-blocking-us-firms-from-defence-fund/
[Accessed 23 12 2022]

should champion initiatives aimed at enhancing European Strategic Autonomy. A more autonomous Union would permit the United States to shift more resources towards the Indo-Pacific and it would make the relationship between the two actors more equal, reduce the dependency of the European Union on the United States and it would allow the former to better leverage and protect its interests in the international arena[21]. After all, this last element is the core of European Strategic Autonomy.

[21] Menon, R., 2022. *A New and Better Security Order for Europe*. [Online]
Available at: https://www.defensepriorities.org/explainers/a-new-and-better-security-order-for-europe
[Accessed 10 12 2022]

2.2. Tools available to Member States to pursue European Strategic Autonomy

This section analyses the instruments available to Member States to pursue greater coordination in the field of defence within the European Union framework, thus boosting European Strategic Autonomy. It specifically looks at the industrial component of European Strategic Autonomy, as it is the one, compared to the political one, which allows more ground for cooperation. Furthermore, it can also be argued that industrial cooperation could indirectly boost and benefit political collaboration, as the more Member States share knowledge and know-how by embarking in successful projects, the more their political stances align to the benefit of the creation of a shared strategic culture in Europe. However, as it will be argued in subparagraph 2.3., there are structural obstacles preventing the emergence of a true shared strategic culture, as well as the creation of a European defence industry. Nevertheless, the latter can be reinforced and the instruments that will be analysed in this section pursue this objective as they aim at boosting efficiency and interoperability between Member States by investing in the European defence industry. In particular, those instruments are the European Defence Agency, PESCO and the European Defence Fund (EDF).

During the 2003 Thessaloniki Council Summit, an agreement was found and the Council was tasked, in the course of 2004, to take the necessary actions towards establishing an intergovernmental agency in the field of defence capabilities development, research, acquisition and armaments[22]. Pursuant to this task, a Joint Action (2004/551/CFSP) establishing the EDA was unanimously agreed upon by the Council of the European Union[23]. Thus, EDA became operational on October 4, 2004, and since then serves its purposes which, as specified in the Joint Action, include the definition of European capabilities and armaments cooperation initiatives, the identification of operational requirements, the evaluation of the improvement of military capabilities and the strengthening of the EDTIB. Each and every European Union Member State is also member to the European Defence Agency which can thus count on 27 participating Member States[24].

Having been established under the authority of the Council of the European Union, the EDA is an intergovernmental agency, as testified by its institutional arrangement. The head of the Agency is the HR/VP, which ensures its overall functioning and that the strategic directions by the EU Council

[22] Ekelund, H., 2015. Institutionalist approaches to agency establishment. In: N. Karampekios & I. Oikonomou, eds. *The European Defence Agency*. Oxford: Taylor & Francis Ltd, pp. 11-26.
[23] For a reconstruction of the process that led Member States to reach an agreement upon the mandate of the EDA, see Fiott, D., 2019. *Defence Industrial Cooperation in the European Union: the State, the Firm and Europe*. I ed. Oxford: Taylor & Francis Ltd, chapter 3.
[24] This is a recent development, as until June 2022 Denmark had opted-out from CSDP. In a historical referendum, two thirds of Danish voters agreed to Denmark to join the EU cooperation in security and defence and, as a consequence, it became member of the EDA.

and the decisions of the Steering Board are properly implemented by the Chief Executive. The Steering Board is the main EDA organ. It is chaired by the HR/VP and is formed by the Defence Ministers of the Member States, or their representatives. Besides being the decision-making body of the Agency, the Steering Board has also the power to appoint the Chief Executive (on a proposal from the Head of the Agency) and to adopt the general budget and rules of procedure. It takes decisions by QMV.

This brief overview shows how the EDA has all the characteristics of a typical intergovernmental agency. Nevertheless, it has some supranational elements that, even though they do not alter its character, introduce some innovative aspects. Among these, there is the «establishment of a common pool of information, the development of common standards that promote greater harmonisation and more coherence and integration in defence cooperation among EU member states»[25]. Furthermore, in carrying out its task, the EDA has to liaise with the supranational European Commission. However, the approach of the two bodies is fundamentally different, with the Commission embracing a more structural stance while the EDA is characterized, as every other European initiative in the security and defence field, by an ad-hoc approach[26]. In the period ranging from the establishment of the EDA to before the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty, the Agency emanated a Code of Conduct for Defence Procurement aiming at developing a competitive European Defence Market and at strengthening the EDTIB. In pursuing those objectives, the Code lays down the main principles guiding EDA actions: voluntary participation to open projects, non-binding approach, mutual transparency and accountability, mutual support and benefits and fair and equal treatment of suppliers. Therefore, it has been argued that the EDA approach is characterized by a logic of intergovernmental networking[27].

When established, the EDA had no basis in primary law. The Lisbon Treaty solved this problem by formally recognizing it as an EU agency and giving it a treaty-based mandate. In the effort to improve the military capabilities of Member States, article 42(3) subparagraph 2 TEU states that:

> The Agency in the field of defence capabilities development, research, acquisition and armaments (hereinafter referred to as 'the European Defence Agency') shall identify operational requirements, shall promote measures

[25] Chappel, L. & Petrov, P., 2012. The European Defence Agency and Permanent Structured Cooperation: Are We Heading Towards Another Missed Opportunity?. *Defence Studies*, 12(1), p. 55.
[26] For an analysis of the relationship between the European Commission and the EDA, see Fiott, D., 2015. The European Commission and the European Defence Agency: A Case of Rivalry?. *Journal of Common Market Studies*, 53(3), pp. 542-557.
[27] Bátora, J., 2009. European Defence Agency: A Flashpoint of Institutional Logics. *West European Politics*, 32(6), pp. 1075-1098.

> to satisfy those requirements, shall contribute to identifying and, where appropriate, implementing any measure needed to strengthen the industrial and technological base of the defence sector, shall participate in defining a European capabilities and armaments policy, and shall assist the Council in evaluating the improvement of military capabilities.

Then, article 45 TEU lays down the tasks of the European Defence Agency, which comprise:

> (a) contributing to identifying the Member States' military capability objectives and evaluating observance of the capability commitments given by the Member States;
>
> (b) promoting harmonisation of operational needs and adoption of effective, compatible procurement methods;
>
> (c) proposing multilateral projects to fulfil the objectives in terms of military capabilities, ensure coordination of the programmes implemented by the Member States and management of specific cooperation programmes;
>
> (d) supporting defence technology research, and coordinate and plan joint research activities and the study of technical solutions meeting future operational needs;
>
> (e) contributing to identifying and, if necessary, implementing any useful measure for strengthening the industrial and technological base of the defence sector and for improving the effectiveness of military expenditure.

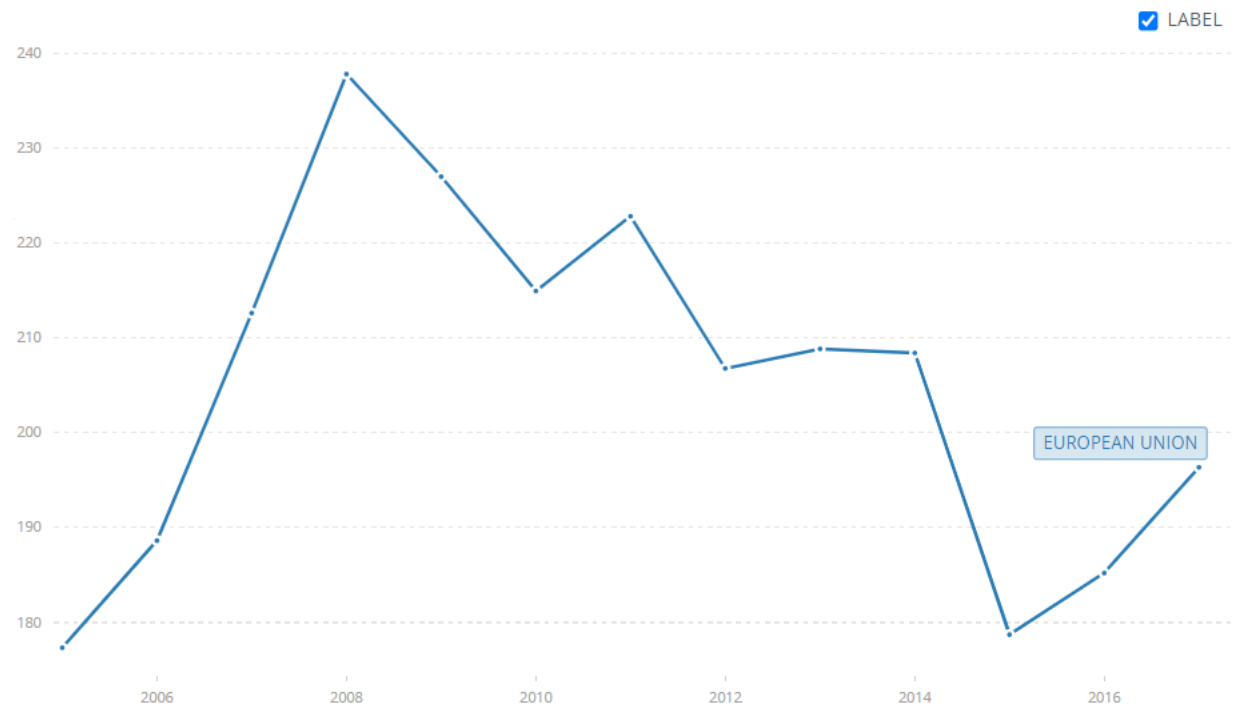
In order to rationalize its activities pursuant to the abovementioned tasks, in 2008 the EDA developed its first Capability Development Plan (CDP) that addresses long-term security and defence challenges. Despite its non-binding character, it offers a comprehensive insight into the military capabilities Member States are recommended to look at when identifying priorities and opportunities for cooperation[28]. From the outset, it was underlined that the CDP was an effort to address the well-documented fragmentation in demand for European military capabilities and provide the picture that all member states need to consider when planning future capability agendas, not a supranational military equipment or capability plan that seeks to replace national defence plans and programs[29]. In drafting the CDP, the EDA takes into account the NATO Defence Planning Process in order to harmonise NATO and European capabilities development, a further element confirming that the pursue of greater European Strategic Autonomy is not detrimental to NATO. Another key document that guides EDA action is the Coordinated Annual Review on Defence (CARD). Launched in 2017, it aims at seeking ways to improve coherence between Member States defence planning and procurement which are traditionally carried out at the national level.

[28] European Defence Agency, 2008. *Capability Development Plan*. [Online]
Available at: https://eda.europa.eu/what-we-do/all-activities/activities-search/capability-development-plan#:~:text=The%20CDP%20is%20a%20comprehensive,priorities%20and%20opportunities%20for%20cooperation.
[Accessed 29 12 2022]

[29] Sheperd, A., 2015. EU military capability development and the EDA: ideas, interests and institutions. In: N. Karampekios & I. Oikonomou, eds. *The European Defence Agency*. Oxford: Taylor & Francis Ltd, pp. 65-83.

Despite the initial excitement regarding the establishment of the EDA, its record in its first years of life is not equally exciting. In particular, the EDA suffered from the same Europeanist-Atlanticist divide that characterized the history of European defence, with countries such as the United Kingdom, but also Poland and the Baltic States, preferring not to develop capabilities within the European Union framework not to undermine transatlantic relations. In addition, the EDA suffers from budget constraints that hinder it effectiveness and the ever-present tendency, which survives even to this day, to pursue capabilities development at the national level weakens its ability to act[30]. Furthermore, these dynamics were compound by the financial crisis that struck Europe in 2009, determining a further cut in defence spending of Member States, as shown by Graph 1 below. Nevertheless, after the financial crisis the EDA managed to partially recover, also thanks to the establishment of PESCO and of the EDF.

Graph 1



Source: World Bank

As already argued in the last part of the previous chapter, the Permanent Structured Cooperation is a flexibility mechanism allowing willing and capable Member States to seek greater integration in the field of defence through projects essentially aiming at increasing their military

[30] *Ivi*, p. 73.

capabilities and interoperability. The debate on PESCO is essentially linked to the one regarding exclusivity against inclusivity. Essentially, it examines whether differentiated integration is beneficiary to the achievement of a higher degree of strategic autonomy as it allows for steps forward in defence cooperation or, on the contrary, the fragmentation it leads to is detrimental to the quest for strategic autonomy as only a few, willing Member States pursue greater integration thus undermining cohesion. The debate also reflected French and German initial positions regarding PESCO. France, coherently with its Europeanist stance, championed exclusivity with a higher bar for entry and more restrictive membership in order to allow for the formation of "coalitions of the willing" and, therefore, a more ambitious PESCO that would have also acted as an enabler of European Strategic Autonomy. On the contrary, Germany supported an inclusive PESCO wanting to avoid further divisions within the European Union. The following discussion does not aim at giving a definitive answer to the debate or to comprehensively evaluate the effectiveness of PESCO institutional arrangement. Times are still not mature for such an evaluation. Nevertheless, it will be argued that differentiated integration, when supported by a strong political will and the relevant technology, can lead to positive results. At the same time, PESCO is not living up its initial expectations and it is afflicted by some serious drawbacks.

In the end, a compromise was found, even though closer to the German position rather than the French one. The compromise entailed the adoption of a voluntary methodology in which Member States would choose their own deadlines for completing the deliverables and the strict requirements, requested by France to entry into projects, were remodulated into objectives to be achieved through PESCO, turning the latter into a process without undermining its ambition[31]. Thus, 25 Member States currently participate in PESCO projects with a varying degree of commitment. A Member State can participate in PESCO as long as they meet the very low threshold of participation in one project[32]. This produced differentiation in another respect, allowing for the emergence of project clustering, a dynamic characterized by the emergence of small constellation of States across different projects[33].

The main element that differentiates PESCO from other forms of cooperation is the binding nature of the 20 commitments participating Member States accepted when they joined. While projects constitute the "face" of PESCO, the binding commitments provide, or should provide, Member States with a strategic direction guiding them when deciding whether to take part to a project. The degree

[31] Fabry, E., Koenig, N. & Pellerin-Carlin, T., 2017. Strengthening European defence: Who sits at the PESCO table, what's on the menu?. *Notre Europe Tribune*, p. 2.
[32] PESCO binding commitment n. 17.
[33] Martill, B. & Gebhard, C., 2022. Combined differentiation in European defense: tailoring Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) to strategic and political complexity. *Contemporary Security Policy*, p. 14.

of commitment is very high: among other things, Member States committed to regularly boost their defence spending, to increase their defence investment expenditure to reach the 20% of total defence spending collective benchmark, to increase joint and "collaborative" strategic defence capabilities projects involving the EDA and the EDF, to address the capabilities shortfalls identified in the CDP and the CARD, to boost the interoperability of their forces, to make available strategically deployable formations and enhance multinational structures, to ensure that their efforts contribute to the strengthening of the EDTIB, and so on. The purpose of PESCO emerges even more concisely from the Council Decision 2017/2315, which states that a potential point of arrival for PESCO could be the attainment of a "coherent full spectrum force package". Thus, coherently with the French vision, PESCO is considered a strategic autonomy enhancer.

Reading through the 20 binding commitments, they convey the same sense of vagueness that emerges from the examination of other European objectives in the field of defence. In fact, despite being binding, they are too general to be translated into a clear policy direction. Without a guidance, the currently active 60 PESCO projects lack coherence as action cannot substitute for strategy[34]. None of the projects can be deemed useless, but their analysis them makes their diversity emerge and the lack of a strategy with regards to capabilities development. In fact, even if Member States were to strictly follow the binding commitments, they would not be able to extract a clear sense of purpose from them as they provide no guidance on what projects they should strategically prioritize based on an assessment of their current capabilities. Documents that provide this strategically important assessment already exist. In fact, as argued above, the CDP and the CARD respectively provide a snapshot of the context Member States need to take into account when planning future capabilities agendas and strategies aiming at improving coherence between Member States defence planning and procurement. However, both the CDP and the CARD are not binding, so Member States have little incentive to follow them when deciding about pursuing a specific project. Another consequence of the vagueness of the 20 binding commitments is that there is almost no culture of compliance. In fact, there is the option of suspending a Member State from PESCO, but the lack of clarity makes formally complying with them almost automatic. For this reason, as long as Member States respect the most specific commitment of participating in at least one project, they will not be pressured to step up their efforts within PESCO.

Despite those drawbacks that hinder a meaningful and effective participation of all Member States to PESCO, the initiative produced some positive projects that boosted cooperation between

[34] Biscop, S., 2021. European Defence and PESCO: Don't Waste the Chance. *EU Integration and Differentiation for Effectiveness and Accountability*, Issue 1, p. 6.

them, especially amongst the ones more willing to cooperate[35]. The initial wave of PESCO projects was announced in May 2018 and since then 60 total projects, divided into four waves, were launched. The first two tranches counted 17 projects, the third 13 and the fourth 14, with the remaining projects closed. Those sheer numbers already reveal that the majority of projects are not completed. Comparing the projects released within the different tranches, some differences emerge. Initial projects primarily concentrated on joint capabilities, with a specific focus on maritime and cyber capabilities. The second tranche added air systems and training facilities dimensions. The third wave was characterized by a further increase in the focus on enabling and joint capabilities. Finally, the last group is characterized by a high diversification of projects, dealing with several domains as air, land, maritime, space, and so on. The latest projects are also the most ambitious ones. In fact, initial projects were mainly already existing projects ongoing outside the European Union framework which were the reconverted into PESCO projects[36]. Another trend characterizing PESCO projects is that the higher the ambition, the less the States involved. In fact, strategical projects that aim at filling important capabilities gap such as the European Patrol Corvette (EPC) only see the participation of few Member States which possess the political will and the technological capabilities to carry them out[37]. Thus, PESCO indirectly fosters differentiated integration also by the varying degree of the ambition of the projects.

The already mentioned 2017 international developments led to the establishment of the European Defence Fund. That year, the European Commission proposed the creation of a fund aiming at financing transnational defence research and development within the European Union framework. Despite being officially launched in 2021, the EDF preceded by two other programmes, namely the European Commission's Preparatory Action on Defence Research (2017-2019, approximately €90 million) supporting collaborative defence research, and the European Defence Industrial Development Programme (2019-2020, approximately €500 million), co-financing collaborative development projects[38]. The EDF was then launched within the 2021-2027 Multiannual Financial Framework. It has a budget close to €8 billion, divided into €5.3 billion for collaborative capability development projects complementing national contributions and €2.7 billion for collaborative defence research to address emerging and future challenges and threats[39]. Initially, the budget

[35] Four countries can be considered PESCO frontrunners, namely France, Germany, Italy and Spain.
[36] Martill, B. & Gebhard, C., 2022. Combined differentiation in European defense: tailoring Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) to strategic and political complexity, p. 15.
[37] In the case of the EPC, Italy, Spain, Greece and France are the project members and Italy is the project coordinator.
[38] Volpe, M., 2022. *Challenging the defence sector with innovation opportunities: The European Defence Fund promote the competitiveness of EU by leveraging collaborative efforts and cross-border cooperation*. [Online] Available at: https://www.zabala.eu/opinions/european-defence-fund/
[Accessed 02 January 2023]
[39] European Commission, 2021. *The European Defence Fund (EDF)*. [Online]

proposed by the European Commission amounted to almost €13 billion, which however was not approved.

Through the EDF, Member States can receive funding for collaborative projects involving at least three national entities. Projects dealing with emerging and disrupting technologies can be established by smaller groups. The EDF is executed by annual work plans divided into 17 horizontal and thematic action areas, which have been designed not to change over the course of the Multiannual Financial Framework 2021–2027. Depending on the configuration of the project, the baseline funding can vary from 20% to 100%, with the possibility to award bonuses when the amount of funding is less than 100%. For example, for PESCO projects, the amount of the bonus equals to an additional 10%[40]. Further incentives, in the form of increased funding rate, are awarded to projects that incentive cross-border collaboration between Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) and mid-caps if their degree of involvement is above a given threshold. Currently, 56 projects are being fund by the EDF.

Available at: https://defence-industry-space.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2022-05/Factsheet%20-%20European%20Defence%20Fund.pdf
[Accessed 2 January 2022].

[40] Blockmans, S. & Crosson, D. M., 2021. PESCO: A Force for Positive Integration in EU Defence. *European Foreign Affairs Review*, 26 (Special Issue), pp. 87-110.

2.3. Obstacles to European Strategic Autonomy

As stated at the start of this chapter, this study conceptualizes European Strategic Autonomy as being composed of two elements: a political one and an industrial one. Drawing on this approach, this section will examine the main obstacles preventing the achievement of a greater degree of strategic autonomy. In particular, it will be argued that political and industrial fragmentation between Member States are the main reasons why they do not, or at least not all of them, strive to achieve greater integration in the field of defence. Politically speaking, the reason why Member States have different preferences regarding to whether pursue strategic autonomy can be traced back to the Europeanist-Atlanticist divide and to the lack of a shared strategic culture. Industrially speaking, the lack of cooperation in the development of capabilities is essentially due to the absence of a real economic benefit for each and every Member States. In fact, as of June 2021, only 9% of research and technology in the field of defence is conducted cooperatively between Member States[41].

An element usually taken into account when trying to explain foreign policy choices of a country is its grand strategy. While this kind of analysis has been mainly conducted with regards to large actors in the international order, such as the United States, China and Russia, the same can be done for the European Union. In fact, the EU is the only international organization which holds different characteristics of statehood, such as an integrated single market and the ability of its supranational institutions to issue binding acts. As Fiott and Simón[42] argued, a plethora of EU institutions and bodies are responsible for strategy making. Depending on the character of the policy domain associated with a grand strategy, the involved bodies can be supranational or intergovernmental. Especially in the security and defence field, while the Treaties and documents such as the EUGS lay down general strategic objectives, there is the concrete difficulty to pursue and operationalize them. Through CSDP missions, the European Union seeks to contemporary pursue its grand strategy consisting of spreading its liberal and democratic values and to impact the scenarios it intervenes in. However, as CSDP missions rely on Member States capabilities, it is not always straightforward to deploy them due to divergence in the national grand strategy of different Member States[43]. Thus, CSDP strategy is still dependent on the grand strategy of the single Member States taking part in the specific mission.

[41] European Commission, 2021. *The European Defence Fund (EDF)*.
[42] Fiott, D. & Simón, L., 2019. The European Union. In: P. Dombrowski & S. Reich, eds. *Comparative Grand Strategy: A Framework and Cases*. Oxford: Oxford Academic, pp. 262-283.
[43] Haesebrouck, T. & Van Meirvenne, M., 2015. EUFOR RCA and CSDP Crisis Management Operations: Back on Track?. *European Foreign Affairs Review*, 20(2), pp. 267-285.

With regards to European Strategic Autonomy, Member States have different opinions and positions based on their historical perspective, strategic cultures, alliances and even on their own preference. The main distinction taking into account these elements in order to justify Member States different postures is the so called Atlanticist – Europeanist divide[44]. According to it, Atlanticist Member States predilect preserving transatlantic relations over European initiatives in the field of defence, making sure that the latter do not undermine the former by, for example, establishing high barriers to entry in the European defence market for American firms. The typical example of an Atlanticist state would then be, even if it is not a Member State of the European Union anymore, the United Kingdom, as demonstrated by its adverse approach towards multiple European defence initiatives. On the contrary, Europeanist states are the ones that support and even promote said initiatives, advocating for a greater degree of strategic autonomy and a more integrated European defence market. The most notable example of a Europeanist country is France.

It is worth noting that no country is either fully Atlanticist or Europeanist. In fact, all European Union Member States are somewhat in the middle between the two positions, thus characterizing the Europeanist – Atlanticist divide as a continuum rather than a dichotomy[45]. The position of the Member States on the continuum can vary over time, but there is a tendency rooted in the culture of the specific country that makes it lean towards one or the other end of the spectrum. An example of a country which usually tries to reconcile and balance both positions is Italy, whose governments historically see NATO and European integration as complementary, conceiving the latter as a goal to attain within the framework of the Atlantic Alliance[46]. Thus, Italian governments would attempt to steer them back on the same course whenever they started to deviate, frequently as a result of French initiatives.

Again, no country is at either end of the spectrum. Yet, the Atlanticist – Europeanist divide, where Atlanticist countries prefer a transatlantic approach to European security with NATO as its cornerstone while Europeanist seek greater integration in the field of defence with NATO and the United States playing a secondary role[47], still represents a strong barrier to the achievement of a greater degree of strategic autonomy. In fact, the first chapter of this work has shown that progresses

[44] Boekle, H., Jóhannesdóttir, A., Nadoll, J., Stahl, B., 2004. Understanding the Atlanticist–Europeanist Divide in the CFSP: Comparing Denmark, France, Germany and the Netherlands. *European Foreign Affairs Review*, 9(3), pp. 417-441.
[45] Becker, J., & Malesky, E., 2017. The Continent or the "Grand Large"? Strategic Culture and Operational Burden-Sharing in NATO. *International Studies Quarterly*, 61(1), pp. 163-180.
[46] Croci, O., 2008. Not a Zero-Sum Game: Atlanticism and Europeanism in Italian Foreign Policy. *The International Spectator*, 43(4), pp. 137-155.
[47] Græger, N. & Haugevik, K., 2009. *The revival of Atlanticism in NATO?: Changing security identities in Britain, Norway and Denmark*. I ed. Oslo: Norwegian Institute of International Affairs (NUPI), p. 13.

in CFSP and CSDP can be filibustered even by a single country through the activation of one of the multiple legal instruments at its disposal, chief among them unanimity as the main voting procedure. In addition, it cannot be affirmed that the employment of mechanisms for differentiated integration would be enough to compensate the abovementioned drawback. On the one hand, they allow for a group of willing Member States to pursue deeper cooperation. On the other, their voluntary character has no elements pushing more Atlanticist countries to change their stance and shift their position on the Atlanticist – Europeanist continuum. Instead, what would be required is a change in their strategic culture, a task easier said than done.

Atlanticism and Europeanism can be considered two foreign policy approaches determined by the strategic culture of a particular country. Generally speaking, the concept of culture was associated to security studies for the first time by Snyder in 1977[48]. Since then, scholars have sought to give a unitary definition to the term strategic culture, failing to do so but at least agreeing on the fact that culture, and thus history, plays a prominent role in shaping behaviour[49]. After years of fruitless ideological debates on the meaning of strategic culture, in 2011 Biava, Drent and Herd[50] managed to operationalize the concept, allowing it to be tested against hypothesis. While their findings became outdated due to most recent developments, their definition of strategic culture represents a good starting point. They consider strategic culture as composed by three main drivers that allow for its formation. Firstly, recognition of new threats and the subsequent adaptation of the EU institutional capacity and capability to address them and then the political will to address them. Secondly, they consider lessons identified and learned from previous missions. Lastly, the final drivers are the shared norms with regards to using appropriate instruments, military force included, to tackle those threats and how to institutionalize them.

The above understanding of strategic culture is, however, linked to the purposes of the paper in which it is defined. Arguably, that definition is too focused on an operational and institutional interpretation of the concept. According to me, that definition of strategic culture is characterized by an *a posteriori* approach which fails to lay down a proper strategy informing military action. In fact, while threat assessment is a fundamental element even in the definition employed in this study, there is no element suggesting that Member States, each with its own strategic culture, would agree on the

[48] Snyder, J., 1977. *The Soviet Strategic Culture: Implications for Limited Nuclear Operations*, Santa Monica: RAND Corporation.
[49] For a reconstruction of the scholarly debate on the definition of strategic culture, see Haesebrouck, T., 2016. Explaining the Member States' Varying Military Engagements: the Potential of a Strategic Culture Perspective. *Journal of Contemporary European Research*, 12(3), pp. 774-781.
[50] Biava, A., Drent, M. & Herd, G., 2011. Characterizing the European Union's Strategic Culture: An Analytical Framework. *Journal of Common Market Studies*, 49(6), pp. 1227-1248.

lessons learned of previous missions, nor that shared norms would emerge after missions. Furthermore, even if we conceded that Member States learned from their errors and institutionalized the resulting norms, it would not be desirable. The historical developments outlined in the previous chapter show how the numerous failures of the European Union external action all stemmed from a lack of a grand strategy and comprehensive approach to crisis. On the surface, it might seem they learned from their mistakes and institutionalized arrangements aimed at overcoming them. However, these arrangements failed to provide meaningful instruments to enhance coherence and, even if they did, the price paid would be too high.

A trial-and-error approach to is what determined the failure of the most relevant missions of the European Union. Thus, this study portrays strategic culture drawing on different approaches[51] taking into account a *a priori* definition of threats and how to address them. Strategic culture is defined as being characterized by three interlinked level. The first level is threat perception, which determines the objective of the use of force. The second level is represented by military doctrine, which shapes the means and modes of the use of force. The last level is cultural and thus historical, and accounts for national preferences not explainable under the first two levels. Such an understanding of strategic culture explains Member States different priorities with regards to security issues and differences in how to address them. Differences in the strategic cultures of Member States is what determines the fragmentation of the political consensus around the concept of European Strategic Autonomy. For example, said differences is what generated a debate between the French President Emmanuel Macron and the former German Defence Minister Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer about a declaration of the latter claiming that «Europe still needs America»[52].

In a 2019 study[53], the European Council on Foreign Relations (ECFR) mapped the opinions of Member States regarding European Strategic Autonomy. From the interviews conducted with decision makers and experts from the then 28 European Union countries, it emerges that the political fragmentation due to divergent strategic cultures determines differences in how Member States perceive European Strategic Autonomy, the degree of importance they attribute to it and its relations with the role of the United States in Europe. The research also helps understand that rather than 27 different strategic cultures, some Member States hold the same positions regarding the concept of

[51] Zandee, D. & Krujiver, K., 2019. The European Intervention Initiative: Developing a shared strategic culture for European Defence. *Clingendael – Netherlands Institute of International Relations*.
[52] Von Der Burchard, H., 2020. *German Defense Minister expresses surprise over Macron criticism*. [Online] Available at: https://www.politico.eu/article/annegret-kramp-karrenbauer-defense-germany-nato-macron-alliance/ [Accessed 10 January 2023]
[53] Franke, U., Varma, T., 2019. Independence Play: Europe's pursuit of Strategic Autonomy. *European Council on Foreign Relations*.

European Strategic Autonomy. Thus, groupings containing a variable number of countries with the same opinion on the topic emerge. This is not to say that when two or more states have the same position regarding strategic autonomy then they have the same strategic culture. Rather, different strategic cultures can lead to the same result, either support to strategic autonomy or lack thereof.

The first fairly homogenous group is represented by the so called "Big Four" of European defence, namely France, Germany, Italy and Spain. Those countries are the ones with the largest military expenditure of the whole European Union, and they are the ones which participate in most PESCO projects as well. They all have a positive opinion about European Strategic Autonomy and agree on the need for a more autonomous Europe. Yet, there are differences even between the four strongest supporters of European Strategic Autonomy. In fact, France is surely the fiercest backer of the concept, as much as the whole contemporary debate is considered to derive from Macron's Sorbonne speech[54]. Initially, Germany did not share the French enthusiasm. As mirrored by the analysed debate on PESCO, Berlin has always been more cautious than France, as it was more concerned with preserving European unity than with deepening integration. Nevertheless, last August Federal Chancellor Olaf Scholz ended the ideological debate between the two countries by endorsing an understanding of European Strategic Autonomy closer to the French position[55]. Thus, despite German longstanding Atlanticism, their positions are converging. As already argued, Italy welcomes greater strategic autonomy in the field of defence and does not see its achievement as detrimental to NATO. However, it seeks to balance French initiatives when they become to demanding. Finally, Spain seeks to positions itself in between France and Germany. It champions European Strategic Autonomy, not least because it would help the country build the capabilities it lacks, but sees it within the NATO framework and opportunistically to foster its interests[56].

Another relevant homogenous group emerging from the research of the ECFR is the one containing countries which see European Strategic Autonomy as a contentious concept. This group can be divided into two further subgroups, one containing European countries on the eastern border of the Union and the other containing countries with a strong transatlantic tradition and fear of strong European integration. Again, the strategic culture of the countries in each subgroup is not completely homogeneous. Nevertheless, the result is a varying degree of scepticism towards strategic autonomy. Among countries with a strong transatlantic tradition there are Luxembourg, the Netherlands and

[54] Ouest-France, 2017. *Sorbonne speech of Emmanuel Macron - Full text / English version*
[55] Pestel, É. & Süß, J., 2022. What Remains of Macron's Sorbonne Speech Five Years Later?. *Friedrich Naumann Foundation for Freedom*.
[56] Arteaga, F., et al., 2021. Autonomía estratégica europea e intereses de España. *Real Instituto Elcano*.

Sweden[57]. Denmark was also in this list until June 2022, when it reversed its opt-out from European defence. Luxembourg, in turn, is largely uninterested in defence matters. Sweden and the Netherlands fear that European Strategic Autonomy would undermine NATO as it could eventually lead to the creation of a European Army. Regarding the countries on the eastern flank, their opposition to European Strategic Autonomy is mainly due to the fear of Russian aggression. They believe that NATO is the security framework that better assures them against a possible Russian aggression. They view European Strategic Autonomy as danger because it, they assume, entails the emancipation of the EU from NATO, and they think that a European security community would not be sufficient to protect them. The main supporter of this view is Poland, closely followed by the Baltic Republics which, however, are not in outright opposition to the concept as it is their neighbour.

What sketched above reveals all the difficulties in finding a common stance between Member States. Some of them are at opposite ends of the spectrum when it comes to strategic culture. If they do not agree on the threats they face and how to address them, it is impossible to find an agreement on the capabilities to develop and on the operations they need to carry out. Furthermore, the remaining Member States not discussed above hold a median position between the two groups analysed. An attempt aiming at making the strategic cultures of Member States converge came from, once again, France. In fact, in June 2018 nine European countries signed the European Intervention Initiative (EI2) Letter of Intent. The EI2 is France's last attempt to build a stronger consensus around its vision of European security and defence. It is a pragmatic, flexible and non-binding arrangement which ultimately aims at improving the ability of participating Member States to respond to crisis and threats.

To achieve that objective, the EI2 does not seek to create a new standby force, but to build a shared strategic culture between the participant Member States by developing common doctrine and fostering interoperability[58]. According to the Letter of Intent, this will be achieved by enhancing the interactions between the members to the Initiative. Interactions will focus on four main fields: strategic foresight and intelligence sharing, scenario development and planning, support to operations, and lessons learned and development of a doctrine. The Letter of Intent fails at providing a definition of strategic culture. Yet, as can be determined from the areas of interactions, the French understanding of the concept is very close to how it has been portrayed in this study.

[57] The United Kingdom would be the first country of this list if it had not withdrawn from the European Union.
[58] Zandee, D. & Krujiver, K., 2019. The European Intervention Initiative: Developing a shared strategic culture for European Defence.

Beside the first nine States that joined the EI2 from the outset, which are Belgium, Denmark, Estonia, France, Germany, the Netherlands, Portugal, Spain and the United Kingdom, other four signed the Letter of Intent afterwards. They are Finland, which joined at the end of 2018, Norway and Sweden, which joined in 2019, and Italy, which joined shortly after Norway and Sweden. By comparing this list with the previous considerations about the strategic cultures of EU countries, it emerges how diverse and heterogenous this group of countries is. Among them, there are the Big Four of European defence and, at the same time, countries with an almost opposite strategic culture such as Estonia or the United Kingdom, with the latter which is not even a member of the European Union anymore. The presence of the United Kingdom is significative. As already argued, it is one of the major European players in the field of defence, yet it is not in the European Union. Thus, it at least arguable to maintain that the EI2 would be beneficial to the cause of European Strategic Autonomy, not last because the UK can exert its influence on the operations carried out in that framework to avail its interests which are, not rarely, in contraposition to the achievement of a greater degree of autonomy. Furthermore, a study[59] shows that until now the EI2 did not produce encouraging results regarding the achievement of its main objective, which is the convergence of strategic cultures. Nevertheless, if France manages to attract more countries and to advance its vision of European Strategic Autonomy, the socialization process implied in the Initiative could lead to positive results.

As discussed above, the Member States of the European Union are very heterogenous in terms of strategic cultures. Different geopolitical interests and historical and cultural attitudes are the reasons behind this diversification. Two very important groups, one containing the most politically and military relevant countries and the other containing Atlanticist and Eastern European countries, have almost opposite visions regarding European Strategic Autonomy due to that heterogeneity. Their positions will not converge from day to night, and external shock will be arguably needed. Whether the Russian – Ukrainian War might provide such shock will be evaluated in the last chapter of this study. However, even if it was to, Member States need indications on the path to follow. As the strategic culture of a country is usually inferred from national strategic documents such as the White Paper on Defence, the European Union lacked such documents until recently. In fact, the EUGS does not provide the same in-depth analysis and level of detail as a White Paper would. The same can be affirmed for the European Security Strategy[60] composed in 2003, whose authors were uncomfortable

[59] Zandee, D., Kruijver, K., 2019. The challenge of a shared strategic culture in Europe. *Atlantisch Perspectief*, 43(5), pp. 27-32.
[60] Council of the European Union, General Secretariat of the Council (2009). *European Security Strategy: a secure Europe in a better world*. Publications Office.
Available at: https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2860/1402

with labelling it as a "Strategy" as it merely provided a collection of operating principles for confronting the threats of the post-Cold War era[61].

The Strategic Compass[62] is the last, and most comprehensive, attempt of the European Union to build a European strategic culture. Approved on March 21, 2022, by the European Council following a German initiative, it provides the European Union with an action plan aimed at reinforcing CSDP by the year 2030. The Compass, approved less than one month after the Russian invasion of Ukraine, is structured around four pillars: Act, Secure, Invest, and Partner. Each pillar encompasses a number of objectives Member States have committed to achieve by 2030. Among the most relevant objectives there is the creation of a up to 5,000 units EU Rapid Deployment Capacity in order to swiftly and efficiently act should a crisis outbreak and a general commitment to devote greater attention to both traditional, such as the need to enhance EU's maritime presence, and emerging, such as the need to develop a Common Security and Defence Space Policy, security issues. Overall, the investment pillar is the most complete and substantial. In order to overcome the fragmentation of Member States' defence industries, not only European countries will have to increase their defence spending, but they will need to better allocate their resources by using them to foster systems standardization and interoperability[63]. Thanks to the joint work of the EDA, the European Investment Bank, and to the EDF, The European Unions aims at strengthening the EDTIB by fostering common research and procurement and by reducing existing strategic and technological dependencies on foreign powers.

It is to early to judge the impact of the Strategic Compass. Surely, it will not solve capability gaps or improve the EU's technological and operational preparedness, but it may assist in aligning overall strategic guidance and capabilities[64]. In itself, the initiative is more than welcomed as it provides an initial step towards the definition of a European strategic culture as it provides a thorough threat analysis and a common strategy to address the identified threats. This strategic approach is what the European Union needs to enhance its strategic autonomy and what other initiatives, such as PESCO and the EUGS, lacked. This is the real value of the Strategic Compass: even if it will not live up to all of its objectives, it provides the tracks that the European Union will need to follow if it wants to play a meaningful role in international affairs. Nevertheless, it remains to be seen if Member States

[61] De France, O. & Witney, N., 2013. Europe's Strategic Cacophony. *European Council on Foreign Relations*, p. 2.
[62] European Union External Action, 2022. *A Strategic Compass for Security and Defence: For a European Union that protects its citizens, values and interests and contributes to international peace and security.*
Available at: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/documents/strategic_compass_en3_web.pdf.
[63] Leoni, R., 2022. Lo Strategic Compass dell'UE e le prospettive future della Difesa Europea. *Centro Studi Internazionali*.
[64] Fiott, D., 2020. Uncharted territory? Towards a common threat analysis and a strategic compass for EU security and defence. *European Union Institute for Security Studies*.

will follow its guidance. On the basis of the above analysis of the degree of political fragmentation between Member States, the premises are not encouraging.

An account of the obstacles to the achievement of a greater degree of European Strategic Autonomy solely based on cultural and historical aspects of Member States would be, at best, incomplete. Generally speaking, very few dynamics have only one explanatory variable. This is truer than ever for military action, which is subject to a number of other constraints mainly linked to the availability of resources and technology and to economic considerations. Thus, the lack of European integration in the field of defence necessarily needs to be analysed taking into account this inherent characteristics of military action. With regards to European Strategic Autonomy, this means that its achievement is hindered by widespread fragmentation of the industrial landscape which has its origin long ago and is fuelled by a national, rather than European, approach to defence Research and Development (R&D) and procurement.

The European defence industry is plagued by dynamics that have their origin in the period immediately following the end Cold War. After the end of the confrontation between the United States and the Soviet Union, which saw the former triumphing, the main reason supporting European defence spending disappeared. Thus, in search of "peace dividends"[65], European countries cut their defence spending: in particular, over the 1990s the UK cut their defence budget of 36%, Germany of 28% and France of 12%[66]. This dynamic did not manifest only in Europe, as also the United States cut its defence spending in that period. The difference is that, confronting with a shrinking domestic and foreign armaments market, US firms underwent a series of merger and acquisitions that gave life to the industrial giants that still survive today. Defence spending cuts were further reinforced in Europe by the 2008 financial crisis, which forced European countries to do not invest in defence to avoid additional public debt increase. While also the United States was victim of the rhetoric of "peace dividends", it never lost its spot as the country with the most defence spending in the world. Thus, as European countries lacked a proper industrial plan, they found themselves either buying off-the-shelf products from the United States or settling for platforms and systems dating back to the Cold War era and which are still used to date.

These dynamics affected the ability of European countries to develop a strong national industrial base, which in turn hindered the emergence of the EDTIB. On the other hand, these drawbacks can also be seen as systemic incentives pushing Member States to pursue greater

[65] The term "peace dividend" was a slogan employed by George H. W. Bush and Margaret Thatcher after the end of the Cold War to underline the economic benefits of a reduced defence spending.
[66] Hoeffler, C., 2019. Differentiated Integration in CSDP Through Defence Market Integration. *European Review of International Studies*, 6(2), pp. 43-70.

cooperation and integration in the defence-industrial field. However, to date they still struggle to achieve a satisfying degree of coherence that would allow them to benefit from economies of scale, boost interoperability and to cope with the rising unit cost of military equipment due to technological improvement. Furthermore, the fragmentation of the European defence-industrial landscape leads to costly duplication amongst Member States and between them and NATO. In fact, as shown by a broadly cited 2017 study from the Munich Security Conference[67], the participating Member States of the EDA used 178 types of major weapons systems, compared to only 30 types used by the United States of America. Furthermore, a 2021 study[68] aimed at updating the data portrayed by the Munich Security Council shows that the picture is, for what concerns coherence, is even more grim. In fact, by analysing the specific market segments of tanks, infantry fighting vehicles, self-propelled howitzers, fighter aircraft, destroyers and frigates, and conventional submarines, the research shows that the European defence industry is unevenly fragmented, with the degree of fragmentation varying between the different market segments.

A fundamental problem is represented by the fact that Member States still see defence-industrial policy as a field entirely subject to their sovereignty, considering European initiatives, at best, as complementary to national ones. Nor they have institutional incentives to do otherwise. In fact, according to the Treaties, article 346 TFEU states that:

> Any Member State may take such measures as it considers necessary for the protection of the essential interests of its security which are connected with the production of or trade in arms, munitions and war material; such measures shall not adversely affect the conditions of competition in the internal market regarding products which are not intended for specifically military purposes.

As a result, the European defence-industrial landscape is composed of a small number of large defence companies, with national governments adopting both traditional and non-traditional protectionist policies to allow them to remain competitive vis-à-vis foreign firms. On the other hand, the emergence of this large industrial complexes is not enough to compete with American and, to a lesser extent, Chinese firms, with only one European company, BAE Systems, ranking within the world's top 10 and four within the top 20[69]. Furthermore, this internal competitivity has not been enough to provide any European country with sufficient capabilities in every defence domain. If it is true that, taken together, European countries possess full-spectrum military capabilities, it is also true

[67] Munich Security Conference; McKinsey & Company & Hertie School of Governance (2017). *More European, More Connected and More Capable: Building the European Armed Forces of the Future*. [Online]
Available at:
https://securityconference.org/assets/02_Dokumente/01_Publikationen/MSCEuropeanDefenceReport2017.pdf
[68] Olsson, P., 2021. The European Defence Market – Unevenly Fragmented. *Swedish Defence Research Agency*.
[69] Wille, J., et al., 2021. A Growth Plan for the European Defence Industry. *Strategy&*, p. 7.

that, due to the national character of defence procurement, those systems are not designed to work together, thus undermining interoperability and the emergence of an independent and complete European capability portfolio[70]. As a consequence, strategic autonomy is also hindered and it results in a weakened European Union which does not hold the necessary capabilities to assert its presence on the global stage as a unitary actor, nor can its Member States alone.

Both European Union institutions and Member States are fully aware of the drawbacks of the fragmentation sketched above. The latest study on the cost of non-Europe by the European Parliament Research Service[71] highlights that, neglected cooperation in the field of defence is costing Member States at least €22.15 billion per year, which amounts to about 10% of their combined defence budget. While the research was temporarily framed within 2019 and 2024, it could be argued that recent geopolitical development Thus, in order to compensate for the costly duplications stemming from the lack of cooperation, Member States have gave life to a series of incentives aimed at providing forum of cooperation. Some of them, such as the EDF and PESCO, were created within the European Union framework while others, such as the already discussed E2I, were created outside of it and as a result of intergovernmental cooperation. In addition to the E2I, there are a number of other similar initiatives stemming from interstate agreements. It is beyond the scope of this dissertation to provide a comprehensive analysis of those, but it is safe to say that they did not reach, in most instances, their objectives. On the contrary, it can be argued that all those initiatives creating different, competing frameworks for defence-industrial cooperation represent a further source of fragmentation adding a regional layer to the problem, as many bi or multilateral initiatives outside the European Union framework entail the grouping of countries within a specific region[72]. An additional consequence of this regionalization of the European defence-industrial field is an exacerbation of the differences between the strategic cultures of Member States belonging to different regional groups.

Systemic incentives, such as geopolitical pressure stemming from a shifting international environment, and economic benefits, such as the achievement of economies of scale, the avoidance of duplications of efforts, standardization of equipment and reduction of costs that will likely continue to grow due to technological innovation, appear not to be sufficient to push Member States towards

[70] *Ivi*, p. 1.
[71] European Parliament Research Service, 2019. *Europe's two trillion euro dividend: Mapping the Cost of Non-Europe, 2019-24*. [Online]
Available at: https://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document/EPRS_STU%282019%29631745
[Accessed 15 January 2023].
[72] Bunde, T., 2021. Defending European integration by (symbolically) integrating European defence? Germany and its ambivalent role in European security and defence policy. *Journal of European Integration*, 43(2), pp. 243-259.

significative cooperation in the defence-industrial field. In fact, as argued by a study[73] on the implementation of Directive 2009/81/EC on defence procurement, around 80% of defence expenditure happens at the national level, rather than at the European one. Lack of mutual trust, protectionism with regards to industrial interests, and a desire to safeguard national intellectual property and expertise are all possible causes. In fact, inter-firms relations are characterized by rivalries that hamper cooperation due to protectionism and a propensity to favour domestic suppliers over foreign ones[74]. This distributional implication of cooperation are more clear when the latter takes within an inter-state framework, rather than an European one. Thanks to the financial incentives provided by the European Union for industrial collaboration, defence firms are less concerned about competition between them and other European suppliers[75]. In order to answer the question relating to what brings European countries to seek cooperation within either framework, Calcara[76] introduced market size as a variable explaining this decision. Furthermore, his study also provides another layer accounting for lack of cooperation between Member States.

The researcher argues that market size is a decisive factor in explaining Member States' decisions regarding collaborative arrangements in the armaments domain, as it determines the relative costs and benefits of cooperation. He divides European countries into first and second tier powers, according to the internal market's capacity to absorb domestic weapon systems (which is directly tied to defence budget) and to the position of national arms manufacturers in the regional and global defence markets. According to this approach, France and Germany are first tier countries, while Italy, Spain, the Netherlands and Poland are second tier. As such, he contends that companies located in bigger markets have the financial and technological resources to retain a more independent industrial structure. Since they aim to preserve competitive domestic defence-industrial capabilities, these firms are frequently reluctant in collaborative efforts. Firms based in smaller markets, on the other hand, should develop other methods to preserve their place in the European market. The best way to do so is specializing in a specific market niche to develop comparative advantages and achieve economies of scale.

This framework helps understand the preference of first and second tier states regarding armaments cooperation. Since every collaborative project entails a transfer of know-how and

[73] Masson, H., Martin, K., Quéau, Y. & Seniora, J., 2015. *The Impact of the "Defence Package" Directives on European Defence*, Brussels: European Parliament's Subcommittee on Security and Defence.
[74] Tucker, J., 1999. Partners and rivals: a model of international collaboration in advanced technology. *International Organization*, 45(1), pp. 83-120.
[75] DeVore, M., 2014. International armaments collaboration and the limits of reform. *Defence and Peace Economics*, 25(4), pp. 415-443.
[76] Calcara, A., 2020. Cooperation and non cooperation in European defence procurement. *Journal of European Integration*, 42(6), pp. 799-815.

technology between its participants, in cases where there is asymmetry between them with regards to market size the first tier country will be unwilling to carry out the cooperation as the second tier state will comparatively benefit more than it because of this directional nature of technology and know-how. Thus, prime contractors in countries with a large defence industry will prioritise projects with a low degree of technological transfer in order to preserve their capabilities allowing them to produce complex weapon systems domestically, while defence firms of smaller countries will aim to take part to projects that will allow them to reinforce their relative position vis-à-vis partners. This model shows that European defence-industrial collaboration is characterized by both competitiveness and cooperation, making it difficult for Member States to fully engage in the latter.

Drawing on this study, another research[77] applies the same reasoning to explain the autonomy-efficiency dilemma. Again, market size is a fundamental variable, but this time it is used to explain in which instances European countries cooperate and when, on the other hand, they decide to rely on external partners, such as the United States, to fill their capabilities. Surely, the United States are the country which mostly benefitted from the globalization of the armaments industry, due to their ability to master system integrators. However, this hegemony makes a dilemma arise for other states: how to balance efficiency, achievable by buying off-the-shelf products, with autonomy, which diminishes as efficiency rises. European countries face this dilemma also from a regional standpoint. In fact, countries with a larger market size would benefit from a more levelled European defence-industry playing field, as it will allow them to emerge as regional system integrators. On the other hand, medium and smaller sized countries try to resist the levelling as they seek to have more system integrators to choose from in order to strengthen their bargaining position and do not lose too much autonomy.

As shown by the evidence brought by this section, European countries suffer from political fragmentation and divergent strategic cultures, mainly due to different geopolitical interests and cultural and historical backgrounds. A few initiatives, both within the European Union framework and outside of it, aim to reduce this gap, but their results are, at best, inconsistent. Furthermore, the defence-industrial landscape is also fragmented, with the vast majority of defence procurement happening at the national level rather than at the European one. The incentives to pursue greater collaboration, such as a shifting geopolitical order where Europe is called to act in a meaningful and unitary manner, reduction of costs which are constantly growing due to technological advancements, the achievement of economies of scale, greater interoperability and a reinforcement of European

[77] Calcara, A. & Simón, L., 2021. Market Size and the Political Economy of European Defense. *Security Studies*, 30(5), pp. 860-892.

cooperation seems not to be enough. The main reasons behind the scarcity of industrial cooperation are lack of mutual trust, protectionism with regards to industrial interests, and a desire to safeguard national intellectual property and expertise, as well as inter-firms relations being inherently organized by competitiveness. The division between political and industrial factors is for classification purposes only. In reality, political and industrial constrains compound and reinforce each other and, taken together, represent a significant obstacle hindering the achievement of European Strategic Autonomy.

The Way Forward

3.1. The Ukrainian War

The Russian invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022, left the world into shock. The military escalation represents the peak of the confrontation between the two countries which started in 2013, when Ukraine underwent a series of internal changes in order to integrate itself within the European Union family. As the process started with the Association Agreement went on, Moscow grew increasingly suspicious of Kiev's effort to get increasingly closer with the European Union. Thus, it first started imposing economic sanctions on Ukraine. The economic pressure applied by the sanctions eventually worked as the Yanukovych's government suspended the signing of the Agreement. This decision determined widespread protests in Ukraine, mostly repressed in blood, which ended up with the so-called Revolution of Dignity and a regime change. As a result, Russian policy turned more assertive, with the annexation of the Crimean peninsula in 2014, a geopolitically relevant territory for Moscow as it contains its only true major warm-water port, the one of Sevastopol[1]. After the annexation, the two countries and the international community tried to normalize the situation with mixed results. However, in 2021 tension arose again and the two countries started a series of border exercises which also saw the involvement of NATO.

This brief reconstruction of the events that led to the Russian invasion of Ukraine shows how it has been a gradual process and that the international community had at least some time to prepare for it. In fact, Russian troops build-up along the border with Ukraine started as early as October 2021 and the United States informed its European allies about the danger of an invasion, but the latter largely met the warnings with scepticism[2]. Thus, it is safe to argue that the shock the opening of this chapter refers to is not in relation to the invasion itself. As argued, there were many signals suggesting the possibility of a direct attack. What made European countries surprised is, rather, the characteristics of the war. Europeans thought that the continent would never witness a "real" war anymore, or that by the time it did break out, it would be hybrid[3]. The Ukrainian War demonstrated that those assumption were wrong. In fact, it is the first military confrontation since the Second World War between two countries on the European continent whose nature is largely traditional. Even though the distinction between traditional and irregular warfare is for academic purposes only, as their

[1] Marshall, T., 2016. *Prisoners of Geography: Ten Maps That Explain Everything About the World*. Reprint ed. New York: Scribner, pp. 24-25.
[2] Ruge, M. & Shapiro, J., 2022. *The exaggerated death of European sovereignty*. [Online]
Available at: https://ecfr.eu/article/the-exaggerated-death-of-european-sovereignty/
[Accessed 25 January 2023]
[3] Nones, M., 2022. I rischi di una difesa europea troppo accelerata. [Online]
Available at: https://www.affarinternazionali.it/difesa-comune-europea-accelerata/
[Accessed 03 January 2023]

relationship is better explained by seeing it as a continuum rather than a dichotomy[4], the former is characterized by the use of conventional military capabilities in traditional domains, namely land, air and sea. Despite the Ukrainian War has some unconventional elements, to date it is heavily shifted towards the traditional end of the spectrum.

The traditional character of the war caught Member States off guard not only under, as already discussed, a psychological point of view, but also with regards to available capabilities. In fact, as analysed in the first chapter, the European Union never conducted high intensity operation and never found itself in the midst of a traditional international conflict. Operations as the ones in the Balkans, in Africa, and in Afghanistan are good examples of such low to mid intensity missions. In fact, since its creation, the objective of CSDP has always been the one of conduction of crisis management operations, mainly in the form of peacekeeping and stabilisation efforts[5]. Thus, the Common Security and Defence Policy has never had a real defence dimension, resembling a simple foreign policy tool rather than a proper defence policy[6].

The consequences of this lack of experience with traditional, full scale, conflicts are also visible on the capabilities of European countries. CSDP missions are carried out by employing resources and assets made available by Member States. As argued in the previous chapter, no single Member State possesses full-spectrum capabilities to carry out military operations in the framework of a full scale international conflict. Beside capabilities in themselves, that would require an ability to project force that, to date, no European country holds. This is one of the reasons why, despite the provision contained in article 42(7) TEU regarding a common assistance clause between Member States in case of an armed attack on their territory, common defence is still entrusted to NATO and the provision is unlikely to be activated before article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty in case of a confrontation involving a Member State. The characteristics of CSDP and of the missions carried out within its framework determined the nature of European capabilities. Member States found themselves facing low to mid intensity operations and, as a consequence, they mostly developed capabilities to carry out that kind of missions. Thus, the European Union would not be ready to sustain a full scale conventional conflict as the one in Ukraine.

[4] Fabian, S., 2021. *Irregular Versus Conventional Warfare: A Dichotomous Misconception*. [Online]
Available at: https://mwi.usma.edu/irregular-versus-conventional-warfare-a-dichotomous-misconception/
[Accessed 02 January 2023]
[5] For reference, see Howorth, J., 2007. *Security and defence policy in the European Union*. I ed. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
[6] Simón, L., 2022. *European strategic autonomy and defence after Ukraine*. [Online]
Available at: https://www.realinstitutoelcano.org/en/analyses/european-strategic-autonomy-and-defence-after-ukraine/
[Accessed 04 January 2023]

The Russian invasion of Ukraine acted as a strategic wake up call for Member States and the European Union. When Russia crossed the border with Ukraine escalating the conflict, they realized they did not have the political and military capacity to respond to it. Politically speaking, at least at the start of the conflict, the EU 27 showed once again the political fragmentation with regards to defence matters outlined in the second chapter of this dissertation. Coherently with their strategic culture, Eastern European countries embraced a zero tolerance policy towards Russia's aggression, considering it the proof of the need for NATO and United States' engagement in Europe, and that the project for a strategically autonomous Europe is an outright failure as NATO is the only actor capable of defending Member States against Russian assertiveness. Furthermore, divisions ran deep even between Member States which, at a first glance, seem more aligned. For example, initially France tried to mediate between Russia and Europe, while Germany abandoned its pre-2022 ambition to turn Russia into a reliable partner through economic interdependence as soon as the conflict outbroke[7]. It took some time to witness the current level of political alignment between Member States, but now they seem aligned at least regarding the main issues.

The EU 27 realized they had to address the discussed political and industrial drawbacks in order to be able to efficiently respond to the conflict. To do so, they decided to increase their defence spending. Since the start of the war, they announced increases in their defence budget amounting to around €200 billion in the upcoming years, even though it will take until 2024 to compensate the underspending which characterized the post-2008 financial crisis period[8]. Beside this increase in national defence budgets, the European Union also created some instruments to assist Ukraine in the short term. The first instrument is the European Defence Industry Reinforcement through common Procurement Act (EDIRPA). The EDIRPA represents a short term commitment by the European Commission to allocate €500 million of EU budget over the period ranging from 2022 to 2024 to reinforce European defence industrial capacities through common procurement, aiming at addressing Ukraine's most urgent and critical needs resulting from the war. Furthermore, the EU is also committed to directly assist Ukraine military. In fact, since the start of the war it allocated €2.5 billion through the European Peace Facility (EPF) to provide Ukraine with the weapons it needs.

[7] Zerka, P., 2022. *The case for defence: How Russia's war on Ukraine has proved France right*. [Online]
Available at: https://ecfr.eu/article/the-case-for-defence-how-russias-war-on-ukraine-has-proved-france-right/
[Accessed 04 January 2023]
[8] European Commission, 2022. *EU steps up action to strengthen EU defence capabilities, industrial and technological base: towards an EU framework for Joint defence procurement*. [Online]
Available at: https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_22_3143
[Accessed 01 January 2023]

The aforementioned instruments aim at getting the most out of the increase in defence spending of Member States. As one year since the start of the war is rapidly approaching, the constant support to the Ukraine military drastically lowered the levels of European weapon stocks. Replenishing stocks is a goal in itself, but this task hides the risk of further exacerbating the fragmentation of the European defence-industrial landscape. In fact, spending does not automatically equal to better capabilities and, in order to satisfy the short term needs imposed by the war in Ukraine, Member States might be tempted to buy off the shelf military equipment from third countries. This would lead to greater fragmentation as there would be no coordination between their procurement efforts. Thus, considering that the average life span of military equipment amounts to around 30 years, the European Union would suffer from lack of interoperability and standardization for decades, a dynamic that would further diminish the already low level of European Strategic Autonomy. In other words, if the European Union manages to coordinate the procurement efforts of its Member States, the Union will benefit from greater interoperability and its positive consequences. On the contrary, if greater defence spending is not coordinated at the European level, Member States will buy off the shelf or second hand products from third countries, ending up either possessing multiple weapons systems or being condemned to technological backwardness. Whether the choice, the EDTIB European Strategic Autonomy would be undermined.

Remarkably, Ukraine's military needs are deeply intertwined with the needs of the European Union's defence industry. In fact, as national stocks are almost totally depleted, Member States are pressured to replenish them to sustain the flow of weapons towards Ukraine. At the same time, in doing so, they have the opportunity to address the main issues responsible for European industrial fragmentation. However, in order to seize this opportunity, the European Union has to move from an emergency and ad-hoc approach to a standardized one. In fact, after one year since the start of the war, the EDIRPA and the EPF are losing momentum, as shown by the fact that the last tranche of money under the EPF is being used to fund "maintenance and repair" which, despite being a crucial task, it represents the proof that those instruments are running out of steam[9]. Another reason why it will be fundamental to shift towards a normalization of joint procurement is that it is the only way to aggregate demand at the European level, thus providing the necessary economic incentive defence firms need to be pushed towards cooperation. As argued in the previous chapter, one of the reasons behind the lack of collaboration is that defence companies do not have clear economic advantages

[9] Angelet, B., 2022. *The War against Ukraine and European Defence: When will we square the circle?* [Online]
Available at: https://www.egmontinstitute.be/the-war-against-ukraine-and-european-defence-when-will-we-square-the-circle/
[Accessed 30 December 2022]

outweighing the drawbacks they would face should the pursue a greater degree of cooperation. By pooling demand at the European level, Member States will give a strong signal to their defence industries that greater defence spending is not just a by-product of the war and thus they can profit off greater collaboration.

The main problem with pursuing this objective will be that the characteristics of the war make a more comprehensive approach to procurement difficult. In fact, filling capabilities gaps exacerbated by the war will take years due to high delivery times and high costs per unit[10]. Thus, if the European Union invests all of his resources of joint procurement of military equipment, its support to Ukraine will falter in the long run as they will run out of weapons systems. The need for long-term strategic assistance is beyond dispute, but Member States are facing the delicate dilemma between it and short-term military support. Thus, while they are running out of Soviet-era equipment, they are also buying off the shelf from third countries. Arguably, what the European Union needs to achieve the double objective of assisting Ukraine and increasing its strategic autonomy is instruments dealing with both sides of the coin. In particular, it will need to reinforce intra-budgetary instruments as the EDIRPA to replenish its stocks and offer short-term assistance to Ukraine. At the same time, it will need to lay out new budgetary and regulatory tools to reinforce the EDTIB and thus giving it the means to produce needed capabilities to modernize European arsenals, reduce dependency on third countries when it comes to supply and boost the EU capacity to act in its neighbourhood[11].

Finally, a thorough rethinking of CSDP will be also required. In order to really reinforce the EDTIB, CSDP missions will need to deal with operational theatres requiring high end and high intensity capabilities. Until now, CSDP missions limited their scope to peace-making and peace-keeping operations. The development of better and interoperable systems to address the issue of industrial fragmentation is not an objective in itself. On the contrary, it serves the purpose of giving the Union the ability to exert its influence in its neighbourhood and spread its values and in order to do so, it cannot limit itself to peace-keeping and peace making. The defence industries of Member States will not produce technologically advanced weapons systems for the EU if the latter does not

[10] Gressel, G., 2022. *More tortoise, less hare: How Europeans can ramp up military supplies for Ukraine in the long war*. [Online]
Available at: https://ecfr.eu/article/more-tortoise-less-hare-how-europeans-can-ramp-up-military-supplies-for-ukraine-in-the-long-war/
[Accessed 02 January 2023]

[11] Besch, S., 2022. *EU Defense and the War in Ukraine*. [Online]
Available at: https://carnegieendowment.org/2022/12/21/eu-defense-and-war-in-ukraine-pub-88680
[Accessed 01 January 2023]

employ them, as it will be way more profitable to sell those abroad or to produce according to national standards.

3.2. Relationship with geopolitical giants: the United States and China

What can the European Union do to do not find itself trapped in the geopolitical confrontation between the two most important actors currently on the world stage? Arguably, this question would require a whole dissertation to be properly addressed. It is not by chance that the European Research Council awarded a Consolidator Grant equal to €1.7 million to Vrije Universiteit Brussel to explore the degree of European autonomy in Sino-American competition[12]. At the present time, it is difficult to make predictions regarding what role the European Union will occupy in the confrontation between the United States and China. However, what can be safely affirmed, is that the critical juncture we are currently witnessing is a great opportunity for the EU to build the basis of its independence from both players as to avoid being trapped in their skirmishes. In order to do so, the Union will have to reassert its role in the transatlantic alliance, taking advantage of both the Ukrainian War and of a more open United States President. Regarding China, it will need to be careful in balancing the economic benefits resulting from the engagement with it while resisting its pull. As both endeavours will require a bolstering of European capacity to navigate the modern world, it will have the opportunity to boost its strategic autonomy even beyond the security and defence realm in the process.

The relationship between the United States and the European Union is one of the most relevant aspects of the debate on European Strategic Autonomy. As discussed in the previous chapter, some scholars and government officials see the concept as revolving around this relationship. In reality, European Strategic Autonomy entails much more than just considerations regarding transatlantic relations which, nonetheless, represent a fundamental aspect of it. The United States, also through NATO, has been the main security provider for European countries for decades. European Strategic Autonomy is about the European Union achieving a variable degree of independence in military and security matters, thus calling into question, to a certain extent, the current international arrangement. As will be argued, the United States is not willing to discuss a complete reorganization of the relationship with its European allies, as it drew some red lines that partly shape its vision of European Strategic Autonomy.

Transatlantic relations touched an all time law under the presidency of Donald Trump. The former United States President embraced an isolationist stance that had dire results not only on its relationship with European countries, but also on the whole international liberal order. In fact, multilateralism receded as he withdrew from the Paris Climate Agreement and the World Health

[12] Wittermans, S., 2022. *VUB professor Luis Simón receives 1.7 million euro*. [Online]
Available at: https://press.vub.ac.be/vub-professor-luis-simon-receives-17-million-euro
[Accessed 01 February 2023]

Organization. With regards to transatlantic relations, Trump's administration adopted a transactional approach, criticizing its Allies for their defence underspending, while at the same time regarding them as outright foes[13]. Furthermore, Trump even contested the value and the utility of the transatlantic alliance, casting doubts on the United States commitment to the common assistance clause enshrined in article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty. In doing so, Trump effectively managed to keep Europe divided and weak as the United States sought to compete with Beijing to hold on to its declining hegemonic position[14]. Thus, it comes with no surprise that the debate on European Strategic Autonomy gained new momentum in this period, when European countries started to grow worried about the United States commitment to their security.

Joseph Biden's presidency marked a significative break with the one of his predecessor. Yet, there are also a number of elements of continuity between the two. Elements of discontinuity can be found especially in the declarations and tone of the new President. As soon as he took office, he declared that "America is back", underlining how the United States retreated from the international stage under Trump's administration. Differences can also be witnessed in the declaration addressing the relations with European countries, which the Biden reassured regarding the United States commitment to NATO and to transatlantic relations in general. However, the enthusiasm that accompanied the first period following the elections regarding the possibility of recalibrating the alliance to pre-2016 standards proved to be mistaken. In fact, if on one hand Biden changed the assertive tone of its predecessor into a more open and inclusive one, on the other its policies are characterized by a certain degree of continuity. Both Trump's and Biden's policies are characterized by a variable degree of unilaterality and possess a strong strategic component that has precedence over transatlantic ties. In particular, Biden did not consult European countries when, in August 2021, completed the American withdrawal from Afghanistan, nor he cared that the agreement he concluded with the United Kingdom and Australia jeopardized a submarine contract between the latter and France. Finally, he also did not change its approach with China, especially with regards to trade policy, despite some of its aspects damaging European countries.

Traditionally speaking, the United States has always supported European integration, advocating for its deepening. This is true for every aspect of the European integration process, except for security and defence issues. In fact, the United States opposed European Strategic Autonomy as

[13] Jakštaitė-Confortola, G., 2022. US Foreign Policy during the Biden Presidency: A Reset in the US Approach towards the EU Strategic Autonomy? In G. Česnakas & J. Juozaitis, eds. *European Strategic Autonomy and Small States' Security*. London: Routledge, pp. 81-92.
[14] Martin, G. & Sinkkonen, V., 2022. Past as Prologue? The United States and European Strategic Autonomy in the Biden Era. *European Foreign Affairs Review*, 27(Special Issue), pp. 99-120.

its officials saw it as detrimental to NATO, the main pillar of the transatlantic security architecture, as they feared it would generate competition and duplication of efforts[15]. A change of course occurred with the Obama's administration, which was the first United States President to see European Strategic Autonomy under a more favourable light. In fact, Obama had to deal with the consequences of one of the most harsh financial crisis the world has ever witnessed, the rise of other powers and wearisome wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Furthermore, he was the first president to set a pivot to Southeast Asia. Thus, it is unsurprisingly that he favoured a more autonomous EU. However, this approach was strictly limited to the Obama's presidency, as his two followers embraced different approaches.

Donald Trump's and Joseph Biden's views of European Strategic Autonomy are characterized by both similarities and differences. Coherently with what already discussed, Trump was in overt opposition to the concept, as he feared it would undermine the United States position within NATO. Furthermore, he also had domestic concerns regarding the degree of openness of the European defence market, as he feared PESCO and the EDF would hinder United States' firms access to it, as demonstrated by the letter sent by two undersecretaries to the then HR/VP Federica Mogherini in May 2019[16]. Differently from Trump, Biden's administration supports the idea of European Strategic Autonomy, as it enables burden-sharing and strengthens the European pillar of NATO[17]. This approach is determined by political needs, as the United States require more capable European allies taking care of the crisis in their neighbourhood while they deal with an increasingly assertive China, even if that would mean a loss of export markets for American defence firms[18]. However, there are red lines. Similarly from Trump's approach, European Strategic Autonomy cannot lead to competition and duplication of functions with NATO. In short, the current United States administration supports European Strategic Autonomy as long as it makes European countries more capable to take greater responsibility in their neighbourhood, leads to greater defence spending and is not detrimental to the United States geopolitical interest and to NATO functions. Thus, it is very unlikely to witness common assistance duties slip out the NATO framework, at least in the short to medium period.

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[15] Binnendijk, H. & Vershbow, A., 2021. *Needed: A trans-Atlantic agreement on European strategic autonomy*. [Online]
Available at: https://www.defensenews.com/global/europe/2021/10/10/needed-a-transatlantic-agreement-on-european-strategic-autonomy/
[Accessed 07 January 2023]

[16] See Chapter 2, footnote 20.

[17] Jakštaitė-Confortola, G., 2022. US Foreign Policy during the Biden Presidency: A Reset in the US Approach towards the EU Strategic Autonomy?, p. 87.

[18] Romanyshyn, I., 2021. Breaking the Law of Opposite Effects: Europe's Strategic Autonomy and the Revived Transatlantic Partnership. *Egmont Institute*, p. 3.

The reason why Biden shares positive and negative elements of its view regarding European Strategic Autonomy with its predecessors is because of objective forces which shape the policies of every United States president. The Ukrainian War also shows this dynamic. Even though Ukraine is not part of NATO nor of the European Union, the two are playing a fundamental role in its defence despite not being allowed to directly intervene militarily. Thus, NATO's and United States' commitment to common defence is not in doubt. On the other hand, it also showed that the United States grand strategy has irreversibly shifted towards the Indo-Pacific region. As highlighted in the 2022 National Security Strategy[19], despite the war in Ukraine, the United States regard Russia as a short to medium threat term, while it still regards the rise of China as the most challenging systemic threat to the Western liberal order and the Indo-Pacific as the most relevant operational theatre of the following years. Thus, the Ukrainian war had this ambivalent effect on transatlantic relations: if, on the one hand, it confirmed American and NATO commitment to Western European security, on other it highlighted that Europeans need to do more with regards to security and defence as the United States focus is progressively shifting towards the Indo-Pacific.

Biden's presidency and the war in Ukraine is an occasion for European countries to try to rebuild transatlantic ties after four years of destructive Trump administration. It is time to put the old Atlanticist – Europeanist divide to the side, striving for a better division of labour that goes beyond the traditional debate on burden-sharing. Biden welcomes the increased defence spending Member States are pursuing through national defence budgets and, contrarily to Trump, also supports European initiatives that aim at developing the EDTIB, as PESCO and the EDF. If Member States continue on this path, they will eventually reach a combined level of funding that will exceed the one of their competitors in their neighbourhood, chief amongst them Russia. However, more money does not automatically equal to more involvement. They will have to take greater responsibility in their neighbourhood and, together with the United States, will need to define a division of labour at the sub-strategic level[20]. The basis is already there. According to article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty, NATO members have a duty, even though not absolute, to assist each other in case of attack. On the other hand, an evolutive interpretation of article 42(7) TEU states that Member States have the responsibility to support each other, even militarily, for purposes of regional stability[21]. The two sides

[19] The White House, 2022. *National Security Strategy*. [Online]
Available at: https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/Biden-Harris-Administrations-National-Security-Strategy-10.2022.pdf
[Accessed 15 January 2023]
[20] Economides, S. & Sperling, J., 2018. *EU Security Strategies: Extending the EU System of Security Governance*. I ed. London: Routledge.
[21] Engelbrekten, K., 2022. Beyond Burdensharing and European Strategic Autonomy: Rebuilding Transatlantic Security After the Ukraine War. *European Foreign Affairs Review*, 27(3), pp. 383-400.

of the Atlantic will have to build the future of their ties on this basis, avoiding outdated Cold War understandings of burden sharing and thus benefitting from a more mature and equal relationship.

The European Union started having relationships with China only in 2003, when the two entities concluded a strategic partnership. Until then, it neglected its rise and focused more on its neighbourhood and on the transatlantic bond. Yet, with its internal market composed by billions of people, China was entering the global stage. Since then, Sino-European relations proved to be complex and ambiguous. It is not by chance that, in 2019, the European Commission regarded China as a «a negotiating partner with whom the EU needs to find a balance of interests, an economic competitor in the pursuit of technological leadership, and a systemic rival promoting alternative models of governance»[22]. This triple definition reflects that complexity and suggests the difficulty in laying down a coherent and unambiguous policy stance towards China. As a partner, in 2020 China became the European Union leading trade partner in goods with €586 billion, compared to €555 billion of the United States. As an economic competitor in pursuit of technological leadership, China is trying to engage in the development of emerging technologies in order to create dependencies on it[23]. As a systemic rival, China is trying to penetrate in the economies of other countries through economic investments and initiatives, such as the Belt and Road Initiative, which are seen by some as an attempt to expand Chinese soft power in the world, thus challenging the international liberal order[24].

Since 2003, the European Union and its Member States have engaged with China in multiple ways. As already states, China is the European Union first trade partner in goods and the latter competes with the United States which seeks to secure market shares. Yet, trade relations between the EU and China are characterized by a growing trade deficit which the former will have to rebalance through measures contrasting practices that distort competition. In particular, the relationship is characterized by both external and internal asymmetry. Externally, China does not offer the same degree of access to its internal market as European countries do. Internally, some Member States, namely Germany, feel the pull of the Chinese market more than others. This last point leads to the question of internal cohesion with the European Union. In fact, China has tried to exploit differences

[22] European Commission & HR/VP, 2019. *EU-China Strategic Outlook: Commission and HR/VP contribution to the European Council*. [Online]
Available at: https://commission.europa.eu/publications/eu-china-strategic-outlook-commission-and-hrvp-contribution-european-council-21-22-march-2019_en
[Accessed 02 February 2023].
[23] Armanini, U. & Esteban, M. 2019. Strategic autonomy in a new era: a Cold-War risk assessment of China's involvement in the EU's 5G networks. *Elcano Royal Institute*, ARI 89/2019.
[24] Berman, N., Chatzky, A. & McBride, J, 2023. *China's Massive Belt and Road Initiative*. [Online]
Available at: https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/chinas-massive-belt-and-road-initiative
[Accessed 05 February 2023]

amongst Member States with a view to divide them. The 17+1 Initiative, aiming at extending the Belt and Road Initiative to European countries, goes in this direction. Yet, the Initiative lost momentum and European countries managed to resist to the attack. Furthermore, in September 2021 the European Union has, for the first time, elaborated a common strategy for the Indo-Pacific that also deals with engagement with China. Surely, such initiatives are welcomed as, in order to retain its strategic autonomy vis-à-vis Sino-American competition, the European Union needs to define a common approach.

The European Union and China are economically intertwined in multiple ways. Trade, firm-to-firm relations, technological and know-how transfers are only few of the fields in which the European Union and China are interlinked. Yet, Beijing has always tried to steer those relationships into dependencies, for example by elaborating measure damaging fair competition, forcing technology transfers or closing its market to European firms. In addition, in recent years China's domestic and regional policies took a turn for the worse. Human rights violations against Uyghurs in the Xinjiang region, the massive and bloody crackdown of the democratic Hong Kong protests, renewed assertiveness in its neighbourhood, the recent Taiwan crisis, the intransigent management of the health crisis, and the autarkic turn witnessed during the XX Communist Party Congress are just a few elements that led Member States to reconsider their relation with China. Furthermore, even though it is true that the European Union increasingly built its ties with China, the United States are still the Union's major political partner, as they share values and a way of living foreign to the Chinese model. Thus, when Washington started to identify China as the most challenging medium to long term threat, European suspicion and feeling of insecurity towards the latter rose. Today, the state of Sino-European relations is in shambles.

Despite Brussels being closer to Washington rather than Beijing, the point here is not that the European Union has to cut its ties with the latter. At least, existing dependencies make engagement necessary. The EU must be able to obtain a certain degree of independence from both actors in order to avoid getting trapped in their confrontations and thus lose autonomy. In particular, the question will be whether the EU will be an object or a subject in Sino-American relations. Arguably, due to the complexity that characterizes the relationship between the three of them, the EU will play both roles at the same time and depending on the issue at stake. The Union still has not the power to completely free itself from existing dependencies. Yet, what it can do is asserting its foreign policy in relation to both actors and make strategic autonomy a priority. What this means is refusing interference in European affairs, securing the integrity of its partners in the Indo-Pacific, investing in technological R&D to strengthen the EDTIB and catch up with the cutting edge technological

development of both countries, and not giving up abiding to its values only for commercial returns. There are some encouraging signals. When debating about third countries participation in PESCO and the EDF, Member States reached the conclusion that, in order to participate to projects, the former needed to respect the values of the European Union and it is not indeed the case for China. By placing this barrier, the EU effectively managed to protect its defence-industrial market by Chinese interference. In short, European Strategic Autonomy is a tool that allows the European Union to be able to retain its independence from geopolitical giants, granting it the ability to make its decisions autonomously and to pursue them. Coherently with the analysis in the previous chapter, it is not an end by itself. Rather, it is a mean to reach different, yet interlinked, objectives.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this thesis analysed the concept of European Strategic Autonomy and its relevance for the present and the future of the European Union. In an international order more and more characterized by confrontation and assertiveness by states seeking to challenge the status quo. Furthermore, in the past few years, liberalism has receded significantly due to international developments as Brexit and the Trump's presidency. This dissertation sought to answer the following research question:

RQ: is a noticeable degree of strategic autonomy achievable in a short to medium term?

Drawing on the research conducted especially in the second chapter of this dissertation, the answer seems to be in the negative in the short term and ambiguous in the medium. In the short term, the obstacles to European Strategic Autonomy appear of greater magnitude compared to the incentives and to the instruments available to Member States to pursue greater integration in the field of security and defence. In particular, the European Defence Agency, the Permanent Structured Cooperation and the European Defence Fund are not enough to boost strategic autonomy as they are still dependent on the political will of Member States to fully use them. In the medium term, results appear to be more ambiguous. In fact, thanks the longer time span, Member States will have more time at their disposal to craft new instruments or reinforcing existing ones to boost strategic autonomy. In addition, the war could act as a centripetal force bringing them together. Furthermore, if the Ukrainian war will not continue for years, they will have the possibility to evaluate its impact on European integration and can learn important lessons from it, allowing them to define the path they want to pursue without having their attention and resources drained by an ongoing war. On the other hand, the opposite still holds true. If Member States do not take advantage of the current situation, the national defence spending increases and political declaration of solidarity between them will be devoid of meaning. Moreover, there are doubts on whether the European Union would manage to survive the blow of a failure of such magnitude. In short, much will depend on their political will and if they will manage to overcome internal differences for the sake of the European project, and the following decade will be the most crucial one. The pieces of the puzzle are there, now it is up to Member States to compose it. For European defence, it is now or never.

This dissertation opens possibilities for further research outlooks regarding European Strategic Autonomy. In particular, it would be interesting to understand whether Member States have specific incentives in pursuing cooperation within the European Union framework, for example through PESCO projects, rather than doing so within other frameworks, for example through the Organisation for Joint Armament Co-operation or bi-lateral means. Beside the small economic incentive awarded to projects carried out through PESCO, it would be beneficial to understand

whether there are other elements in favour of European cooperation. Should they not be present, achieving European Strategic Autonomy would be even more difficult as it cooperation would rely on the sole political will of Member States. In order to investigate this matter, a series of professional figures could be interviewed in order to compare the development process of military platforms in the different frameworks. Furthermore, another interesting research outlook is represented by the role of the European Union in Sino-American competition, as matter that will be explored in the following years by the SINATRA project.

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Executive Summary

The European Union is currently undergoing times of profound conceptual transformation. This transformation has its roots in the recent past, as it started in 2019 when the newly elected President of the European Commission Ursula Von der Leyen made a speech enunciating a qualitative shift in the work of the European Commission. In that speech, Von der Leyen stated that she had a Geopolitical Commission in mind, one that would be engaged in the world as a positive power capable to bring peace in the global order. In addition, in 2020 the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and Vice-President of the Commission of the European Union Josep Borrell declared in front of the European Parliament that the European Union "must learn the language of power" and not only rely on soft power. This approach is in stark contrast with the history of the European Union. In fact, the Union was born as a regulatory power dealing with economic matters, as after the Second World War the security of the continent has been entrusted to NATO and the United States. Despite the American interest in Western European security and stability, the United States has not always been satisfied with the degree of commitment and collaboration of its European allies. The 1950 Korean War had deep consequences on transatlantic relations and European defence, as the United States started to request a major contribution to Western European countries to collective defence, at least in their neighbourhood. This request was inherently linked with the issue of German's rearmament.

In order to address both issues, the French Prime Minister Rene Pleven submitted to the French National Assembly the so-called Pleven Plan, which paved the way to the ideation of the European Defence Community, the first structured attempt at European integration in the field of defence. However, the project failed. To enter into force, the treaty establishing the EDC had to be signed by the parliaments of the participant States. Four out of the six initial members of the EDC ratified the treaty swiftly. In 1954, a strong ideological conflict afflicted the French political debate. The magnitude of the debate was so large that Italy, despite being ready to ratify the treaty, waited to see how the events in France would unfold. On August 30, 1954, the EDC was brought to vote after only two debates. Then, the majority of the National Assembly passed a motion to postpone the discussion, a procedural institute which marked the *de facto* failure of the EDC through a non-substantive vote and without a proper discussion.

The non-ratification of the EDC Treaty by France and, consequently, Italy, gave a devastating blow to the project of European integration in the field of defence. After the failure of the EDC, European countries started to explore different paths of integration outside the then Communitarian framework, with mixed results. The most important one has been the Western European Union,

established in 1954 using the 1948 Treaty of Brussels between France, the United Kingdom, Belgium, Luxembourg and the Netherlands as a legal basis. The main objective of the Brussels Treaty was to create a mutual defence agreement between Western European countries in order to contrast a potential German aggression. However, with the establishment of the WEU, Germany is granted access to the same organization born out of the necessity to build a common defence framework against it. Thus, the very birth of the WEU deprives it of its initial *raison d'être*. Surely, German rearmament was kept in check by its contemporary membership to NATO. However, the WEU was only left with a residual objective, which was allowing the functioning of NATO in Europe. The newly established European military arm was born ideologically ill and that is reflected in the marginal role it played throughout the Cold War, as NATO still retained the central stage. The WEU obtained some relevance only in the late 1980s, when it was used as a framework for low-intensity military operations in the Iran-Iraq war, in the Gulf War and in the Balkan crisis. In the same period, the WEU had the merit of laying down what became known as the Petersberg Tasks, which allowed WEU members to, under the organization's authority, use their forces for humanitarian and rescue tasks, peace-keeping tasks, and tasks of combat forces in crisis management, including peace-making. However, the Petersberg Tasks followed the same disappointing pattern of other initiatives undertaken in that period.

While European countries were experimenting, with mixed results, different integration patterns in the field of defence, the world was changing. The major international development that verified is constituted by the end of the Cold War in 1991. The security vacuum left by the Soviet Union also determined the initially unforeseen emergence of new security problems, largely linked to regions of the world wielding high potential for conflict. The receding commitment of the United States to scenarios it does not have a direct interest in is the product of this new security environment. Hence, the need for European countries to address the crises emerging in their neighbourhood without necessarily relying on American intervention. Among those crises, the most relevant one, due to its consequences on European defence, has been the Bosnian conflict stemming from the dissolution of former Yugoslavia. At the time of the explosion of the conflict, the European Community did not have any treaty-based instrument to carry out a military intervention. In fact, the conflict started in the midst of political negotiations regarding the Maastricht Treaty. In 1987 the Single European Act amended the Treaty of Rome introducing, for the first time in primary law, a reference to security. However, this reference was rather limited as it contained no reference to defence and reference to security is only made regarding its political economic aspects, without any reference to security policy. Generally speaking, the provisions of the Single European Act did not lay down any specific right or duty for Member States, which found themselves without any pressure to act. However, the

more specific norms contained in the Maastricht Treaty did not lead to coordinated action during the Yugoslav crisis either. Thus, the lack of a comprehensive institutional framework is not the reason why European countries did not intervene in the conflict. In fact, European countries were divided on minor political issues that determined to their inability to act.

The 1992 Maastricht Treaty introduced for the first time in primary law provisions about security and defence in the form of a Common Foreign and Security Policy. However, Member States introduced in the text several provisions to impair the pursuit of common goals and objectives in the field, thus weakening the whole institutional infrastructure. In pursuing CFSP objectives, they must direct their efforts towards the general interest of the Union in a spirit of loyalty and mutual solidarity, abstaining from any action that would be detrimental to said interest and objectives. In doing so, they even surrendered unanimity as a voting procedure, establishing a qualified majority vote for joint actions in areas in which they have a common interest. However, as article J.3 states, the decision to adopt qualified majority vote is subject to consensus. Hence, every country holds veto power. Furthermore, even if Member States decide to vote through qualified majority, they still have an exit strategy in article J.3(6) which contains an emergency clause that can be invoked in cases of "imperative need" allowing Member States to question qualified majority vote. With all the analysed loopholes characterizing the Maastricht Treaty, it does not surprise that the internal divisions between Member States during the Bosnian War led to a deadlock within the European Union. Furthermore, matters with defence implications are not governed by the aforementioned provisions as the Maastricht Treaty just provided that CFSP included the "eventual" framing of a common defence policy, which "might" lead to a common defence.

A 1996 Intergovernmental Conference produced the so-called Amsterdam Treaty which amended the provisions of Maastricht Treaty regarding security and defence. Firstly, it determined the disappearance of the WEU, since its tasks have been gradually absorbed by the European Union. Secondly, further negotiations related to the introduction of elements of flexibility in the three pillars in order to weaken the veto power Member States held thanks to the use of unanimity as a voting procedure. in the final stages of the Intergovernmental Conference, Member States decided not to introduce mechanisms triggering flexibility in the second pillar, opting instead for constructive abstention. Arguably, Member States considered that, due to the very nature of CFSP, largely characterized by an ad-hoc approach to crises management, a specific flexibility clause was superfluous, if not detrimental. Through constructive abstention, Member States could abstain from voting on a certain policy without impairing its advancements while, at the same time, recognizing that the decision bound the EU as a whole. Despite the good intentions behind constructive abstention,

whose rationale lies in the fact of not allowing a single Member State to block initiatives of a numerous group, in a historical moment when Member States were struggling to leave a mark in international affairs and to speak with one voice, this mechanism of defection further undermined the credibility of European initiatives in the field of defence. In fact, it showed once more lack of internal cohesion. Finally, another drawback is represented by the fact that Member States are not all politically equal, and thus initiatives where countries like France, the United Kingdom or Germany abstained, would not be significant, if not an outright failure.

European initiatives in the field of defence gained new momentum thanks to the 1998 St. Malo Declaration by France and the United Kingdom. While France had always advocated for a stronger European integration in the field of security defence, the same cannot be said for the United Kingdom, which held a more Atlanticist stance entailing a robust commitment to the security of Western Europe by the United States. Then, in 2001, the Nice Treaty has been ratified, but it did not add significant changes to the CFSP machinery. However, just ten months after the Nice Treaty, the European Council adopted the Laeken Declaration, which aimed at reforming it. After the Laeken Declaration, an Intergovernmental Conference was set up in 2003 and led to the drafting of the Treaty Establishing a Constitution for Europe. In 2005, however, the Treaty was rejected through referendum by France and the Netherlands, mainly because of its constitutional character and the consequent constitutional elements attached to it. This development produced another Intergovernmental Conference in 2007, which led to the to the drafting of the Reform Treaty, also known as the Lisbon Treaty, which entered into force in December 2009. It is noteworthy that the provisions relating to security and defence remained mostly unchanged between the Treaty Establishing a Constitution for Europe and the Lisbon Treaty, attesting their large degree of approval by Member States.

The Treaty of Lisbon introduced important changes to the European Union. Generally speaking, it abolished the pillar structure introduced by the Maastricht Treaty giving thus birth to a unitary organization, at least on paper. Although eliminating the formal division into pillars, the EU is still composed of two souls: a supranational and an intergovernmental one. Policies outside the single market are discussed and voted within intergovernmental institutions, and the Common Foreign and Security Policy and the newly established Common Security and Defence Policy make no exception. In addition, as provided by article 24(1) TEU, CFSP is subject to specific rules and procedures that do not apply to other policy areas, outlining once more the distinctive nature of CFSP. Contrarily to the previous treaties, which dedicated to CFSP just one article, the Lisbon Treaty reserves a whole section, Section 1 of Chapter 2 in Title V, to the topic and CSDP is addressed in the subsequent Section 2. The CFSP objectives laid down in the TEU are remarkably vague. This reflects

the distinctive nature of this policy field, largely dependent on the political will of the Member States which are tasked with adding content to the general provisions. Furthermore, CFSP is subject to specific rules and procedures which are disjointed from the rules and procedures stemming from the division of competence between the European Union and the Member States. These rules and procedures are unanimity as voting procedure, the exclusion of the adoption of legislative acts and, consequently, rejection of the jurisdiction of the Court of Justice of the European Union except regarding the application of article 40 TEU and for CFSP acts adopted by the Council entailing restrictive measures against natural or legal persons. CFSP instruments remained untouched in their content in the transition from the Nice Treaty to the Lisbon Treaty. What changed is their nomenclature, and whether the new terminology, which does not bring any change in content, successfully conveys a simplified view of CFSP instruments is, at best, arguable.

Several political and administrative institutions are involved in CFSP decision making and implementation process. The decision-making power is in the hands of the European Council, which can define the strategic interest and objectives of the Union. In doing so, it acts unanimously on recommendation of the Council. The need of the Union to speak with one voice is addressed with the establishment of the President of the European Council, which not however the only figure responsible for external representation as the Lisbon Treaty establishes the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy (HR/VP). Thus, these two institutional figures have to share the stage with the risk of, depending on their personal attitudes, jeopardising one or another in relation to this task. However, he also has a role in the decision-making procedure. The HR/VP and the Member States have the power to make a proposal to the Council, which then takes the consequent decisions unanimously. There are a few exceptions to the general rule of unanimity. According to article 31(2) TEU, the Council can act by qualified majority when adopting a decision implementing a previous Council decision taken by unanimity and relating to a Union's strategic interest, objective, action or position; when adopting a decision defining a Union action or position, on a proposal of the HR/VP following a specific request of the European Council; and when appointing special representatives. As for the Amsterdam Treaty, Member States can avoid qualified majority voting upon invoking vital and stated reasons of national policy.

The above list of matters to be decided by qualified majority vote is non-exhaustive. In fact, article 31(3) allows for more issues to be decided with this voting procedure. However, this mechanism is triggered by a unanimous decision of the European Council. Thus, before allowing the Council to decide by qualified majority vote, another intergovernmental institution must give its unanimous consent, thereby allowing member States to block the process. Moreover, any decision

with defence or military implication cannot be taken with qualified majority vote even if they fall within either the list in article 31(2) or the mechanism in article 31(3). Finally, Member States have an additional protection mechanism from decisions they do not want to take part to, namely constructive abstention, which, as already stated, allows for Member States not to be bound by a decision, while at the same time recognizing that said decision binds the Union as a whole.

Article 42(1) TEU defines CSDP as an integral part of CFSP aimed at providing the Union with an operational capacity made of military and civilian assets that can be used to attain the objectives of strengthening international security, for peace-keeping operations and for conflict prevention. These objectives are pursued using capabilities provided by Member States. Article 42(2) defines the scope of CSDP, which includes the progressive framing of a common Union defence policy that will lead to a common defence. Compared to the wording of previous treaties, which provided that the progressive framing of a common defence police might have led to common defence, the Lisbon Treaty is much more committed to this objective. However, the second subparagraph of article 42(2) underlines that the eventual progresses in the field do not take place in a vacuum. On the contrary, the policy of the Union in this field is subordinated to the security and defence policy of Member States and to their obligations within NATO, which is still portrayed as the enabler of the European Union common defence despite the introduction of a mutual assistance clause in article 42(7) TEU.

In order to design and implement CSDP missions, the Council has created a series of distinct administrative bodies through CFSP decisions. Alongside them, article 38 TEU establishes the Political and Security Committee (PSC), which has the power to monitor international developments, to give his opinion on CFSP policies and to monitor their implementation. More importantly, it is responsible for the political control and strategic direction of CSDP missions and operations. The European Military Committee (EUMC) is tasked with the military direction of the missions through the EU Operation Commander, which is responsible for the operational execution of the mission. The Military Staff of the European Union (EUMS) duties include early warning, situation assessment, strategic planning, liaising with NATO and working in close cooperation with the European Defence Agency (EDA) to enhance defence capabilities. Finally, the EEAS has two units that contribute to the design and implementation of CSDP missions. The Crisis Management and Planning Directorate which is responsible for the political strategic planning and review of CSDP missions, while Civilian Planning and Conduct Capability deals only with civilian missions.

The decision-making process within CSDP is characterized by the constant interaction between these bodies. In particular, the Crisis Management and Planning Directorate elaborates a

Crisis Management Concept, a document which contains an evaluation of the situation, states the EU's objectives and proposes a strategy. The document is drafted in collaboration with the Committee for Civilian Aspects of Crisis Management (CIVCOM) and the EUMC. Then, the PSC agrees on the concept and forwards it to the Council for approval. Once approved, The Committee on Civilian Planning and Conduct Capability and the EUMS lay out the civilian and military strategies to achieve the aims of the Crisis Management Concept. Following, the PSC outlines the various options and submit them to the Council, which will have to take a decision on whether to make the action military or civilian in nature and the consequent strategy. Finally, the operational planning document are drafted by the EUMC in case of military operations or by the Committee on Civilian Planning and Conduct Capability for civilian missions.

The last innovative element introduced by the Lisbon Treaty with regards to CSDP is represented by flexibility clauses allowing for willing Member States to seek further integration and, on the other hand, eliminating the veto power of unwilling Member States which can instead not take part to certain actions. There are two ways to trigger flexibility. The first one is through article 42(5) TEU which allows the Council to entrust the execution of a task to a group of Member States. The second flexibility mechanism is permanent structured cooperation (PESCO). Article 42(6) TEU allows for States whose military capabilities fulfil higher criteria and which have made more binding commitments to one another in this area to establish permanent structured cooperation. The Treaty of Lisbon provides that PESCO must be established with a Council decision. This happened only in 2017.

In that period, thanks to a series of international developments, namely the hostility of the former United States President Donald Trump towards Europe and NATO, the renewed Russian aggression in Ukraine and Brexit, which removed the strongest opposer to common European defence, CFSP and CSDP gained new momentum. It is in this new international context, characterized by renewed isolationism and assertiveness, that the European Union firstly introduced the concept of European Strategic Autonomy. The first official document mentioning the concept are the 2013 European Council conclusions of its first thematic debate on defence. As already emerges from this first rudimentary introduction of the notion, defence capabilities are an integral part of European Strategic Autonomy. In order to develop and maintain those, a strong, sustainable, and integrated technological and industrial base is required. Thus, it can be affirmed that the development of European Defence Technological and Industrial Base (EDTIB) is an enabler of European Strategic Autonomy.

The next official document mentioning European Strategic Autonomy is the 2016 European Union Global Strategy (EUGS), which uses the expression four times. Despite using the term more often than the 2013 European Council conclusions, the EUGS fails to precisely define it. In fact, the document only highlights how important strategic autonomy is in order to allow the European Union to promote its values and enhance security both within and outside its borders. Having the capabilities and political will to act autonomously does not necessarily equal to embracing an inward-looking stance. In fact, the EUGS underlines multiple times that the process leading to a more autonomous Union does not entail independence from NATO, which remains the core partner in the field of defence and the main actor. On the contrary, fostering strategic autonomy would enhance the European pillar of the Alliance to the benefit of both entities. In addition, the European countries will develop their capabilities in a coordinated manner and by liaising with NATO, as to boost interoperability and to build capacities.

The events of 2016 brought the concept of European Strategic Autonomy at the center of the European debate. Beside the already discussed Global Strategy and several others official documents mentioning it, scholars have strived to define the concept. As official documents failed to give a definition of strategic autonomy, the first scholarly production was principally concerned with either criticizing it or to define what it is not, rather than what it is. Hence the need to reconstruct part of that debate, as to show what is the real content of European Strategic Autonomy and to avoid the risk of politicizing an expression which, due to the attention it received in the last years, runs the risk of becoming a catchphrase devoid of any specific meaning. The main criticism of the concept has to do with concerns regarding a hypothetical isolationist turn that the European Union would take should it achieve strategic autonomy. Under the cloak of strategic autonomy, the reasoning goes, the European Union will implement isolationist policies that will make it more inward-looking in all policy domains at the detriment of the countries who benefits from its openness. European Strategic Autonomy does not entail any of the above and these negative understandings can arguably be traced back to either a general aversion against European integration or to misconception regarding its content.

In order to overcome these conceptual drawbacks, there have been attempts by both scholars and European institutions to redefine strategic autonomy. These attempts concern both the form and the substance of strategic autonomy. Concerning the form, the term “strategic autonomy” has been almost totally eliminated from the discourse, being substituted by other expressions such as “Strategic Sovereignty” or “Open Strategic Autonomy”, which are used interchangeably. At the same time, this semantical change has been accompanied by a parallel change in substance. However, the change in

substance is only apparent, as the new expressions do not entail a real modification of the content of European Strategic Autonomy. If there has to be a difference between strategic autonomy and strategic sovereignty, it is in the scope of application of the two, as strategic sovereignty can be seen encompassing several policy fields while strategic autonomy is more fitting to the security and defence area, which is the focus of this dissertation.

European Strategic Autonomy can be defined as the European Union's ability to define its priorities and to implement them in cooperation with others, when possible, and on its own, when necessary. As such, European Strategic Autonomy is not about autarchy or independence from the EU partners. Rather, it is about strengthening the European Union in order to allow it to better navigate a world characterized, as already argued, by growing competitiveness and conflictuality between its major players and within different regions. It has to do with the recognition by Member States that they cannot tackle global problems, be those pandemics, energetic crises or wars in their immediate neighbourhood, alone. As simple as it is, they just lack the capabilities to do so. In this framework, European Strategic Autonomy is conceptualized as being composed of two main elements: a political one and an industrial one. The first has to do with the construction of a shared strategic culture between Member States and with the common recognition of the need of a more autonomous Union. The industrial one, on the other hand, regards capabilities development and their employment to attain common objectives deriving from political consensus.

A mistake that must be avoided is the one to consider European Strategic Autonomy as an end by itself. Failing to do so would imply emptying the concept of any meaning, making it, on the one hand impossible to pursue, and on the other, even detrimental to do so. On the contrary, European Strategic Autonomy is a mean to achieve the ambitious goal of advancing its interest and values in the multilateral world it contributed to build over the years, pursuant to article 3(5) TEU. European Strategic Autonomy is not even a binary concept, thus allowing only for two scenarios: full autonomy or full dependency. Rather, it encompasses a range of choices depending on contingencies and allowing the European Union to adapt it based on the specific case at hand. Again, the reasoning accusing strategic autonomy to lead to protectionism is difficult to support as its flexibility allows the European Union to decide how to act in the specific instance based on, for example, the costs (both economic and political) of greater integration.

Member States have several tools at their disposal to boost strategic autonomy. One of those is the European Defence Agency (EDA), an intergovernmental agency established under the authority of the Council of the European Union. The main principles guiding EDA actions are: voluntary participation to open projects, non-binding approach, mutual transparency and accountability, mutual

support and benefits and fair and equal treatment of suppliers. Amongst its tasks, there is the contribution to identifying the Member States' military capability objectives, the promotion harmonisation of operational needs and adoption of effective, compatible procurement methods, the proposition of multilateral projects to fulfil the objectives in terms of military capabilities, ensure coordination of the programmes implemented by the Member States and management of specific cooperation programmes, the support of joint defence technology research, and the contribution contributing to identifying and, if necessary, implementing any useful measure for strengthening the industrial and technological base of the defence sector and for improving the effectiveness of military expenditure.

Despite the initial excitement regarding the establishment of the EDA, its record in its first years of life is not equally exciting. In particular, the EDA suffered from the same Europeanist-Atlanticist divide that characterized the history of European defence, with countries such as the United Kingdom, but also Poland and the Baltic States, preferring not to develop capabilities within the European Union framework not to undermine transatlantic relations. In addition, the EDA suffers from budget constraints that hinder it effectiveness and the ever-present tendency, which survives even to this day, to pursue capabilities development at the national level weakens its ability to act. Furthermore, these dynamics were compound by the financial crisis that struck Europe in 2009, determining a further cut in defence spending of Member States, as shown by Graph 1 below. Nevertheless, after the financial crisis the EDA managed to partially recover, also thanks to the establishment of PESCO and of the EDF.

The main element that differentiates PESCO from other forms of cooperation is the binding nature of the 20 commitments participating Member States accepted when they joined. While projects constitute the “face” of PESCO, the binding commitments provide, or should provide, Member States with a strategic direction guiding them when deciding whether to take part to a project. However, reading through them, they convey the same sense of vagueness that emerges from the examination of other European objectives in the field of defence. In fact, despite being binding, they are too general to be translated into a clear policy direction. Without a guidance, the currently active 60 PESCO projects lack coherence as action cannot substitute for strategy. None of the projects can be deemed useless, but their analysis them makes their diversity emerge and the lack of a strategy with regards to capabilities development. Documents that provide this strategically important assessment already exist. In fact, the Capability Development Plan (CDP) and the Coordinated Annual Review on Defence (CARD) respectively provide a snapshot of the context Member States need to take into account when planning future capabilities agendas and strategies aiming at improving coherence

between Member States defence planning and procurement. However, both the CDP and the CARD are not binding, so Member States have little incentive to follow them when deciding about pursuing a specific project.

The European Defence Fund (EDF) is a fund aiming at financing transnational defence research and development within the European Union framework. It has a budget close to €8 billion, divided into €5.3 billion for collaborative capability development projects complementing national contributions and €2.7 billion for collaborative defence research to address emerging and future challenges and threats. Through the EDF, Member States can receive funding for collaborative projects involving at least three national entities. The EDF is executed by annual work plans divided into 17 horizontal and thematic action areas, which have been designed not to change over the course of the Multiannual Financial Framework 2021–2027. Depending on the configuration of the project, the baseline funding can vary from 20% to 100%, with the possibility to award bonuses when the amount of funding is less than 100%. For example, for PESCO projects, the amount of the bonus equals to an additional 10%. Further incentives, in the form of increased funding rate, are awarded to projects that incentive cross-border collaboration between Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) and mid-caps if their degree of involvement is above a given threshold. Currently, 56 projects are being fund by the EDF.

Despite the presence of this elements that contribute to the achievement of a greater degree of strategic autonomy, there are also several political and industrial obstacles. Politically speaking, Member States have different opinions and positions regarding European Strategic Autonomy, based on their historical perspective, strategic cultures, alliances and even on their own preference. The main distinction taking into account these elements in order to justify Member States different postures is the so called Atlanticist – Europeanist divide. According to it, Atlanticist Member States predilect preserving transatlantic relations over European initiatives in the field of defence, making sure that the latter do not undermine the former. On the contrary, Europeanist states are the ones that support and even promote said initiatives, advocating for a greater degree of strategic autonomy and a more integrated European defence market. No country is either fully Atlanticist or Europeanist. In fact, all European Union Member States are somewhat in the middle between the two positions, thus characterizing the Europeanist – Atlanticist divide as a continuum rather than a dichotomy. The position of the Member States on the continuum can vary over time, but there is a tendency rooted in the culture of the specific country that makes it lean towards one or the other end of the spectrum.

Atlanticism and Europeanism can be considered two foreign policy approaches determined by the strategic culture of a particular country. This study defines strategic culture as being

characterized by three interlinked level. The first level is threat perception, which determines the objective of the use of force. The second level is represented by military doctrine, which shapes the means and modes of the use of force. The last level is cultural and thus historical, and accounts for national preferences not explainable under the first two levels. Such an understanding of strategic culture explains Member States different priorities with regards to security issues and differences in how to address them. Differences in the strategic cultures of Member States is what determines the fragmentation of the political consensus around the concept of European Strategic Autonomy.

An account of the obstacles to the achievement of a greater degree of European Strategic Autonomy solely based on cultural and historical aspects of Member States would be, at best, incomplete. Military action is subject to a number of other constraints mainly linked to the availability of resources and technology and to economic considerations. Thus, the lack of European integration in the field of defence necessarily needs to be analysed taking into account these inherent characteristics of military action. With regards to European Strategic Autonomy, this means that its achievement is hindered by widespread fragmentation of the industrial landscape which has its origin long ago and is fuelled by a national, rather than European, approach to defence Research and Development (R&D) and procurement.

The European defence industry is plagued by dynamics that have their origin in the period immediately following the end Cold War. After the end of the confrontation between the United States and the Soviet Union, which saw the former triumphing, the main reason supporting European defence spending disappeared. Thus, in search of "peace dividends", European countries cut their defence spending. This dynamic did not manifest only in Europe, as also the United States cut its defence spending in that period. The difference is that, confronting with a shrinking domestic and foreign armaments market, US firms underwent a series of merger and acquisitions that gave life to the industrial giants that still survive today. Defence spending cuts were further reinforced in Europe by the 2008 financial crisis, which forced European countries to do not invest in defence to avoid additional public debt increase. Thus, as European countries lacked a proper industrial plan, they found themselves either buying off-the-shelf products from the United States or settling for platforms and systems dating back to the Cold War era and which are still used to date.

A fundamental problem is represented by the fact that Member States still see defence-industrial policy as a field entirely subject to their sovereignty, considering European initiatives, at best, as complementary to national ones. As a result, the European defence-industrial landscape is composed of a small number of large defence companies, with national governments adopting both traditional and non-traditional protectionist policies to allow them to remain competitive vis-à-vis

foreign firms. On the other hand, the emergence of this large industrial complexes is not enough to compete with American and, to a lesser extent, Chinese firms. Furthermore, this internal competitivity has not been enough to provide any European country with sufficient capabilities in every defence domain. If it is true that, taken together, European countries possess full-spectrum military capabilities, it is also true that, due to the national character of defence procurement, those systems are not designed to work together, thus undermining interoperability and the emergence of an independent and complete European capability portfolio. As a consequence, strategic autonomy is also hindered and it results in a weakened European Union which does not hold the necessary capabilities to assert its presence on the global stage as a unitary actor, nor can its Member States alone.

Systemic incentives, such as geopolitical pressure stemming from a shifting international environment, and economic benefits, such as the achievement of economies of scale, the avoidance of duplications of efforts, standardization of equipment and reduction of costs that will likely continue to grow due to technological innovation, appear not to be sufficient to push Member States towards significative cooperation in the defence-industrial field. In fact, as argued by a study on the implementation of Directive 2009/81/EC on defence procurement, around 80% of defence expenditure happens at the national level, rather than at the European one. Lack of mutual trust, protectionism with regards to industrial interests, and a desire to safeguard national intellectual property and expertise are all possible causes. In fact, inter-firms relations are characterized by rivalries that hamper cooperation due to protectionism and a propensity to favour domestic suppliers over foreign ones. This distributional implications of cooperation are more clear when the latter takes within an inter-state framework, rather than an European one. Thanks to the financial incentives provided by the European Union for industrial collaboration, defence firms are less concerned about competition between them and other European suppliers.

European countries suffer from political fragmentation and divergent strategic cultures, mainly due to different geopolitical interests and cultural and historical backgrounds. A few initiatives, both within the European Union framework and outside of it, aim to reduce this gap, but their results are, at best, inconsistent. Furthermore, the defence-industrial landscape is also fragmented, with the vast majority of defence procurement happening at the national level rather than at the European one. The incentives to pursue greater collaboration, such as a shifting geopolitical order where Europe is called to act in a meaningful and unitary manner, reduction of costs which are constantly growing due to technological advancements, the achievement of economies of scale, greater interoperability and a reinforcement of European cooperation seems not to be enough. The

main reasons behind the scarcity of industrial cooperation are lack of mutual trust, protectionism with regards to industrial interests, and a desire to safeguard national intellectual property and expertise, as well as inter-firms relations being inherently organized by competitiveness. The division between political and industrial factors is for classification purposes only. In reality, political and industrial constrains compound and reinforce each other and, taken together, represent a significant obstacle hindering the achievement of European Strategic Autonomy.

What the future holds is still unknown. However, The Russian invasion of Ukraine acted as a strategic wake up call for Member States and the European Union. When Russia crossed the border with Ukraine escalating the conflict, they realized they did not have the political and military capacity to respond to it and that they had to address those drawbacks. To do so, they decided to increase their defence spending. Since the start of the war, they announced increases in their defence budget amounting to around €200 billion in the upcoming years. Furthermore, the European Union also created some instruments to assist Ukraine in the short term, such as the European Defence Industry Reinforcement through common Procurement Act (EDIRPA), aiming to reinforce European defence industrial capacities through common procurement, and the European Peace Facility (EPF), aiming to provide Ukraine with the weapons it needs.

The aforementioned instruments aim at getting the most out of the increase in defence spending of Member States. As one year since the start of the war is rapidly approaching, the constant support to the Ukraine military drastically lowered the levels of European weapon stocks. Replenishing stocks is a goal in itself, but this task hides the risk of further exacerbating the fragmentation of the European defence-industrial landscape. In fact, spending does not automatically equal to better capabilities and, in order to satisfy the short-term needs imposed by the war in Ukraine, Member States might be tempted to buy off the shelf military equipment from third countries. This would lead to greater fragmentation as there would be no coordination between their procurement efforts. In other words, if the European Union manages to coordinate the procurement efforts of its Member States, the Union will benefit from greater interoperability and its positive consequences. On the contrary, if greater defence spending is not coordinated at the European level, Member States will buy off the shelf or second-hand products from third countries, ending up either possessing multiple weapons systems or being condemned to technological backwardness. Whether the choice, the EDTIB European Strategic Autonomy would be undermined. This dynamic shows how the Ukrainian War provides a unique opportunity to boost European Strategic Autonomy.

Finally, the European Union has the occasion to reorganize transatlantic relations thank to Biden’s presidency. In fact, Trump disregarded transatlantic ties multiple times, arriving to the point

of deeming its European allies as outright foes. Regarding European Strategic Autonomy, Donald Trump and Joseph Biden views are characterized by both similarities and differences. Trump was in overt opposition to the concept, as he feared it would undermine the United States position within NATO. Furthermore, he also had domestic concerns regarding the degree of openness of the European defence market, as he feared PESCO and the EDF would hinder United States' firms access to it. Differently from Trump, the Biden's administration supports the idea of European Strategic Autonomy, as it enables burden-sharing and strengthens the European pillar of NATO. This approach is determined by political needs, as the United States require more capable European allies taking care of the crisis in their neighbourhood while they deal with an increasingly assertive China, even if that would mean a loss of export markets for American defence firms. However, there are red lines. Similarly, from Trump's approach, European Strategic Autonomy cannot lead to competition and duplication of functions with NATO.

Sino-American competition is the last topic related to the future of European Strategic Autonomy. The European Union suffers of a number of dependencies on both countries that are unlikely to disappear anytime soon. Thus, engagement with both actors is a necessity. However, the European Union runs the risk of getting trapped in their confrontation and thus lose further autonomy. What it can do to avoid this drawback is to make strategic autonomy a priority. What this means is refusing interference in European affairs, securing the integrity of its partners in the Indo-Pacific, investing in technological R&D to strengthen the EDTIB and catch up with the cutting edge technological development of both countries, and not giving up abiding to its values only for commercial returns.