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**Title of the dissertation: "Strategic autonomy, security, and
energy diversification in the European Union."**

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To my beloved ones.

Title

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Table of contents

Introduction	4
Chapter 1: “the academical and political debate on European strategic autonomy, from the past until nowadays”	5
1.1 What we mean by ‘Strategic Autonomy’ and the evolution of this concept.	5
1.2 Strategic Autonomy meant as responsibility, hedging and emancipation.	10
1.3 The Transatlantic debate on European Strategic Autonomy in both defence and energy areas.	14
Chapter 2 “the strategic nature of energy and its relevance for the EU”	20
2.1 The key role of Energy in the modern economic system	20
2.2 A new economic system with a new pattern of dependencies	24
2.3 Energy and European Union, the historical link	26
2.4 The current European legal framework on energy	28
Chapter 3 “the link between the Russian-Ukrainian War and European Strategic Autonomy”	31
3.1 EU’s involvement in the Russian-Ukrainian War	31
3.2 Member states response, their background with Russia and Union far-reaching plans and strategies	34
Conclusion	41

Introduction

This dissertation is going to discuss and analyse the concept of European strategic autonomy (EU-SA or ESA), analysing the historical path of this project, the state of art of the academical and political debate on it and the concrete implications that ESA has on EU's foreign policy.

The work will start from here: "Strategic autonomy allows an international actor to act autonomously to ensure its security and protect its interests. What are the EU's priorities in this regard? Have they changed over time?"

The research question of the present dissertation wants to investigate on the EU's foreign policy behaviour, to assess if changes in priorities and attitudes have occurred, if the geopolitical interests of the Union are mutated and if they are better protected compared to the past. However, the unit of measurement of this potential foreign policy enhancement is the development of European strategic autonomy, since the protection of strategic sectors is, as we will explore later, extremely related to the capacity of an actor to act autonomously and freely in the international arena. The more a state is free from hard and strategic dependencies, the more it will be able to take decisions regardless of the potential outcome provoked by these ones. Conversely, an international actor who strongly relies on other states resources will be less inclined to carry out actions which can negatively affect or disrupt the supply chain of these facilities. Hence, foreign policy's quality and effectiveness is mostly related to the degree on which strategic interests and areas are safeguarded.

The enhancements regarding the EU internal capabilities will be mainly focused on two prominent strategic fields, which have experienced a dramatic development: energy and defence. Therefore, the focus on these two areas is justified due to the relevance they cover within the framework of this topic.

To provide an exhaustive answer to the research question, I am going to start from the origins of this concept to the current state of art related to it. The same historical-based approach will be used to explore the academical and political debate on the subject, which have experienced an exploit especially in the recent years. Therefore, different views about the realisation of EU-SA will be exposed, attempting to portray a general understanding of both the debate and the current military tools at the disposals of the EU to achieve this ambitious aim. The first chapter is mainly related to the defence sphere, due to its traditional link with the argument. Conversely, the second chapter will deal with the energy sector, which is recently gaining an increasing importance due to the conflict in Ukraine. The strategic nature of this sector will be deeply analysed as well as its implications on both international stage and, more specifically, on EU. Therefore, we will observe if energy has actually become a priority of the UE, by analysing its current legal framework on the matter and the strategies developed.

Nonetheless, this will be further explored in the last chapter, where the protection of interests and the setting of priorities by the EU, among which we find energy security, will be showed in the light of the Russian-Ukrainian War.

To provide some context, the debate surrounding EU-SA has been historically linked with the defence area but in the recent years has dramatically begun to cover many other sectors. The Russian invasion of Ukraine, the outbreak of Covid-19 and other structural and circumstantial factors of the international arena, have contributed to the spill over of the argument in different strategic sectors.

The concept can be meant and viewed according to different perspectives. Therefore, European strategic autonomy has not a univocal meaning and the way is carried out may change according to the mutable international context. Different international scenarios may require different tasks and commitments by international actors. In this regard, the EU has considerably changed its direction and concerns.

However, it is not possible to address the issue of EU-SA without conceptualising the transatlantic framework in which the EU is embedded in since both US and NATO are indirectly involved in the development of this project. As already mentioned, the energy area too has gained much more importance within the European context. Energy represents the engine of the modern economics; for this reason, the stable and safe functioning of the energetic supply chain constitutes a matter of national security for states. International actors have to deal with their own energetic demand through the creation of energy portfolios, better-known as ‘energy mixes’. Nonetheless, a large amount of exported energy by a malign partner or by a certain group of perilous countries may turn into a dangerous dependency, compromising the international actor’s ability to act. The importance of a well-built energy mix has been evident especially after the outbreak of the Russian-Ukrainian War, whereby the EU, to reduce its Russian energy dependency, had to face a heavy energy crisis, resulted in the highest inflation that European Union has ever had. Hence, energy has proven to be an equally important area if compared with the more debated one of defence and has started to be considered as one of the most relevant Union’s subject matters. Finally, in the last years, the legislation on the topic had been expanded and a higher degree of Union control was achieved, although it did not impede the subsequent crisis provoked by the Russian invasion. However, after the onset of the conflict, the strategies deployed by the Union in this regard have been unprecedented and extremely far-reaching in terms of objectives.

Chapter 1: “the academical and political debate on European strategic autonomy, from the past until nowadays”

1.1 What we mean by ‘Strategic Autonomy’ and the evolution of this concept.

In this chapter, I am going to highlight the definition of the evolving concept of European strategic autonomy pointing out many aspects and areas covered by it. I am going to describe some ways in which EU-SA could be meant e.g., as an increase in responsibility, as coverage or as an act of emancipation. Furthermore, I am going to describe the state of art of the academic and political debate about this topic within the transatlantic context, providing different points of views and interpretations on it. Defence autonomy and Energy security are going to be dealt with more attention: the first one for its traditional relevance with EU-SA and the second one for its increasing importance in the current international scenario. EU strategic autonomy (EU-SA) is a term referring to “the capacity of the EU to act autonomously – that is, without being dependent on other countries – in strategically

important policy areas” (Mario Damen, 2022¹). In the last decades, the debate on this concept has been more and more crucial, whereby many global events have displayed the fragility of the Union, opening the debate on becoming a more autonomous and responsible actor, which should be less subject to the dependencies of third-party actors. As stated by the Vice President of Commission and High Representative of the European Union Joseph Borrell: "Today we are in a situation where economic interdependence is becoming politically very conflictual". In a speech given in Strasbourg in 2022, he also talked about the "weaponisation of economic interdependence," highlighting how it can be used as leverage to influence political decisions or exert pressure on another country. However, the potential risks associated with dependence are not confined solely to the economic sphere, but also extend to other areas, such as competition, trade, digital, industrial, financial governance, and defence policy, which are just some of areas where the potential for more strategic autonomy has been identified by the same EU policymakers.

In this context, EU-SA debate has dramatically grown in importance.

Let us begin by tracing the historical origins of this concept. In 1950, this term was used for the first time by General Charles De Gaulle, who stated:” the weaponry is limited, as you know, to weapons that confer no strategic autonomy upon us. But this is a bad thing for us, because after all, the policies do not always overlap, particularly concerning Africa, and even French Africa. It may be unacceptable to us not to be able to do anything by ourselves’ (De Gaulle 1970, 328²). From this quotation, it is rather intuitive to comprehend that SA has primarily assumed a military dimension. Rooted in the Gaullist tradition, the concept has later become more "Europeanised" (Joan Miró, *The Global Society*, 2022³), but originally denoted the aspiration to avoid dependence on the United States (Howorth, 2020).⁴

Throughout the existence of the EU, many initiatives have been carried out to develop a certain degree of autonomy on the military aspect. The first one and, probably, the most famous one, can be considered the European Defence Community (EDC), brought forward by the French Prime Minister Plevin. Although, It is necessary to specify that numerous reasons were behind the European Defence Community project and part of them were not actually related to the achievement of EU-SA, such as the French control on German rearmament. However, the EDC was meant to establish a European Army and to effectively coordinate the defence policies of

¹ Damen, M. (2022) *European Parliament*, [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document/EPRS_BRI\(2022\)733589](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document/EPRS_BRI(2022)733589). Available at: [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2022/733589/EPRS_BRI\(2022\)733589_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2022/733589/EPRS_BRI(2022)733589_EN.pdf) (Accessed: 24 May 2023).

² De Gaulle, C. *Dans L'attente* (février 1946-Avril 1958. N.p., 1970. Print.)

³ Miró, J. (2022a) ‘Responding to the global disorder: the EU’s quest for open strategic autonomy’, *The Global Society* [Preprint]. Available at: <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/epdf/10.1080/13600826.2022.2110042?needAccess=true&role=button> (Accessed: 2023).

⁴ Howorth, J.2020.“The CSDP in Transition: Towards‘Strategic Autonomy’?”In*Governance andPolitics in the Post-Crisis European Union*, edited by R. Coman, A. Crespy, and V. Schmidt, 312–329. Cambridge, UK: CUP

the contracting parties. Moreover, the treaty that established the European Defence Community provided for the creation of a separate military command but coordinated with that of NATO.

In 1998 the Anglo-French summit in Saint Malo paved the way for the creation of the CSDP, part of the bigger framework of the CFSP, already introduced with the Treaty on the European Union in 1993. The CSDP is actively engaged in crisis management and the prevention of war, including the potential for autonomous military and civilian operations. It collaborates with international organisations such as Nato and the UN, ensuring the security of the Union and the safeguard of its interests. The Common Security and Defense Policy was born right after the failure of the European Security and Defence Identity (ESDI). ESDI aimed to create a European military command inside the framework of NATO to autonomously fulfil those external actions defined as 'Petersberg Tasks'. The project advocates that EU-led operations will be conducted only when NATO as a whole is not involved and it is also committed to consulting and collaborating with NATO with appropriate transparency in such operations (Mattheos Skouras, Colonel, Hellenic Army, 2001⁵). The termination of the ESDI project was caused by numerous criticisms that were raised against it, which we will discuss later on.

Finally, in 2018 and 2021, two further bodies were created, namely, the Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) and the European Defence Fund (EDF), both aimed to enhance the cooperation among member states in the field of defence. PESCO is the centrepiece of this project to forge a European defence union and achieve strategic autonomy and has been described as a 'game changer for European cooperation' (Antonio Missiroli, 2017⁶). PESCO aims to achieve an adequate level of strategic autonomy in the defence industry sector, along with 25 EU member states, it offers a legal framework to jointly plan, develop and invest in shared capability projects (European Defence Agency, 2023⁷). Here we have another dimension of the EU-SA mainly focused on military industrial capability rather than operational one. Currently, there are 60 projects delivered by the organisation and among the most famous projects are the Tiger Helicopter, the Eurodrone MALE RPAS and the Unmanned Ground System.

Since the European Council's 2013 conclusion, which introduced the concept of 'Strategic Autonomy' in an official EU document for the first time, the term has expanded in scope and objectives, broadening its meaning, going far beyond the defence sphere. This evolution is evidenced in the EU Global Strategy of 2016⁸. This draft represents

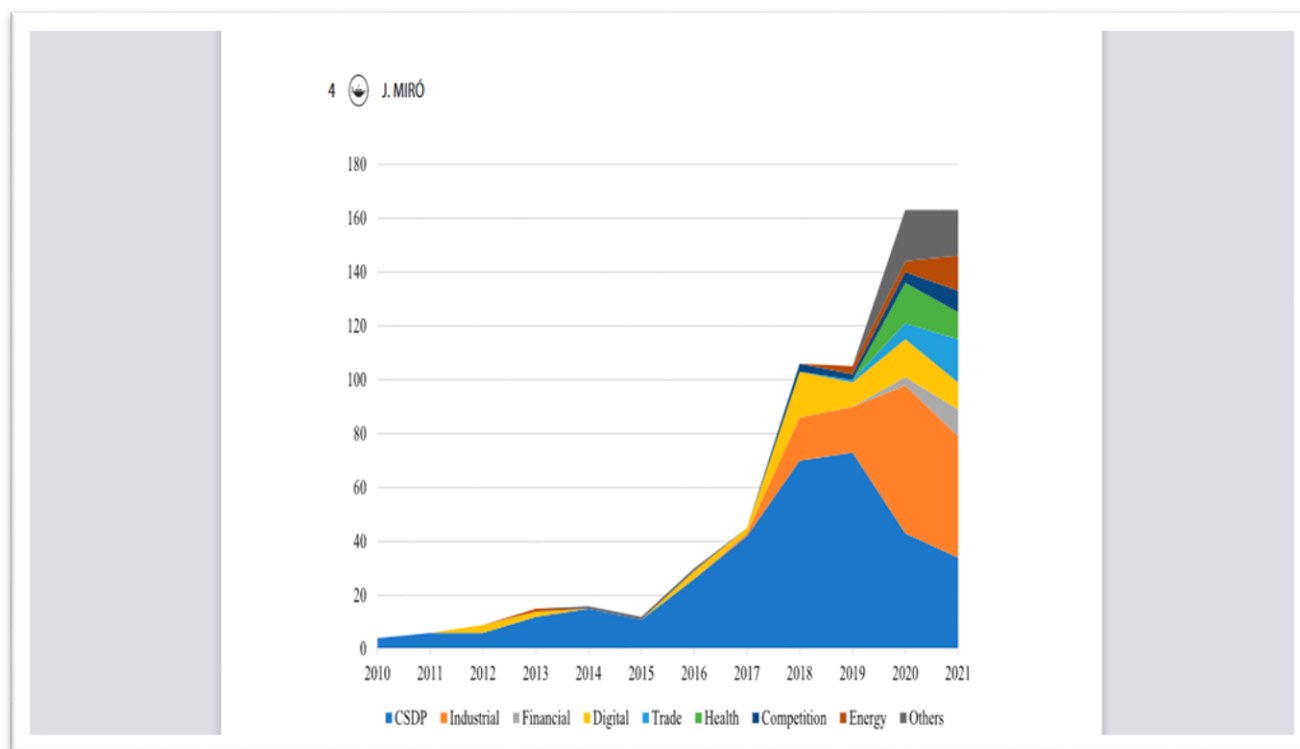
⁵ Colonel Skouras, M. (2023) *European Security and Defense Identity, Greece and Peace Operations*, <https://apps.dtic.mil/sti/citations/ADA391269>. Available at: <https://apps.dtic.mil/sti/pdfs/ADA391269.pdf>

⁶ Fiott, D., Missiroli, A. and Tardy, T. (2017) 'Permanent Structured Cooperation: What's in a name?', *European Union Institute for Security Studies* [Preprint]. Available at: <https://www.iss.europa.eu/content/permanent-structured-cooperation-what%E2%80%99s-name> (Accessed: 2023).

⁷ [https://eda.europa.eu/what-we-do/EU-defence-initiatives/permanent-structured-cooperation-\(PESCO\)](https://eda.europa.eu/what-we-do/EU-defence-initiatives/permanent-structured-cooperation-(PESCO))

⁸ https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/global-strategy-european-unions-foreign-and-security-policy_en

the strategic guidance that the EU should follow in its foreign policy, ranging from current to far-reaching scenarios. Therefore, an ambitious project as EU-SA, aimed to reduce external dependencies and act autonomously in the long run, has to be built starting from this authoritative document. In fact, the paper presented by former HR Federica Mogherini highlights new and numerous areas in which strategic autonomy can be increased, including the energy and cybersecurity sectors. Other areas have grown in importance later, especially after the outbreak of Covid 19 and Russian-Ukrainian War, such as EU Trade Policy, the strength of the Euro and technological and digital sovereignty (Nicolai von Ondarza and Marco Overhaus, 2022⁹). Their strategic importance is evident: a well-led EU's trade while digitalization and technological advancements are necessary to provide the EU with greater flexibility and independence in its relations with China and Russia. 5G/6G technology and semiconductors furnished by China and the crucial Russian contribution in Eso ExoMars mission are some examples of dependencies in this particular field.



From this graph published using data from the Office of the European Union¹⁰, it can be observed that mentions of strategic autonomy in the defence field have drastically decreased after 2019, leaving space for

⁹ Ondarza, N. von and Overhaus, M. (2022) *Rethinking strategic sovereignty*, *Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik (SWP)*. Available at: <https://www.swp-berlin.org/10.18449/2022C31/> (Accessed: 2023).

¹⁰ Miró, J. (2022a) 'Responding to the global disorder: the EU's quest for openstrategic autonomy', *The Global Society* [Preprint]. Available at: <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/epdf/10.1080/13600826.2022.2110042?needAccess=true&role=button> (Accessed: 2023).

other sectors, including energy. However, these data date back to 2021 and it is conceivable that the debate surrounding EU-SA in defence has experienced an increase once again due to the outbreak of the War.

As a matter of fact, The Ukrainian-Russian war has seen a massive involvement of the Union, which along with its member states has enormously contributed to counter the Russian Federation aggression. In addition to providing humanitarian and financial aid, the European Union has taken the unprecedented step of sending lethal weapons to a belligerent country through the newly established European Peace Facility (EPF). The Council Decision 2022/338 under the EPF illustrates the Union's commitment to embrace an active role in protecting its interests and doing so effectively. The war has not just shown the development made in EU-SA, but it has bolstered this process, forcing the Union to cut off Russian dependencies and prioritise this topic again in its agenda. I am going to come back on this subject matter in the last chapter, since it is worthy to analyse how EU-SA improvement has played a role in countering the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

However, in addition to the defence sector, the war has brought the European energetic supply chain to the centre of the public debate due to the strong dependency the EU had on Russian gas and oil. Breaking the bonds of dependence on Russia has required significant effort, and many efforts still lie ahead, but here the “autonomy” concept seems to be quite different if compared with that one of defence. As stated by Klaus-Dieter Borchardt, deputy director general of the EU’s Directorate-General for Energy: “we are heavily dependent on energy imports, we cannot say that autonomy is a goal in itself”, but that “the Energy Union strategy is rather to ensure the security of supply through the diversification of energy sources”. Indeed, diversification has been the key word of UE throughout the energetic crisis and this struggle has been highlighted by the ‘Repower EU’ Plan. The huge plan consists of saving energy in order to reduce 5% of the energetic demand, diversifying energy supplies to reduce dependence from Russian gas and accelerating the green transition by investing in renewable energies. Therefore, the member states have brought forward policies to remedy the problem of energetic dependence, both looking for new energy suppliers and enhancing the relationships that they already had with others. After the war, the effort made by European Union member states to distribute and replace their reliance on Russian energy imports varied greatly depending on the level of dependency they had prior to the war. In fact, some states were almost entirely dependent on Russian gas imports, such as Finland, which imported 94% of its gas from Russia, Latvia, which imported 93%, and even Germany, which was supplied by Nord Stream I and II and received 49% of its gas from the Russian Federation. The European Commission has attempted to regulate the external actions of its member states in the energy sector by monitoring intergovernmental agreements with their suppliers. However, these attempts have been unsuccessful since the European states have often found ways to circumvent the rules. The consequences of these uncontrolled bilateral agreements, mostly made with the Russian Federation, have contributed to a situation of dependency on external sources of energy, thereby limiting the EU's ability to act freely and autonomously in foreign policy decisions. By way of illustration, among the numerous reasons behind

the EU's inadequate response to the annexation of Crimea in 2014, the energy constraint may be considered one of them (Adérito Vicente, 2020¹¹). In an interdependent globalised economic system, where any dependence may become a weak spot, including and especially energy supply, the concept of Strategic Autonomy has become crucial. Let us momentarily set aside the theme of the relationship between energy and strategic autonomy, which will be addressed in more detail in the second chapter, and return to the theoretical meaning of the concept, which does not actually have a univocal definition. On the contrary, EU-SA can be interpreted and implemented according to different objectives and priorities.

1.2 Strategic Autonomy meant as responsibility, hedging and emancipation.

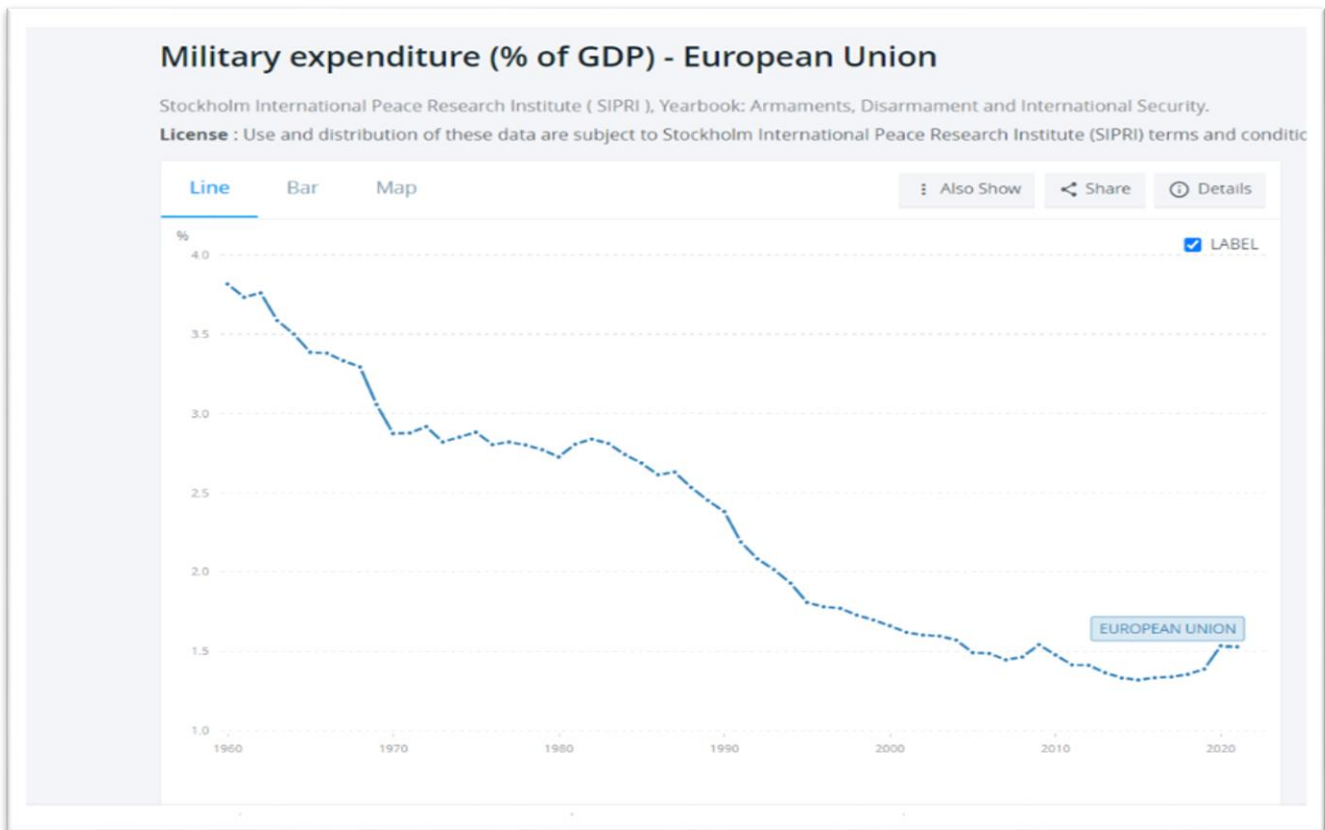
Three conceptions of EU-SA may be pointed out: Strategic Autonomy meant as an increase in responsibility of collective actions within the framework of the multilateral institutions in which EU member states participate, such as the UN and NATO; as hedging, enhancing the military capability to be able to react in a scenario where the deterioration of the transatlantic alliance could leave the Union exposed in some key areas; and as emancipation, which is rooted in the idea that the European Union can be free from dependencies on third-party actors and it should not be considered a second-tier power in the international arena (Daniel Fiott, 2018¹²)

UE's responsibility inside the framework of NATO has been frequently a matter of debate, since it seems that the EU is not engaged with the North Atlantic Treaty as much as the US is. In December 2013, the European Council's conclusions on the Common Security and Defence Policy read: 'the EU and its member states must exercise greater responsibilities in response to those challenges if they want to contribute to maintaining peace and security through CSDP together with key partners such as the United Nations and NATO'. The debate on responsibility of EU member states in NATO started right after the end of the USA-USRR confrontation. In fact, following the end of the Cold War, there was a reduction in military spending among Western and European states. To provide an example, in 1960 the average of GDP's percentage devoted by European countries to their own defence was 3.8%, in 2016 the amount of GDP's percentage spent has fallen to only 1.4% (World Bank data, 2020¹³).

¹¹ Vicente, A. (2022) *Why Europe slept? The failure to prevent the war in Ukraine*, *European Leadership Network*. Available at: <https://www.europeanleadershipnetwork.org/commentary/why-europe-slept-the-failure-to-prevent-the-war-in-ukraine/> (Accessed: 2023).

¹² Fiott, D. (2018) 'Strategic autonomy: towards "European sovereignty" in defence?', *European Union Institute for Security Studies* [Preprint]. Available at: <https://www.iss.europa.eu/content/strategic-autonomy-towards-%E2%80%99european-sovereignty%E2%80%99-defence> (Accessed: 2023).

¹³ <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/MS.MIL.XPND.GD.ZS?end=2021&locations=EU&start=1960>



Additionally, there has been a failure by some EU-NATO states to meet the target of contributing at least 2% of their GDP to the organisation's funds. Today, only nine EU NATO members have achieved the standard required and these states are the three Baltic countries, Poland, Slovakia, Croatia, Bulgaria, Romania and Greece (NATO, 2022¹⁴). The view of EU-SA meant as an increase in responsibility advocates for a Europe free to conduct autonomously issues and crises which can potentially affect them more than they affect their allies, such as the US. This view is completely compatible with the commitments and tasks that EU member states have with NATO, since it just demands for more responsibility inside the framework of the multilateral organisations in which they already participate. However, enhancing the operational capacities of the EU is only possible by investing more both in financial and human terms. By way of illustration, In 2017, EU member states deployed slightly more than 52,000 personnel to various military missions and operations including EU, NATO, OSCE, UN, and others. In comparison, the United States deployed over 208,000 personnel to various missions and operations worldwide during the same year (International Institute for Strategic Studies, *The Military Balance 2018*, London: IISS, 2018¹⁵). Therefore, more resources are needed for the Union to pursue its own objectives if it does not want to completely rely on third-party actors. In fact, EU's heavy reliance on the US has been largely demonstrated on

¹⁴ https://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/2022/6/pdf/220627-def-exp-2022-en.pdf

¹⁵ Routledge (ed.) (2018) 'The Military Balance 2018', *International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS)* [Preprint]. Available at: <https://www.routledge.com/The-Military-Balance-2018/IISS/p/book/9781857439557>.

several occasions, such as the most recent war in Libya in 2011, where even if 90% of the air strikes were UE-led, US contributed 85% of fuel and most of the intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance capabilities (Elizabeth Quintana, "The War from the Air", in Adrian Johnson and Saqeb Mueen, 2012¹⁶). To summarise, supporters of this EU-SA view recognise the importance of achieving a certain degree of autonomy inside the framework of NATO, without creating a sort of internal competition.

On the other hand, 'Hedging' Strategic Autonomy is further focused on industrial military capacity. Here, a well-handled common industrial defence, along with an effective operational capacity, may serve as 'hedging' in a scenario in which the transatlantic alliance deteriorates. In 2017, this eventuality has proven to be not far from reality, considering the Trump administration's conduct in foreign policy, which has undoubtedly worsened the relationship UE-USA, making the member states reconsider the aim of achieving a desirable degree of strategic autonomy. During the years of the Trump presidency, there were no shortage of appeals from European leaders to improve European strategic autonomy in this sector. Foremost among them was French President Emmanuel Macron, one of the greatest advocates of this concept, who declared to CNN in 2018¹⁷: " [Trump] is in favour of a better burden sharing within NATO, I agree with that. And I think that in order to have a better burden sharing, all of us do need more Europe. And I think the big mistake, to be very direct with him, what I don't want to see is European countries increasing the budget in defence in order to buy Americans and other arms or materials coming from your industry. I think if we increase our budget, it's to have to build our autonomy and to become a natural sovereign power". However, the Union faces two diametrically opposed issues. On one hand, It is still hardly relying on non-EU actors in the industrial defence as demonstrated by the import of military equipment made by member states, on the other hand, the member states still consider the national production of this strategic sector as vital for their interests. For instance, 39,3% of the fighter aircrafts purchased by Union states come from non-EU partners, while 48,6% of the main battle tanks are still produced nationally (Daniel Fiott, International Institute for Strategic Studies, 2018¹⁸). Joint productions are relatively increasing through PESCO and EDF. Important steps have been made in this sense since the European Commission now has supranational powers on funding European defence research and military capability projects. A common military-industrial complex enables member states to share the costs of research and development, while also allowing for greater autonomy in procuring military

¹⁶ Johnson, A., Mueen, S. and Quintana, E. (2012) 'The War from the Air', in *Short war, long shadow: The political and military legacies of the 2011 Libya campaign*. London, UK: RUSI.

¹⁷ CNN (2018) *CNN / GPS with Fareed Zakaria: Interview with French President Emmanuel Macron*. CNN. Available at: <https://youtu.be/YwOx2XBQYh0> (Accessed: 2023).

¹⁸ Fiott, D. (2018) 'Strategic autonomy: towards "European sovereignty" in defence?', *European Union Institute for Security Studies* [Preprint]. Available at: <https://www.iss.europa.eu/content/strategic-autonomy-towards-%E2%80%99european-sovereignty%E2%80%99-defence> (Accessed: 2023).

equipment. In the event that the Union loses the support of its partners, it can still act independently due to its self-sufficiency in the military sphere. The first two views can be associated with the general concept of ‘Open’ Strategic Autonomy. They both aim to strengthen the internal capabilities, nevertheless, they still emphasise the value of multilateralism and cooperation. In addition, the ‘openness’ also refers to an economic aspect, in fact, the conclusion of the EU Council held in November 2020¹⁹ says: ‘achieving strategic autonomy while preserving an open economy is a key objective of the Union in order to self-determine its economic path and interests’. The ideological line of pursuing an open EU-SA seems to be the favourite one even among the highest ranking of the Union’s institutions. As explained before, Strategic Autonomy goes beyond the defence sector, it expands itself to all the areas where dependencies are dangerous and heavy, but some dependencies may be tolerated in favour of the free market principle. According to Open EU-SA supporters, the Union's open economy comes before ‘strategic autonomy’. This idea has been traditionally backed by the 7+1 Group (Austria, Sweden, Finland, Ireland, Denmark, Netherlands, Belgium and the European Commission as the eighth member) and sometimes by other member states (the three Baltic countries, Slovakia, Malta, Spain and Czech Republic), as in the case of the November Council conclusion (Éric Van den Abeele, 2021²⁰). These states highlight the importance of maintaining an open economy while pursuing strategic autonomy.

Finally, the last view of EU-SA profoundly differs from the others mentioned above; it is the most radical version of this concept and probably the most difficult to achieve, since it advocates for a complete emancipation from foreign partners. This sort of autarky argues for a complete reliance on Union resources, and if one hand UE has what it takes to achieve emancipation in certain areas, on the other hand there are not sufficient prerequisites to coordinate and make all these resources work together. For instance, although the number of active military personnel in all European armies combined is almost one and a half million, they still lack coordination and high-defence military equipment to function properly. Furthermore, the goal of complete independence seems to be both far from the EU agenda and undesired, considering also the already tough opposition by certain countries to a non-open Strategic Autonomy.

Another feature of these views is the implied meaning of autonomy they have autonomy *from* something or autonomy *to* do something. This binomial is strictly related to two different dimensions of freedoms, which have always been a heated topic dealt with by many philosophers and political scholars. Here, the difference is between the positive freedom and the negative one. The first one, as the word itself suggests, is represented by a subject which is free *to* act according to its belief and its ratio. On the other hand, the negative freedom is ‘[...] not to be

¹⁹ <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2020/11/16/towards-a-more-dynamic-resilient-and-competitive-european-industry-council-adopts-conclusions/>

²⁰ Abeele, E.V. den (2021) *Towards a New Paradigm in Open Strategic Autonomy?* Available at: https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=3873798# (Accessed: 2023).

subject to the inconstant, uncertain, unknown, arbitrary will of another man [...]’ (Locke, 1689²¹), therefore is freedom *from* something. ‘Responsibility’ could be easily associated with the advocacy for positive freedom, ‘Hedging’ may be associated with both freedoms, while ‘Emancipation’ belongs to the negative freedom view. Therefore, while the ‘open’ views on EU-SA back the freedom to act according to the Union needs and priorities, the Emancipationist view sees the limits of autonomy in the involvement of third-party actors, which are not necessarily just the US, but all the state-powers which increase the Europe’s dependencies in its strategic areas, such as China and Russia too. Finally, having explained and analysed the meaning, the importance, the historical background, and the theoretical implications of EU-SA, we can now move on to the political and academic debate arena.

1.3 The Transatlantic debate on European Strategic autonomy in both defence and energy areas.

Since Strategic autonomy has been firstly and mostly associated with autonomy in the defence field, EU-SA and NATO result to be two inseparable elements when it comes to deal with this complex topic. Glenn Snyder has stated that 'alliances have no meaning apart from the adversary threat to which they are a response' (Glenn H. Snyder, 1997²²). After the end of WWII, NATO and its members had a specific aim: counterbalancing and, eventually, defending themselves and their allies, especially Western European states, from the threat of the Soviet Block, represented by the Warsaw Treaty Organizations (WTO). After the dissolution of the USSR, the threat disappeared, and many scholars saw no reason for having an alliance in the absence of any enemy, especially political scientists who adhere to the realist or neorealist perspective. In his essay "The Emerging Structure of International Politics" (1993), Kenneth Waltz wrote: "They [European powers] will have to learn to take care of themselves or suffer the consequences" and concluded: "NATO's days are not numbered, but its years are." The neorealist political scientist argues that the presence of Americans in EU territory would not be justified nor desired by Europeans anymore. Conversely, the neoliberals Keohane and Wallander believed that the transatlantic relationship would have endured even in the absence of a specific threat. In "Institutional Assets and Adaptability: NATO after the Cold War" (2000), Wallander explains the reasons why NATO would have a relatively long life even after the "end of history," citing Fukuyama terminology. Wallander argues that the North Atlantic Treaty had the ability to adapt itself to changing circumstances and remained useful for its members, who now have to deal with diffuse risks rather than a single threat, which was previously represented by the former Soviet Union. Therefore, the shift from an alliance to an institution would have saved NATO from its disappearance.

²¹ Locke, J. (1690) ‘Chapter IV, on slavery’, in *Second treatise of government*.

²² Snyder, G.H. (1997) ‘Part 2, Chapter 6, “Theory: Alliance management”’, in *Alliance politics*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, pp. 192–192.

As a matter of fact, the Transatlantic organisation still endures, nevertheless with some structural and circumstantial issues that have not rarely created some tensions among its members. However, these challenges have further pushed the debate of EU-SA. In fact, Donald Trump's presidency has dramatically contributed to making European leaders question their reliance on the US (Lisbeth Aggestam and Adrian Hyde-Price, 2019²³). The Tycoon adopted a unilateralist and transactional behaviour in foreign policy, showing little interest in its allies' positions regarding numerous subject matters. During his administration, the United States has withdrawn from the Iran nuclear treaty and Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty. Since the JCPOA was a multilateral agreement that only Iran could have ceased, Trump's move has been seen as a rejection of multilateralism, and this has pushed the former High Representative, Federica Mogherini, to comment: "no country is big enough to face this world alone", referring to the transactional foreign policy of Washington. Furthermore, President Trump has decided to move the US embassy from Tel-Aviv to Jerusalem, worsening even more the already fragile situation in the Middle East. In addition, he threatened and deliberately insulted its European partners on several occasions. In 2019, at the NATO summit in London, Trump stated that the US will "deal with" countries "from a trade standpoint" or "in a different way" if they're "delinquent" in their defence spending commitments (The Independent, 2019²⁴). The Tycoon has not just targeted the 'delinquent' states, guilty of under contributing to NATO, he complained particularly to Germany. In 2018, at the UN General Assembly, referring to Germany's Nord Stream II project, he commented: "Here in the Western Hemisphere, we are committed to maintaining our independence from the encroachment of expansionist foreign powers" (The Washington Post, 2019²⁵). By saying that, Trump implicitly meant that Germany was controlled by the Russian Federation due to its gas dependence. In 2019, his disagreement regarding the Russian-German pipeline has found its peak with the US sanctions against all the companies which have contributed with Gazprom to realise the project. In this context, some European leaders felt more than ever that the US was not a reliable partner anymore, and a certain degree of strategic autonomy, at least as 'hedging', was desirable. As the German Chancellor Angela Merkel stated: "it is not the case that the United States of America will simply protect us. Instead, Europe must take its destiny in its own hands. That is our job for the future". However, Trump is not the first US President to complain about the under-contribution to

²³ Aggestam, L. and Hyde-Price, A. (2019a) 'Double trouble: Trump, transatlantic relations and european strategic autonomy', *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies*, 57(S1), pp. 114–127. doi:10.1111/jcms.12948.

²⁴ *Trump threatens 'delinquent' NATO allies with trade blocks if they don't meet military spending targets* (2019a) *The Independent*. Available at: <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/americas/us-politics/trump-nato-summit-macron-countries-trade-military-spending-a9231531.html> (Accessed: 29 May 2023).

²⁵ Noack, R. (2018) *Trump accused Germany of becoming 'totally dependent' on Russian energy at the U.N.. the Germans just smirked.*, *The Washington Post*. Available at: <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2018/09/25/trump-accused-germany-becoming-totally-dependent-russian-energy-un-germans-just-smirked/> (Accessed: 29 May 2023).

NATO nor the first to argue on European inertia, even Barack Obama did. In addition, Obama's bad management of the Syria War has made European countries harshly discuss, in the same way as the conduct of European countries in the War in Libya has triggered the reaction of Obama, who has blamed Europe for the pre-war situation (The Guardian, 2016²⁶). Finally, some structural factors have broadened the divisions in the transatlantic alliance, such as the geopolitical interests of the US, which shifted from Europe to Asia or the different interests and challenges that the two continents have or actually want to face. For the latter case, it is worthy of mention the rejection by France and Germany to join the 'coalition of the willing' in the 2003 Iraq War. However, the vast majority of these differences have started to arise from the end of the Cold War, in those years, the European Strategic autonomy has begun to take shape.

The first step toward the path of autonomy in defence was the ESDI, jointly proposed by France and the UK, in 1998. The old Western European Union (WEU) was meant to serve as a bridge between the North Atlantic Organisation and EU, whereas the full members of WEU were members of NATO as well (Peter Schmidt, 2000²⁷). ESDI was a bigger step toward European Autonomy, it would have gathered 50 '000-60' 000 troops by 2003, in order to deploy them for operations included in the category of 'Petersburg Tasks'. In 1999, at the NATO summit in Washington, the organisation put forward various proposals to ensure European access to NATO's capability in the absence of American involvement. This would enable the European Security and Defence Identity (ESDI) to utilise NATO's Command, Control, Communications, Computers, and Intelligence, namely, the C4I's resources (Stephanie Anderson and Thomas R. Seitz, 2006²⁸). In addition, and most importantly, the ESDI would have provided the creation of a separate (still not 'separable') military command that would have consisted of a Standing Committee on Political and Security Affairs, a Military Committee, and a military staff. However, the creation of a separate military body operating autonomously in some eventual European scenarios raised some criticism from US and non-UE NATO members, fearing to be excluded from the decision-making process and to risk a duplication and delinking from NATO. The famous 3'Ds, cited by the US secretary of State Madeleine Albright (De-linking ESDI from NATO, Duplicating existing efforts, or Discriminating against non-EU members). The debate surrounding the European Security and Defence Identity within the NATO alliance revolves around

²⁶ David Cameron was distracted during Libya Crisis, says Barack Obama (2016) *The Guardian*. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2016/mar/10/david-cameron-distracted-libya-conflict-barack-obama> (Accessed: 29 May 2023).

²⁷ Rummel, Reinhardt, and Peter Schmidt. "West European Integration and Security Cooperation: Converging and Diverging Trends." *Integration and Security in Western Europe*. Routledge, 2021. 3-24.

²⁸ Anderson, Stephanie, and Thomas R. Seitz. "European Security and Defense Policy Demystified: Nation-Building and Identity in the European Union." *Armed Forces & Society*, vol. 33, no. 1, 2006, pp. 24-42. *JSTOR*, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/48608751>. Accessed 2023.

two primary arguments: the notion that ESDI might have had a detrimental impact on the alliance, and the argument that ESDI could have strengthened the European pillar within the alliance. Former National Security Advisor and Secretary of State Henry Kissinger argued that the initiative “could produce the worst of all worlds: disruption of NATO procedures and impairment of allied cooperation without enhanced allied military capability or meaningful European autonomy” (EuObserver, 2001²⁹). One of the primary concerns among Americans about the project, in addition to the issue of the 3Ds, was the potential for European allies to veto a NATO decision through the NAC (North Atlantic Council). This fear was especially relevant in the context of lower-end military operations, such as those included in the "Petersberg Tasks," which could have been exclusively managed by European allies if they had chosen to block a NAC decision for NATO to take action (F. Stephen Larrabee, 2000³⁰). However, the US opinion was ambivalent in regard to this debate, since other politicians showed enthusiasm about the new European initiative such as the former Secretary of State Colin Powell, who stated: “we are in favour of European cooperation on defence. Our European allies must assume greater responsibility for regional and global security, and we are encouraging that through the ESDI. The ESDI is an opportunity for Europe to develop the capability to operate more integrally and to be a more effective partner in global efforts for peace and security”. Although the ESDI project has practically failed, it has been a fundamental factor for the development of the CSDP, introduced with the Treaty of Amsterdam in 1999.

Another EU initiative that has further alimented the transatlantic debate on EU-SA is the creation of PESCO and EDF, respectively founded in 2018 and 2021. There are three main phenomena that have brought to the creation of these bodies (Daniel Fiott, 2017³¹): the decline of the rules-based international order, Brexit, which undermined EU’s defence capabilities and deprived it of a strong and experienced military partner, and as already mentioned, the election of Donald Trump. These events have destabilised European security and have increased the risk perception of the member states. The Russo-Ukrainian War has further given an impulse attracting one of the two members left out from the common defence, namely, Denmark, which now is about to get closer to PESCO too. Again, the debate on the other side of the Atlantic has been ambivalent, since some have argued that PESCO would have competed against the American industrial defence or compromised the interoperability with NATO, and others have seen the initiative as a further increase of responsibility by European allies that would have enhanced the overall strength of the alliance. Shortly after the establishment of PESCO, the Americans, through Ellen Lord, the Secretary of State, sent a letter addressed to Federica Mogherini, the High Representative of the

²⁹Kirk, L. (2001) *Kissinger urges Bush to support NATO*, *EUobserver*. Available at: <https://euobserver.com/news/1377> (Accessed: 29 May 2023).

³⁰ Larrabee, F.S. (2000) *The European Security and Defence Identity (ESDI) and American interests*, *RAND Corporation*. Available at: <https://www.rand.org/pubs/testimonies/CT168.html> (Accessed: 29 May 2023).

³¹ Fiott, D., Missiroli, A. and Tardy, T. (2017) ‘Permanent Structured Cooperation: What’s in a name?’, *European Union Institute for Security Studies* [Preprint]. Available at: <https://www.iss.europa.eu/content/permanent-structured-cooperation-what%E2%80%99s-name> (Accessed: 2023).

European Union. The letter expressed the Americans' worries regarding the exclusion of US companies from pan-European military projects, since, from 2016 to 2018, the value of US military defence export to the EU has been valued at \$62.9 billion worth (US State Department, 2022³²). Moreover, they expressed their concern about the possible production of “duplication, non-interoperable military systems, diversion of scarce defence resources and unnecessary competition between NATO and the EU” (Chazan, Peel, 2019³³). The US has some legitimate reasons to believe that a lack of interoperability may occur. To provide an example, the German initiative Crisis Response Operation Core (CROC) at the PESCO’s level seems to be very similar to the NATO’s initiative Framework Nations Concept (FNC), still organised by Berlin (Lorenzo Giuglietti, 2021³⁴). However, not everyone thinks so. The new president of the United States Joe Biden has applied for the admission at PESCO, in contrast with Trump's ambiguous attitude toward the project. However, the unanimity requirement governing PESCO’s voting modality may still veto the US entrance in the project. These debates have hardly shaken the transatlantic alliance, and only the future knows if realists or liberals were right, if this historical alliance is going to survive or if it is going to shut down, hit by its differences and divergences.

Beyond the defence, another sensitive issue in the transatlantic debate has been the energy area. As mentioned above, the US has often disliked the hard energy dependence that the EU has on Russia. The US views the pipelines as strengthening Russian influence in Europe, increasing Europe's dependency on Russian gas, and weakening transatlantic cooperation (Ryan Jacobsen, 2021³⁵). This disagreement has reached its peak within the National Defence Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2020 (NDAA), passed by the US Senate in December 2019. This act, in the section named "Protecting Europe's Energy Security", includes sanctions on the companies working with Gazprom for the realisation of the Nord Stream II project, which is defined as “a tool of coercion and political leverage”. The NDAA has had the effect of delaying the construction of the pipeline, since two companies working

³² *World Military Expenditures and arms transfers - united states department of state* (2022) U.S. Department of State. Available at: <https://www.state.gov/world-military-expenditures-and-arms-transfers/> (Accessed: May 2023).

³³ Peel, M. and Chazan, G. (2019) *US warns against European Joint Military project, subscribe to read | Financial Times*. Available at: <https://www.ft.com/content/ad16ce08-763b-11e9-bbad-7c18c0ea0201> (Accessed: May 2023).

³⁴ Giuglietti, L. (2021) *The EU's permanent structured cooperation, NATO, and the US: Beyond a zero-sum game, EU-LAC*. Available at: <https://intranet.eulacfoundation.org/en/content/eu%E2%80%99s-permanent-structured-cooperation-nato-and-us-beyond-zero-sum-game> (Accessed: May 2023).

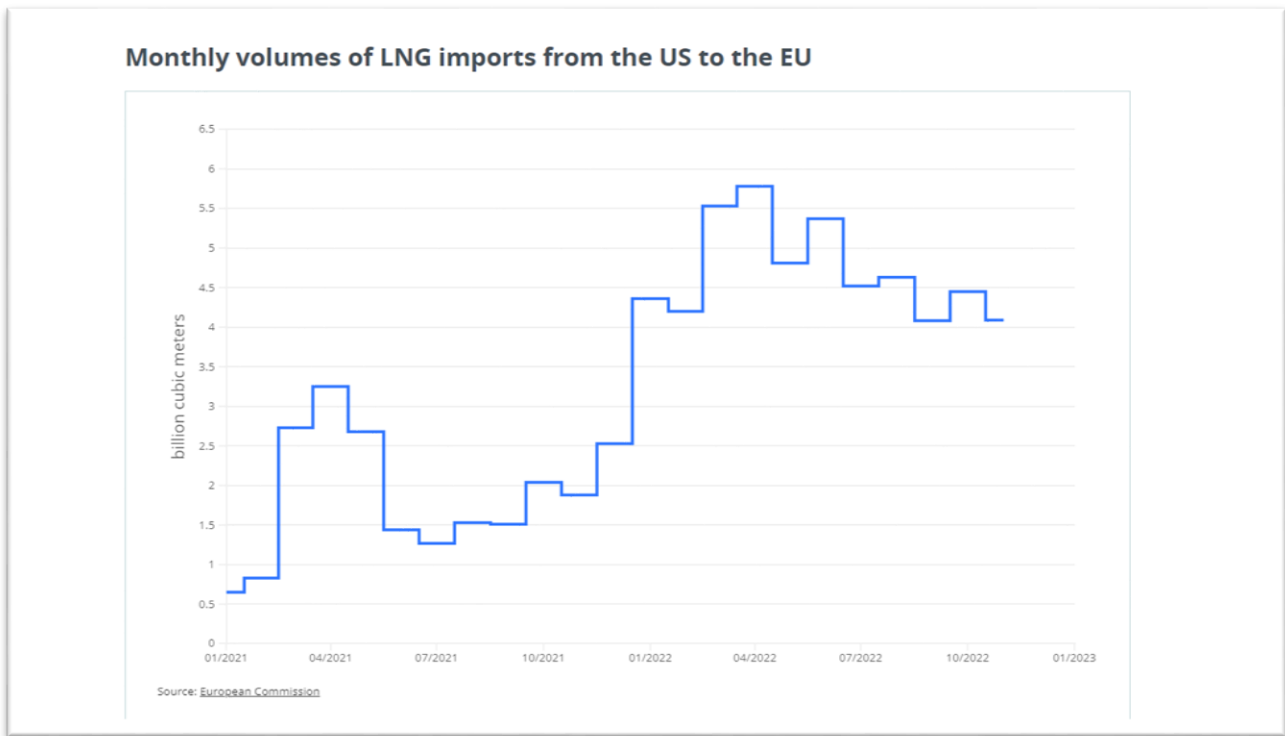
³⁵ Jacobsen, R. (2021) *US sanctions on Nord Stream 2, Institut pro politiku a společnost*. Available at: <https://www.politikaspolecnost.cz/en/analyzy/us-sanctions-on-nord-stream-2/> (Accessed: May 2023).

at the project, ‘Saipem’ (Italian) and ‘Allseas’ (Swiss), decided to withdraw their support. The American sanctions have been seen as an external interference in European internal affairs as the Union stated through one of its spokesmen:” As a matter of principle, the EU opposes the imposition of sanctions against EU companies conducting legitimate business”. However, in 2021, the Biden administration found an agreement by signing a joint declaration with Germany, stating that the German and the US government will sanction Russia if it should attempt to:” use energy as a weapon or commit further aggressive acts against Ukraine”.

Ukraine is one of the so-called ‘transit’ countries, along with Belarus and Moldova. Since its independence from the USSR, Ukraine has always been able to exploit its dominant transit position, threatening to steal Europe-bound gas from the transit infrastructure in order to obtain low prices from Gazprom. However, the Nord Stream projects weaken and reduce the bargaining power of these countries, cutting them off from the gas routes, and increasing Russian exporting capacity of gas to Europe. Therefore, the circumvention of the former Soviet republic deprives Ukraine of its transit-revenue, making the country less able to counter an eventual Russian aggression. Thus, Germany has indirectly weakened Ukraine, and this is the reason why Biden was so concerned about it. In addition, this US narrative allows the administration to align its foreign policy with its commercial interests, presenting itself as a possible alternative to Russian energy supplies (Pierre Noel, 2019³⁶). In fact, after the outbreak of the war, the USA have dramatically increased their export of LNG to Europe, the so-called ‘freedom gas’, since it would be the key to break the dependency's ties that bind together the Russian Federation and the Union (Infographic- “Where does the EU’s gas come from?”, European Council website, 2023³⁷).

³⁶ Noël, P. (2019) *Nord Stream II and Europe’s strategic autonomy*, IISS. Available at: <https://www.iiss.org/online-analysis/survival-online/2019/09/energy-nord-stream-ii-europe-strategic-autonomy/> (Accessed: May 2023).

³⁷ <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/infographics/eu-gas-supply/#:~:text=The%20EU%27s%20gas%20supply>



To conclude, the US and NATO are very concerned about the European reliance on Russia’s energy, which is considered to be ‘an important non-military element in its hybrid warfare toolbox’ (Vira Ratsiborynska, 2018³⁸). However, it is worth asking if there is a distinction between ‘good’ and bad hard dependencies, taking into account that even the best partner may change its ‘friendly’ attitude in International Relations, as proven by the Trump presidency.

In the next chapter, I am going to continue to deal with EU-SA, nevertheless the focus will be on the energetic aspect rather than the military one, since the latter has been already largely analysed because of its predominance in the Strategic Autonomy modern debate.

Chapter 2 “the strategic nature of energy and its relevance for the EU”

2.1 The key role of Energy in the modern economic system

In this chapter, I am going to describe the fundamental role played by energy within the modern economic system and its effects on economic growth. I will depict a general image of how energy and foreign policy interact with each other, explaining how state actors deal with this subject matter in international relations. Therefore, I am going to illustrate the importance of a well-build energy mix and energy strategy. Then, in the second paragraph, keeping an eye on the future, I am going to describe the potential structural change that could occur in the relationship between economic growth and energy consumption, highlighting the effects of the so-called energy

³⁸ Ratsiborynska, V. (2018) *New Research Division Publication: Russia’s hybrid warfare in the form of its energy manoeuvres against Europe: how the EU and NATO can respond together?*, NATO Defence College. Available at: <https://www.ndc.nato.int/news/news.php?icode=1186> (Accessed: 2023).

transition. To continue, in the third paragraph of the chapter, the focus will be on the EU's energetic strategy development and improvement, starting from the historical background which links the Union with the energy topic. Finally, the legislative aspect of the subject matter will be examined in the last paragraph.

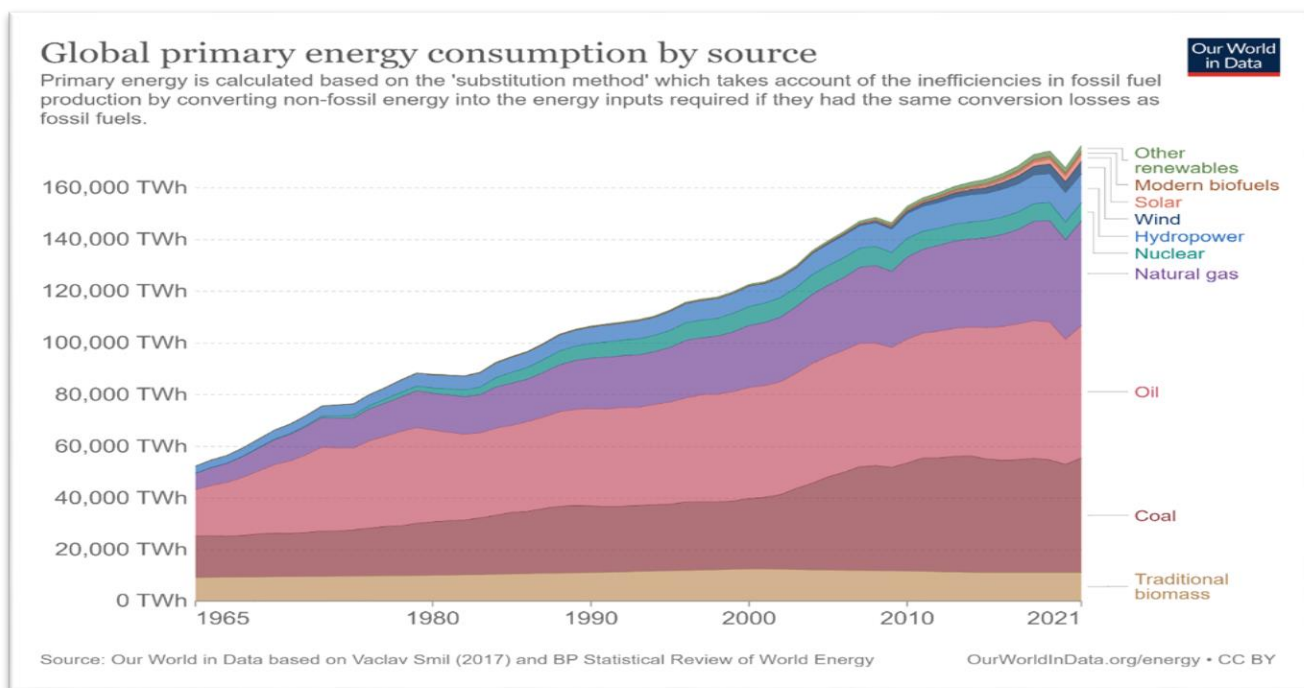
Modern global economics is heavily reliant on energy, which is, to speak, the engine of our worldwide development. An evident link exists between economic growth and energy demand, whereby the former goes up, the latter rises. Although this historical pattern may change in the next future, energy still represents an indispensable tool to bolster national economies. By comparing two distinct graphs - one depicting the evolution of Gross Domestic Product³⁹ (GDP 2015 US\$) over the past seven decades, and the other representing global primary energy consumption⁴⁰ over the same period of time - it becomes evident that the two lines share a remarkable degree of similarity in both their peaks and troughs. This is attributable to the correlation between these two variables. Moreover, In the range of time going from 1971 to 2010, total global energy use increased by about 140% and GDP by 270% (David I. Stern, 2018⁴¹), therefore it is not a linear relationship, but it is surely a positive one.



³⁹ <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.MKTP.KD>

⁴⁰ <https://ourworldindata.org/energy-production-consumption>

⁴¹ Stern, D.I. (2018) *Energy-GDP relationship*, SpringerLink. Available at: https://link.springer.com/referenceworkentry/10.1057/978-1-349-95189-5_3015 (Accessed: May 2023).



Hence, controlling or benefitting from a significant amount of energy, be it natural or liquefied gas, oil, renewables, or nuclear, has surely an advantage in terms of economic growth. For instance, the Republic of Guyana, a former British colony located in South America, has recently emerged as the fastest growing economy in the world, following the discovery of substantial oil reserves (Wisevoter, 2023⁴²). Another example that underscores the profound influence that the oil sector can exert on a nation's economic development is the OPEC nations, which collectively command approximately 80% of the world's oil supply, wielding substantial influence over global oil prices and the overall energy market.

Actually, the vast majority of the countries around the world lack a consistent national source of energy or have not the deemed amount to meet their energy demand. Here, the relationship between GDP growth and energy consumption is interlinked with foreign policy. In fact, almost each state has to cope with its “energy mix”, namely, its energetic portfolio by creating commercial (and even political) bonds with energy exporter countries to import the amount of energy needed. Well implemented policies in this regard may prevent the state from endangering its values, interests or foreign policy aims (Daniel Yergin, 2023⁴³).

⁴² <https://wisevoter.com/country-rankings/fastest-growing-economies/#guyana>

⁴³ Yergin, D. et al. (2023) *The Energy Transition Confronts Reality: By Daniel Yergin, Project Syndicate*. Available at: <https://www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/energy-transition-four-major-challenges-by-daniel-yergin-2023-01> (Accessed: May 2023).

Indeed, this was the scenario that unfolded after the outbreak of the Russo-Ukrainian war. Many member countries of the European Union have relied on Russia to meet a significant portion of their energy needs. However, this move later proved counterproductive in a scenario where Russia, subsidised to some extent by EU gas purchasers, threatened the peace and stability of the same European continent. Such a situation had firstly tied the hands of EU countries in 2014, in the face of the Crimea's invasion.

Such energetic dependence has dramatically compromised the ability of the Union to act. In fact, the former European energy mix was an example of an energy portfolio built at the expense of the Union's foreign policy, which, however, was less developed at the time than it is today.

However, in this realm, the achievement of complete autonomy is replaced by the aim of diversifying the sources. Citing the British Prime Minister Winston Churchill: "Safety and certainty in oil," he said, "lie in variety and variety". Diversification of energetic sources is the key to counter disruptions of supplies that may happen. Not being too reliant on a few partners enables the state in question to provide alternatives to consumers and producers. In addition, in his work "Ensuring Energy Security"⁴⁴, Daniel Yergin points out other features which allow a higher degree of energy securitisation, such as the energetic resilience.

Resilience is the capacity of adapting to difficult and changing circumstances and at the energetic level could be translated as the ability of improving the energetic efficiency, providing a stable and reliable service. It can be achieved through various means such as maintaining spare production capacity, creating strategic reserves, having backup supplies of equipment, ensuring adequate storage capacity along the supply chain, stockpiling critical parts for electric power generation and distribution, and developing well-thought-out plans to address large-scale disruptions that may occur.

Another point is "recognizing the reality of integration". It means that state actors shall not forget that the oil market is one and only and not being part of it nor being interested in it can endanger the security of consumers. In one sentence (Yergin's sentence): "secession is not an option".

Also, information provided by governments proves to be significant. High-quality information can avoid panicking the consumers, keeping the energy market stable and safe.

In addition, Yergin stresses the importance of involving China and India, predicting that their development will bring new global energy sources. This prediction has actually come true, with China now being a fundamental actor in the clean energy supply chain, providing 70% of the global demand for rare earth elements.

The author implicitly underscores the importance of multilateralism and global governance, whereby state actors should collaborate in order to not compromise the global energy supply chain. Therefore, Yergin clearly refers to the liberal doctrine of international relations, emphasising the importance of cooperation between states.

To conclude, the improvement of the energy area and its security deserve great attention, given their importance in the economic development of a country, or, in this case, a union of countries, which increasingly aims to become

⁴⁴ Yergin, Daniel. "Ensuring Energy Security." *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 85, no. 2, 2006, pp. 69–82. *JSTOR*, <https://doi.org/10.2307/20031912>. Accessed May 2023.

autonomous in this strategic sector. However, the system that sees a positive correlation between economic growth and energy consumption may no longer be the dominant one in the near future. In the next paragraph, I will illustrate how this current system is actually changing, undermining this apparent axiomatic binomial.

2.2 A new economic system with a new pattern of dependencies

As already explained, an increase in energy may be translated into an increase in economic growth. This has always been the trend, since the first industrial revolution until today, although something might change in next decades. A shift from industrial to service economy, an increase in energy efficiency given by technological development, an intensified use of electricity and a rapid growth of renewable energies may break the axiomatic binomial between production and energy (McKinsey & Company, 2019⁴⁵).

For the first time since the industrial revolution, the world, or at least, the yet-developed part of it, is experiencing a new conception of development which does not necessarily imply the intensive use of resources and energy. This means that we are dealing with a ‘decoupling’ of CO2 emission from economic growth.

The UK, France, Germany, Sweden, Finland, Denmark, Italy, Czechia, and Romania are just some examples of countries that are experiencing this relatively new phenomenon (Our World in Data, 2021⁴⁶). This event can be explained through the “Kuznets Curve”, which includes three different effects: scale effect, composition effect and technology effect.

The size effect postulates that as production increases, more natural resources will be utilised, leading to increased environmental damage, thereby revealing a positive correlation. The makeup effect, on the other hand, results in a shift from manufacturing to the services sector, which reduces environmental pollution by utilising fewer natural resources as the economic structure improves. The technology effect describes the tendency of countries to invest more in technology as their national incomes rise, leading to more environmentally friendly technologies and decreased environmental pollution through increased research and development (Şenay Saraç, Aykut Yağlikara, 2017⁴⁷)

As can be deduced from the previous statements, renewable energies are destined to play a fundamental role in this new model, enabling developed state actors to get energy consuming fewer natural resources, breaking the historical positive relationship between energy consumption and economic growth. Therefore, in this scenario,

⁴⁵ Sharma, N., Smeets, B. and Tryggstad, C. (2019) *The decoupling of GDP and energy growth: A CEO guide*, McKinsey & Company. Available at: <https://www.mckinsey.com/industries/electric-power-and-natural-gas/our-insights/the-decoupling-of-gdp-and-energy-growth-a-ceo-guide> (Accessed: May 2023).

⁴⁶ <https://ourworldindata.org/co2-gdp-decoupling>

⁴⁷ Saraç , Ş. and Yağlikara, A. (2017) *Environmental kuznets curve: The evidence from BSEC countries - dergipark, DergiPark*. Available at: <https://dergipark.org.tr/tr/download/article-file/561703> (Accessed: May 2023).

States would gradually abandon the use of fossil fuels (or reduce their use, at least) and other natural resources in favour of renewable power.

On one hand, this would reduce the energetic dependence that state actors have with fossil fuels net exporters, but, on the other hand, it would create a new pattern of dependencies with the exporters of raw materials needed for the renewable energy systems.

These critical raw materials needed for the energy transition are mainly represented by the 17 earth-rare elements (REEs), cobalt and lithium. Their use is vast and huge: lithium is used in electric vehicle batteries. REEs such as neodymium, dysprosium, and praseodymium are also used in the magnets of wind turbines to generate electricity. Additionally, electric vehicles require small amounts of lanthanum, cerium, and neodymium in their batteries. Cobalt, nickel, and manganese are also crucial for battery production. Even energy-efficient lighting, such as compact fluorescent lamps and light-emitting diodes (LEDs), contain phosphors that use REEs (International Energy Agency, 2021⁴⁸).

The largest Cobalt reserves are located in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), which owns about 4 '000' 000 metric tons of it (Statista LUISS, 2022⁴⁹). However, having large reserves of this mineral does not necessarily mean knowing how to exploit them properly or having the means to do so. Here, China performs this important task of refining Cobalt. In fact, 70 % of the world's cobalt is mined in the DRC, and 80% of that DRC output then heads to China for processing (The Diplomat, 2022⁵⁰). Regarding lithium, China is extremely involved in the global supply chain of this element. The People's Republic of China is the largest exporter of lithium oxide and hydroxide, and the second largest exporter of lithium carbonate. Again, even in the REEs market, PRC substantially wields control of these materials, possessing 70% of their global production (Statista LUISS, 2022⁵¹). It is evident from the data commented above that new net energy exporters (besides China, Myanmar, Australia, Chile, Congo, and Indonesia for example) and new patterns of dependencies are emerging. Just as Russia uses its relevant position in the energetic supply chain as a 'toolbox' for its foreign policy, the same could happen with China. By way of illustration, in 2010, Japan detained a Chinese fishing trawler captain, in response to that, the Chinese government blocked exports to Japan of minerals used in hybrid cars, wind turbines and guided missiles.

⁴⁸ <https://www.iea.org/reports/the-role-of-critical-minerals-in-clean-energy-transitions/mineral-requirements-for-clean-energy-transitions>

⁴⁹ <https://www.statista.com/statistics/264930/global-cobalt-reserves/#:~:text=The%20Democratic%20Republic%20of%20the,metric%20tons%20as%20of%202022>

⁵⁰ Bociaga, R. (2022) *Minerals and China's military assistance in the DR Congo*, – *The Diplomat*. Available at: <https://thediplomat.com/2022/10/minerals-and-chinas-military-assistance-in-the-dr-congo/#:~:text=All%20of%2070%20percent%20of,heads%20to%20China%20for%20processing> (Accessed: May 2023).

⁵¹ <https://www.statista.com/statistics/270277/mining-of-rare-earths-by-country/>

Deng Xiaoping, the former leader of China, reportedly said that whereas the Middle East has oil, China has dominance over rare earths. While Arab states have previously used restrictions on oil exports as a political weapon, such as in 1956, 1967 and 1973, China has refrained from leveraging its near monopoly on rare earth elements against other governments, at least until now (New York Times, 2010⁵²).

However, Indra Overland, researcher at the Norwegian Institute of International Affairs (NUPI), has tried to counterargue to this ‘myth’. The author claims that “transboundary electricity cut-offs will mostly be unsuitable as a geopolitical weapon”⁵³. She argues that the difference between fossil fuels and renewable energy materials lies in the richness in terms of quantity of the latter. Despite the adjective ‘rare’, REEs are abundant and in addition to this, some of these materials are sometimes replaceable, as in the case of the magnets in the wind turbines.

To conclude, a shift in dependencies may occur in the near future, even if it is not clear if these new energetic ties will continue to dramatically reduce state actors’ autonomy in the way they do today.

2.3 Energy and European Union, the historical link

To start this paragraph, I would like to provide the historical link which connects the Union with energy EU-SA, starting from the creation of one of the three founding communities: the European Atomic Community.

After the creation of the European Coal and Steel community (ECSC) in 1951, the contracting parties, especially the Benelux countries, decided to move further in the integration process of the newly born community. In fact, the Benelux Memorandum paved the way to the negotiations among the 6 members for the creation of an atomic community. The initial lack of a unanimous agreement on the matter was overcome by the Suez crisis (1956), which made reconsider the community’s energetic reliance on the Middle East fossil fuels (Johannes Pollak, Samuel Schubert, Maren Kreutler, 2016⁵⁴). Finally, in 1957, the parties signed the Treaty of Rome and in 1958, the European Atomic Community (EAC or EURATOM) entered into force.

Then, the first European energetic concern was addressed to nuclear power, which was seen as the engine of the ‘third industrial revolution’. To provide some context, before the 1950s, coal was the dominant source of primary energy supply in the six founding states, comprising almost 90% of the total. Later, by 1967, its share had decreased significantly to only 35%. In 1969, oil took over as the primary source of energy, replacing coal as the most important source (Johannes Pollak, Samuel Schubert, Maren Kreutler, 2016⁵⁵). Despite the benefits given by

⁵² Bradsher, K. (2010) *Amid tension, China blocks vital exports to Japan*, *The New York Times*. Available at: <https://www.nytimes.com/2010/09/23/business/global/23rare.html> (Accessed: May 2023).

⁵³ Overland, I. (2019) *The geopolitics of renewable energy: Debunking four emerging myths*, *Energy Research & Social Science*. Available at: <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2214629618308636> (Accessed: May 2023).

⁵⁴ Pollak, J., Schubert, S. and Kreutler, M. (2016) *Energy Policy of the European Union*, p.97. 1st edn. Bloomsbury Publishing. Available at: <https://www.perlego.com/book/2996286/energy-policy-of-the-european-union-pdf> (Accessed: 29 May 2023)

⁵⁵ Ivi., p. 97

the substitution of coal, oil supplies were unreliable due to the unstable situation affecting the Middle east. In fact, after Suez, crises have followed: the 1967 Six-war days, 1973 Yom-Kippur War embargo, the 1978-79 Oil crisis in Iran and the 1980 Iran-Iraq War. In this context, EAC would have been an important instrument to partly reduce such dependency.

However, the EAC was weakened by several factors, including the relatively low cost of oil (at least before the Iranian Revolution in 1978) and the many disagreements among the six founding parties. These divergences were numerous: for example, France wanted to use uranium from its former colonies to avoid dependence on the US, while Italy and Germany relied on American enriched uranium and technology. Furthermore, France disagreed on the form of ownership that nuclear energy should have had. West German nuclear power was in the hands of private actors, whereas de Gaulle believed that French atomic power should be state-owned, in line with his view of national sovereignty. For the same reason, even though France was one of the main supporters of the Euratom initiative, the French General was often mistrustful of supranational organisations and famously referred to Euratom as the most infamous treaty France had ever signed (Johannes Pollak, Samuel Schubert, Maren Kreutler, 2016⁵⁶). Finally, the aims, priorities, and objectives of the six countries in the nuclear realm varied widely, making it difficult to create a common agenda. Ultimately, national interests prevailed over communitarian ones, and state programs began to compete against Euratom research programs (Anna Södersten, 2018⁵⁷).

Given that the European Atomic Community aimed not only to increase integration but also to reduce dependence on external sources of energy, such as oil from Middle East countries, it can be argued that EURATOM represented a primitive and bland first attempt towards achieving energy strategic autonomy for the European continent.

After the Oil Crisis, the energy debate has suffered a setback. European states kept dealing with the subject as a national rather than a communitarian concern. Energy was still firmly controlled by the member states, who retained total control on their energy mix and on their national energetic companies. In fact, the electricity and gas sectors were highly challenging, mainly due to the dominant presence of vertically integrated utilities operating at the national level. These utilities controlled the entire supply chain, from production to distribution, and their market dominance made it difficult for new entrants to compete effectively (Lyons, 1994⁵⁸). To build a common

⁵⁶ Ivi., p. 96

⁵⁷ Södersten, A. (2018) *Chapter 1: A brief history*, *Elgar Online: The online content platform for Edward Elgar Publishing*. Available at: https://www.elgaronline.com/display/9781788112246/08_chapter1.xhtml (Accessed: May 2023).

⁵⁸ Per Ove Eikeland (2011) *Toward a Common European Union Energy Policy*, p18 [edition unavailable]. Palgrave Macmillan US. Available at: <https://www.perlego.com/book/3478965/toward-a-common-european-union-energy-policy-problems-progress-and-prospects-pdf> (Accessed: 30 May 2023).

competitive energy market, these structures had to be gradually dismantled (Prontera, 2017⁵⁹). The Union succeeded in this task at the beginning of the 90's, through important legislative acts such as Directive 96/92/EC, which introduced the liberalisation of the electricity market in Europe. This directive established a regulatory framework for the creation of a single electricity market, promoting competition, efficiency, and the protection of consumer interests. Subsequently, in 1998, the EU adopted Directive 98/30/EC, which extended the liberalisation of the energy market to natural gas. This directive established rules for the creation of an internal natural gas market, promoting competition and efficiency in the production, distribution, and supply of natural gas throughout the European Union. In 2000's, as a consequence of the progressive liberalisation of the energy market, Directive 2003/54/EC on electricity and Directive 2003/55/EC on natural gas established the principles of ownership unbundling between the sectors of production and distribution of electricity and natural gas, with the aim of promoting competition and preventing market dominance by state-owned enterprises.

The Union has always acknowledged the relevance of the energy topic, starting its integration process in the late 50'. This involvement has been confirmed not just by the growing regulation of the energy supply market but even by the increasing relevance of the argument in the EU plans and strategies. In fact, It was in 2000 that the EU published its first Green Paper on security of supply, "Towards a European Strategy for the Security of Energy Supply"⁶⁰, and, six years later, these same concerns were then reaffirmed with the second Green Paper on energy, "A European Strategy for Sustainable, Competitive and Secure ". Returning to the present day, it is now clear that energy has become a prominent topic within European security strategies, as already mentioned in the first paragraph of the first chapter. The Russia-Ukrainian war case study presented in the last chapter will elucidate better this link between EU's security and energy. However, partially addressing the initial research question, it is already possible to understand how energy and its supply have become priorities in the vision of achieving European strategic autonomy.

2.4 The current European legal framework on energy

To conclude this chapter, I am going to illustrate the current European legal framework in this realm, assuming that for achieving energetic strategic autonomy a high degree of EU legislative control is necessary.

The energy policy in the EU has progressed further. This sector has become a shared competence, as laid down in article 4 of the TFEU. This means that member states have the ability to act whereas the Union has not already acted, following the pre-emption principle. Therefore, states retain a discrete degree of freedom, but the Union might set boundaries. Actually, due to the complex and diverse nature of energy policies, different levels of EU

⁵⁹ Prontera, A. (2017) *The New Politics of Energy Security in the European Union and Beyond*. 1st edn. Taylor and Francis. Available at: <https://www.perlego.com/book/1496484/the-new-politics-of-energy-security-in-the-european-union-and-beyond-states-markets-institutions-pdf>

⁶⁰ <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/0ef8d03f-7c54-41b6-ab89-6b93e61fd37c/language-en>

competence apply to different energy-related issues. In fact, a measure concerning the energy sector does not necessarily have to have a legal basis in an article falling under the title dedicated to the energy sector (Title XXI in the TFEU) but can also have a legal basis in an article that does not directly mention energy, but whose purpose and scope may implicitly include it. Then, by way of illustration, article 114 of the TFEU entails harmonisation and therefore it may be applied for energy policies aimed to this objective, along with articles dedicated to energy. Thereby, the Union can use not just the legal basis contained in the title XXI of the TFEU, but other ones indirectly concerning the topic. However, the vast majority of energy policies have been adopted just with title XXI legal basis, through a fundamental legal basis: Article 194(2). This article can establish measures to achieve the objectives contained in Article 191, including "the security of energy supply in the Union". This objective should theoretically grant broad power to the Union, if it were not for the continuation of the same article which states: "such measures shall not affect a member state's right to determine the conditions for exploiting its energy resources, its choice between different energy sources and the general structure of its energy supply". The last part set some limits to EU control, which cannot always act in the name of Union security.

Having briefly analysed the competences and the legal basis of energy policies, I would like to observe a recent case study which has challenged the current legal framework of the Union on this subject: the Nord Stream II (NSII) project. The NSII has raised many criticisms among the member states and its construction has not always been undoubtedly lawful according to some.

As already stated in the first chapter, throughout the years, member states have concluded bilateral agreements with non-EU states actors. If on one hand it is true that member states are entitled to sign this type of agreements, on the other hand, they might hardly compromise the stability of the whole Union, increasing external dependencies and damaging EU's security of supplies. This has been the case of the controversial Russian-German pipeline built in the North Sea.

Concerns regarding the lawfulness of the project are mainly related to the measures contained in the Third Energy Package (TEP). This package includes six measures, divided into three directives and three regulations. The Directive 2003/54/EC and the Directive 2003/55/EC have been already mentioned in the previous chapter that outlined the liberalisation of the energy market. Subsequently, these legislative acts were amended, and today are known as the Directive 2009/72/EC and the Directive (EU) 2019/944 respectively. Together with the Directive 2009/119/CE, they form part of the Third Energy Package. The main objectives pursued by these measures are the separation of energy production and distribution interests, fair access to transmission and distribution networks, and regulated and transparent distribution tariffs. These requirements are set out in Articles 9, 32, and 41 of the Gas Market Directive. Nord Stream 2, which is solely owned by Gazprom and carries gas without providing access to third parties, would violate these requirements and undermine the TEP's core objectives (Valentin Jeutner,

2019⁶¹). Some may argue that Gazprom is a non-EU company, and it should not be bound by EU law. However, the project is in the territorial sea or exclusive economic zone of Finland, Sweden, Denmark and Germany. In addition to this, the jurisdiction of the Hoffmann- La Roche Case⁶² enshrines the principle that the EU law is applicable to non-EU legal subjects which participate in the EU market activities. Despite some doubts regarding the legality of the gas pipeline, reaffirmed by the “European Parliament Resolution of 12 March 2019 on the state of EU-Russia political relations”, the construction of the Nord Stream continued without the EU effectively intervening to stop it. On the contrary, the greatest block has come from the US sanctions, which have undoubtedly slowed the development of the work. Therefore, the EU had some tools to act but it did not use them properly nor effectively.

However, EU legislation has expanded to address these kinds of energy security concerns. For instance, just to cite some of the most important policies in this regard, the Governance of the Energy Union Regulation (EU) 2018/1999 established a governance framework for the Energy Union that includes monitoring energy supply security and coordinating planning at the European level. The Energy Efficiency Directive 2012/27/EU sets binding targets for improving energy efficiency in the EU, with the aim of reducing the Union's dependence on energy imports. Directive 2009/119/EC, part of the above mentioned TEP, aimed at ensuring the security of the EU's oil supply, obliging states to maintain minimum stocks of crude oil and petroleum products. Finally, Directive 2009/28/EC, which has been replaced by Directive (EU) 2018/2001, sets a binding Union target for the overall share of energy from renewable sources.

To sum up, although member states have the right to take care of their energy policies, the Union has set certain boundaries. In this view, the fundamental Directive 2009/72/EC and the Directive (EU) 2019/944 have obliged member states to diversify their supply of energy. These directives are closely linked to what has been discussed so far, as the Union has recognized the importance of this energy strategy and imposed member states to adopt this behaviour for their energy supply.

The Union legal framework has the potentiality to achieve the energy EU-SA, but improvements should probably be made. However, the concern for the topic has always been there, from the EAC to the recent regulations, directives, strategies, and plans.

In the next chapter, I am going to focus on the Russian-Ukrainian War, elucidating the EU's moves to cope with this unprecedented event with far-reaching consequences. I will analyse the REPower EU plan as well as the strategies deployed by the Union to face the energetic crisis provoked by the conflict.

⁶¹ Jeutner, V. (2019) *Amendments, annexations, alternatives: Nord stream 2's contemporary status under EU and international law*, SSRN. Available at: https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=3497072 (Accessed: May 2023).

⁶² <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/ALL/?uri=CELEX%3A62016CJ0179>

Chapter 3 “the link between the Russian-Ukrainian War and European Strategic Autonomy”

3.1 EU’s involvement in the Russian-Ukrainian War

On Friday, September 30th, in the San Giorgio Hall at the Kremlin, Vladimir Putin signed the protocol of annexation for the Ukrainian territories of Donetsk, Luhansk, Zaporizhzhia, and Kherson. On February 24th, 2022, Russia invaded Ukraine, launching the so-called ‘special operation’.

In this chapter, I would like to illustrate the European Union's responses to the war rather than analysing the development, actors, or political and historical reasons behind the conflict. Therefore, the first focus will be on the Union's engagement in the Russian-Ukrainian War, which encompasses a broad range of assistance, including security, military support, and financial aid. Finally, the last focus will be on the strategies and far-reaching plans designed by the EU to counter Russian aggression and manage the resulting crisis. This case study represents the shift in attitudes that the EU has exhibited in its foreign policy, reflecting an increasing determination to preserve its geopolitical interests in the international arena as it has never done before.

The Russian-Ukrainian War has served as a crucial test to evaluate the efficacy of European defence development. The European Union's involvement in this conflict has been characterised not only by the implementation of ten packages of sanctions against Russia, with an eleventh one currently being considered (Ursula Von Der Leyen, Twitter, 2023⁶³), but also by consistent military assistance provided by the EU to Ukraine in countering Russian aggression.

In this context, the European Peace Facility (EPF) has played a significant role. Established through Council Decision 2021/509 and falling under the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) framework, the EPF provides financial contributions to EU military operations through its substantial budget, amounting to €7.979 billion. Since Article 41(2) of the Treaty on European Union (TEU) prohibits the allocation of the Union budget for operations with military or defence implications, the EPF operates as an off-budget instrument of the EU, financed by member states of the CFSP. Consequently, the European Peace Facility operates outside the multi-institutional and the ordinary democratic control of the Union and is subject to the sole Council oversight.

Presently, the EPF finances the vast majority of the Common Security and Defense Policy (CSDP) missions established by the Union, including the EUAM Ukraine operation. The European Peace Facility has strengthened the role of the mission in Ukraine and has provided assistance in various areas related to civilian security.

The EU mission in Ukraine was launched in 2014, its aims were mainly related to the reform of the civilian security sector, furnishing strategic advice and practical support for specific policies in accordance with European Union standards and international principles.

To provide some context, before the mission was approved, some member states were extremely reluctant to interfere in the conflict, due to their unwillingness to be put on a collision course with Moscow. On the other hand, other states, such as Estonia, Lithuania, Poland, Sweden, and the UK, understood the strategic relevance of the conflict and were inclined to embrace a more active role. At the beginning, the deployment of a CSDP mission

⁶³ <https://twitter.com/vonderleyen/status/1655886753184530433?s=20>

served as a leverage to make Moscow accept the OSCE monitoring mission. EU policy makers thought that Russia would have preferred a mission in which they were involved in rather than a European Union mission in which they were not included. Once Russia accepted the OSCE monitoring mission, the EU started to concretely think about a civil security task in the region. Finally, the proposal came from a paper published by the UK, Poland, and Sweden, paving the way for the definitive set up of the mission. The implications of EUAM were significant at the EU foreign policy level. The mission aimed to enhance the accountability and resilience of Ukraine's security services while reducing Russia's influence over them. In the long term, the mission could also contribute to the EU's objective of integrating Ukraine into the political and economic orbit of the Union, moving it away from Russia's sphere of influence.

Furthermore, the deployment of EUAM served as a strong political signal of support to the Ukrainian government and its people. The presence of the mission in the country demonstrated the EU's tangible commitment to Ukraine, which was expected to bolster the determination of the Ukrainian government and its people in the ongoing confrontation with Russia. To sum up, the mission had both deterrent character and soft power implications (Niklas I.M. Nováky, 2015⁶⁴).

In addition, the mandate of the mission has been expanded twice since the outbreak of the war. Firstly, the mandate included border support activities, and later it was further expanded to include EU support for investigations aimed at prosecuting international crimes committed by the Russian Federation.

The expansion of the mandate has been followed by equally concrete and decisive actions, such as the unprecedented decision of sending hard military supplies to Ukraine. Remarkably, for the first time, the EU, through the EPF, has agreed to furnish lethal weapons to a third country. High Representative Joseph Borrell commented on this decision, stating, "another taboo has been broken. The taboo that the European Union does not provide arms in a war. Yes, we are doing it because this war requires our engagement in supporting the Ukrainian army." Nevertheless, this departure from the taboo is considered legally permissible under both European and international law (M. Eugenia Bartoloni, 2022⁶⁵). Analysing closely the EU aids, it is reported according to the European Union External Action Service, that EPF has delivered so far €3.6 billion for military equipment, maintenance, and repair services, € 2 billion for an ammunition package, €61 million for EUAM Ukraine, including ammunition and military equipment, € 31 million for medical equipment,

⁶⁴ Nováky, N.I.M. (2015) *Why so soft? The European Union in Ukraine*, Taylor & Francis Online. Available at: <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/13523260.2015.1061767> (Accessed: 30 May 2023).

⁶⁵ Bartoloni, M.E. (2022) *First-ever EU funding of lethal weapons: 'another taboo has (lawfully) fallen'*, European Papers. Available at: <https://www.europeanpapers.eu/it/europeanforum/first-eu-funding-of-lethal-weapons-another-taboo-has-lawfully-fallen> (Accessed: May 2023).

demining and engineering equipment, ground mobility, logistical assets, and cyber defence (European Peace Facility, Security Compass, 2023⁶⁶).

Additionally, the Union has provided Macro Financial Assistance (MFA) loans to Ukraine, including MFA+ loans, which are an exceptional form of financial support, totaling €27 billion. The legitimacy of these financial aids come from Regulation 2022/2463 and Decision 2022/1201, both relying on Article 212 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU). Furthermore, several member states, such as Germany, Poland, France, the Netherlands, and Italy, have actively contributed through bilateral military aid to Ukraine. The combined financial, humanitarian, and military support provided by the Union and its member states amounts to €52.68 billion, just slightly less than the estimated €71.28 billion contributed by the United States (LUISS Statista, 2023⁶⁷).

Such involvement in the conflict have finally made appear the EU as a real geopolitical actor. The Union is increasingly full filling its regional tasks, taking care of its neighbourhood and trying to re-establish peace and security across the European continent (Joseph Borrell, 2022⁶⁸).

Achievement of EU-SA may have found a turning point in this conflict. If strategic autonomy, as stated in the first chapter, refers to “the capacity of the EU to act autonomously – that is, without being dependent on other countries – in strategically important policy areas”, then we can state that Europe has bolstered its strategic autonomy for three main reasons.

Although it is still heavy aligned with US foreign policy, European external approach has enhanced its autonomy through all the aforementioned coercive actions addressed to Russia. This is demonstrated by the fact that sometimes Union sanctions have gone beyond the measures taken by the other allies. Here, the capacity to act autonomously is met by applying its own restrictive and coercive measures. Even if is the EU actions are still embedded in an alliance framework, they still retain a separated European character distinguished, for example from the American ones.

In addition, Union and its countries have unconditionally backed Kiev despite their reliance and their historical reluctant approach toward Russian aggressiveness. It was not long time ago when large amount of member states GDP flowed from Europe to Russia, indirectly financing the ability of the Federation to wage a war. If we consider Russia as a structural European threat, this indirect founding through energy export

⁶⁶ https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/european-peace-facility-0_en

⁶⁷ <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1303432/total-bilateral-aid-to-ukraine/>

⁶⁸ Borrell, J. (2022) *Putin's war has given birth to geopolitical europe: By Josep Borrell, Project Syndicate*. Available at: <https://www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/geopolitical-europe-responds-to-russias-war-by-josep-borrell-2022-03> (Accessed: May 2023).

was extremely naïve and counterproductive in security terms. However, the cut of energy export from Russia has marked a turning point, showing the willingness of Europe to seriously copy with the Russian Federation issue. Hence, ‘the autonomy to act’ criteria has been met, with the Union overcoming and disregarding its energetic dependencies with Russia to prioritise its geopolitical interests and acting more freely in relation to them.

Finally, the development achieved in defence and energy witness the Union struggle to be less dependent on these “strategically important policy areas”. Although this process started before the war, the latter has been a catalyst for the further improvement of defence and, especially, energy sector. The same Repower EU plan, which is a long-term strategy aimed, among other things, at reducing energy supply chain dependency, is a product of the energy crises provoked by the war. However, its huge implications will be further discussed in the next paragraph.

To conclude, the Union has shown the willingness and the capability of playing an important role in this conflict, preserving its strategic interests related to the region through military, humanitarian, and financial aids. In addition, (almost all) member states have demonstrated a high degree of compactness and unity in facing the geopolitical threat posed by the Russian invasion, developing new tools and coordinating themselves to back the Ukrainian defence.

3.2 Member states response, their background with Russia and Union far-reaching plans and strategies

The outbreak of the war in Ukraine compelled the European Union to legislate and plan in order to mitigate the negative effects of the conflict. Both the COVID-19 pandemic and the subsequent Russian invasion have severely tested strategic areas of the EU, such as defence and energy. However, at the onset of tensions that arose in January 2022 between Russia and Ukraine, the initial European response did not immediately arrive in a unanimous manner. Member states of the Union displayed different attitudes and undertook various measures to contain the Russian threat, according to their interests and historical backgrounds.

By way of illustration, former Soviet Union states, which more than others perceive the Russian Federation as a threat, have massively contributed to empower Ukraine détente before the start of the conflict. In fact, the Baltic have sent anti-tank and anti-aircraft weapons to Ukraine. Estonia has supplied Javelin anti-armour missiles, while Lithuania and Latvia have dispatched Stinger anti-aircraft missiles, which pose a significant threat to Russian helicopters. In addition, Latvia has provided pre-packaged military meals for Ukrainian troops. Even Poland, former WTO’s state, has shown high concern, sending various military assets, including the Piorun man-portable anti-aircraft missile system and ammunition. Other former Iron Curtain countries, such as Romania and Bulgaria, enhanced their national defence. Moreover, France offered its military presence to Bucharest, while Spain and The

Netherlands did the same with Bulgaria, additionally supplying Sofia with air surveillance, fighter jets and a Spanish frigate in the Black Sea (Howorth, 2022⁶⁹).

In preceding the European Union response, member states have exposed themselves sending aids according to their interests related to the conflict and to their relationship's background with Moscow.

In this regard, the initial German hesitation to unconditionally support Kiev deserves some context.

Germany has consistently shown reluctance in countering Russian expansionism, aligning with its "Russland-politik" (Dmitri Stratievski, 2022⁷⁰) or Willy Brandt's "Ostpolitik" concept. Germany has sought to incorporate Russia into the Western sphere, perceiving the threat from the Russian Federation to be far less significant than Ukraine does. Moreover, the idea that German people might be in conflict with Russian brings back unpleased memories to Berlin related to the second world conflict, as confirmed by the speech held by Olaf Scholz at the Bundestag right after the outbreak of the war:"

Putin, not the Russian people, decided to start a war. This separation is important to me. The reconciliation between Germans and Russians after the Second World War was and remains an important chapter in our common history"⁷¹.

Therefore, the soft approach of Berlin is caused by numerous factors, ranging from historical reasons to vital economic interests. For what concerns the latter, energy has been the glue that held this relationship together. After the end of the Cold War, the trade between the two countries increased and this contributed to the creation of a positive atmosphere, accompanied by the mistakenly German belief that the former Soviet Union was yet on its way to democracy (Marco Siddi, 2018⁷²).

This miscalculation of risk has led Ukraine to mistrust Germany, and when the war broke out, the former Soviet Union republic pointed its finger at Berlin's negligence. Not coincidentally, some Ukrainians see Chancellor Merkel as a cause of the conflict due to the Nord Stream projects, the calls to lift anti-Russian sanctions, and the attempts to push Kyiv into signing the disadvantageous Minsk agreements (Ilya Kusa,

⁶⁹ Howorth, J. (2022) *The EU's chair was missing at the Ukraine table*, *Sage Journals*. Available at: <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/17816858221089371> (Accessed: 30 May 2023).

⁷⁰ Stratievski, D. (2022) *German 'sentimental Russophilia'*, *Riddle Russia*. Available at: <https://ridl.io/german-sentimental-russophilia/> (Accessed: May 2023).

⁷¹ <https://www.bundesregierung.de/breg-en/news/policy-statement-by-olaf-scholz-chancellor-of-the-federal-republic-of-germany-and-member-of-the-german-bundestag-27-february-2022-in-berlin-2008378>

⁷² Siddi, M. (2018) *EU member States and Russia.: FIIA – Finnish Institute of International Affairs, FIIA*. Available at: <https://www.fiia.fi/en/publication/eu-member-states-and-russia> (Accessed: May 2023).

2023⁷³). This has undoubtedly strained the bilateral relationship between Germany and Ukraine. However, after the outbreak of the conflict, Germany gradually shifted its direction, distancing itself from Russia and improving its ties with Ukraine.

Germany was not the only European country with strong ties to Russia; Hungary, too, was considered a close partner of Moscow. However, Hungary's attitude has remained ambivalent. Under Western pressure, the Orban government withdrew from the Russian-controlled International Investment Bank (IIB), which relocated its headquarters to the Hungarian capital and has been labelled as a Russian espionage hub in Europe (Aljazeera, 2023⁷⁴). Nevertheless, Hungarian Foreign Minister Peter Szijjarto visited Russia three times for energy-related reasons even after the outbreak of the war. Additionally, the Fidesz cabinet is planning the construction of a new nuclear plant in cooperation with the Russian state-owned company Rosatom and has maintained its hydrocarbon exports at the current level.

Germany and Hungary had the most controversial relationships with Russia among the EU members, nevertheless they were not the only European countries to have close ties with Moscow.

France too has had good relationship with the Russian Federation in the past. The two countries sit together in the seats of UN security council and Paris has always seen Moscow as a like-minded state to discuss with on matters related to the stability of the continent. France, as Italy, has always thought that Russia is an indispensable interlocutor for providing European security. For these reasons, France has tried to de-escalate and avoid any military engagement with Russia. This foreign policy line has been concretely demonstrated by French firm opposition on granting to Ukraine and Georgia NATO Membership Action Plans. However, with the growing self-confidence gained by Russia at the international level and the lack of US support after the election of Trump, France had to cope with the Russian threat both in Middle East and Africa. In addition to the politically destabilized relations over time, France has nonetheless woven important commercial ties with Russia. Therefore, France started to regard Russia as precious trade partner rather than a good political one (David Cadier, 2018⁷⁵). However, the French attempt to emerge as privileged European partner to dialogue with Russia is still evident. The days following the onset of the conflict, Macron

⁷³ Kusa, I. (2023) *Can Ukraine and Germany overcome their disagreements over Russia?*, Carnegie- endowment for international peace. Available at: <https://carnegieendowment.org/politika/88764> (Accessed: May 2023).

⁷⁴ Gosling, T. (2023) *Hungary's loyalties tested as Russia's war in Ukraine grinds on, Russia-Ukraine war News | Al Jazeera.* Available at: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/4/14/hungarys-loyalties-tested-as-russias-war-in-ukraine-grinds-on> (Accessed: May 2023).

⁷⁵ Cadier, D. (2018) *EU member States and Russia.: FIIA – Finnish Institute of International Affairs, FIIA.* Available at: <https://www.fiia.fi/en/publication/eu-member-states-and-russia> (Accessed: May 2023).

repeatedly tried to figure as a mediator between the parties, releasing unpopular statements regarding the situation. By way of illustration, in June 2022, he held that Putin was making a historic mistake but that Russia “should not be humiliated”. Obviously, this statement has been harshly criticised both by Ukraine and eastern member states, which have always been more sensible to the topic for evident geographical reasons (Nicole Gnesotto, 2023⁷⁶).

Another country that had close ties with Russia was Italy. Rome-Moscow relationship was mostly based on economic cooperation, started from the Soviet times. ENI and FIAT succeed in the integrating themselves within the Soviet economic fabric through important agreements, such as the ones signed by Enrico Mattei and Vittorio Valletta respectively in 1958 and 1966 (Giovanni Capozzolo, 2018⁷⁷). Moreover, Italians are historically used to be politically engaged with Russia since the Italian communist party (PCI) was the biggest communist party within the Western Bloc. To date with most recent days, Italy, as France, sees Russia as key interlocutor partner for the European security architecture, especially in the view of an increasing Russian presence in the Mediterranean Sea. However, despite the historical good relationship, after the annexation of Crimea in 2014, Italy strongly backed the EU sanctions addressed to the Russian Federation, defining them as reversible measures needed to bring the former USRR to the negotiation table (Marco Siddi, 2018⁷⁸).

In contrast to Germany, Hungary, and to a lesser extent, France and Italy, other European states have consistently shown hostility and mistrust toward Russia. Examples of these states are Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia, and Poland.

Despite the ante-bellum situation of cooperation and, in some cases, friendship with the Russian Federation, the individual reaction of member states after the outbreak of the war were mostly inclined towards unconditional support for Ukraine, although this support took on different forms and extents depending on the European state providing it.

Defence, energy and as a by-products, strategic industrial research and production have been particularly affected by the War.

⁷⁶ Gnesotto, N. (2023) *Relations with Russia: France’s unique position*, Institut Jacques Delors. Available at: <https://institutdelors.eu/en/publications/relations-avec-la-russie-une-singularite-francaise/> (Accessed: May 2023).

⁷⁷ Capozzolo, G. (2018) *Italia-russia: Neutralità in Metri Cubi*, *Geopolitica.info*. Available at: <https://www.geopolitica.info/italia-russia-neutralita-in-metri-cubi/> (Accessed: May 2023).

⁷⁸ Siddi, M. (2018) *EU member States and Russia: FIIA – Finnish Institute of International Affairs*, FIIA. Available at: <https://www.fiia.fi/en/publication/eu-member-states-and-russia> (Accessed: May 2023).

Regarding the defence field, the Russian annexation of Crimea and later the full-scale invasion of Ukraine, have increased the risk perception of member states and has obliged the Union and its states to enhance their security sector. From, 2014, EU countries gradually began to view Russia as a clear threat to their national security. Initially, some member states, particularly those in the southern part of the continent, did not share the same level of concern as the Baltic states and Central and Eastern European countries regarding Moscow's actions. Traditionally, these states fear Moscow and consider it as their main security issue and the reasons behind this perception have their roots in the modern European history.

In fact, Finland has been invaded twice by Russia and, during the Cold War, the hard conditions of the “Treaty of Paris” imposed huge limitations on Finnish sovereignty. Poland has been invaded in 1939 and, after WWII, has been absorbed within Soviet sphere of influence. A worse fate befell the Baltic states, incorporated within the USRR. However, it is not just the traumatic historical backgrounds experienced by these states that have increased their risk perception. Strategic considerations also contribute to these concerns. In the event of a Russian-instigated conflict in the Baltic States, Polish territory could serve as a strategic corridor for NATO, although exposing it to potential combat operations near Russian military bases in Kaliningrad, where Russia's significant anti-access/area denial capabilities pose serious challenges for the deployment of North Atlantic troops in the Baltic region (Stephanie Pezard, Andrew Radin, Thomas S. Szayna, F. Stephen Larrabee, 2017⁷⁹).

General increase in risk perception has been followed by concrete actions. To provide an example, Italy significantly increased its military presence in the Eastern flank in 2022, moreover, several EU member states decided to bolster their military spending, aiming to reach the 2% of GDP target and Chancellor Olaf Scholz, for example, announced the establishment of a €100 billion special defence fund to modernise Germany's military capabilities, stating that Berlin would exceed the 2% threshold. (Fabrizio Coticchia, 2022⁸⁰).

In addition, military spending within the NATO framework of those countries that more perceive Russia as a threat, such as Baltic states and Poland, steadily rose after the Crimea annexation (NATO press release, 2017⁸¹)

⁷⁹ Pezard, S. *et al.* (2017) *European relations with Russia in the wake of the Ukrainian crisis*, RAND Corporation. Available at: https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR1579.html (Accessed: May 2023).

⁸⁰ Coticchia, F. (2022) *Facing War: Rethinking Europe's security and Defence*, ISPI. Available at: <https://www.ispionline.it/en/publication/facing-war-rethinking-europes-security-and-defence-36652> (Accessed: May 2023).

⁸¹ https://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/pdf_2017_03/20170313_170313-pr2017-045.pdf

Table 3 : Defence expenditure as a share of GDP and annual real change

Based on 2010 prices								
	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016e
Share of real GDP (%)								
NATO Europe	1.69	1.64	1.55	1.53	1.50	1.46	1.44	1.47
Albania	1.52	1.56	1.53	1.49	1.41	1.35	1.16	1.11
Belgium	1.16	1.08	1.05	1.05	1.02	0.97	0.91	0.91
Bulgaria *	1.74	1.64	1.32	1.34	1.46	1.32	1.26	1.30
Croatia	1.62	1.54	1.60	1.53	1.47	1.41	1.37	1.21
Czech Republic	1.52	1.29	1.07	1.05	1.03	0.95	1.04	1.01
Denmark	1.34	1.40	1.29	1.32	1.20	1.13	1.10	1.14
Estonia	1.80	1.70	1.68	1.90	1.91	1.96	2.09	2.18
France	2.02	1.96	1.87	1.87	1.86	1.83	1.80	1.79
Germany	1.39	1.35	1.28	1.31	1.22	1.19	1.18	1.20
Greece	3.08	2.64	2.38	2.29	2.21	2.21	2.38	2.36
Hungary	1.14	1.04	1.05	1.04	0.95	0.87	0.93	1.02
Italy	1.42	1.35	1.30	1.24	1.20	1.08	1.01	1.11
Latvia	1.21	1.06	1.02	0.88	0.93	0.94	1.04	1.46
Lithuania	1.07	0.88	0.79	0.76	0.76	0.88	1.14	1.49
Luxembourg	0.40	0.47	0.39	0.38	0.38	0.39	0.44	0.42
Netherlands	1.42	1.34	1.25	1.23	1.16	1.15	1.13	1.16
Norway	1.54	1.52	1.51	1.47	1.48	1.52	1.47	1.55
Poland	1.70	1.77	1.72	1.74	1.72	1.85	2.22	2.01
Portugal	1.53	1.49	1.49	1.41	1.44	1.31	1.32	1.38
Romania	1.33	1.24	1.28	1.22	1.28	1.35	1.45	1.41
Slovak Republic	1.52	1.27	1.09	1.09	0.98	0.99	1.13	1.12
Slovenia	1.59	1.61	1.30	1.17	1.06	0.98	0.94	1.02
Spain	1.13	1.03	0.94	1.04	0.93	0.92	0.93	0.90
Turkey	2.06	1.93	1.76	1.76	1.75	1.70	1.67	1.69
United Kingdom	2.46	2.48	2.41	2.18	2.29	2.19	2.08	2.17
North America	4.91	4.46	4.42	4.09	3.77	3.50	3.32	3.36
Canada	1.39	1.16	1.23	1.10	0.99	1.01	0.98	1.02
United States	5.29	4.81	4.77	4.42	4.08	3.78	3.58	3.61
NATO Total	3.29	3.04	2.98	2.82	2.65	2.50	2.40	2.43

The full-scale invasion of Ukraine further amplifies this risk perception. The decrease in security provoked by the conflict has pushed Emanuel Macron, great proponent of EU-SA, to lay the foundations of the European Political Community (EPC), to cope with European security issues. The alleged aspiration of the EPC is to become a geopolitical forum for high-level dialogue, to increase coordination and cooperation among the European actors. However, due to its relatively new establishment, it is still early to understand if this community will become a crucial instrument for facing the new challenges of the Old Continent. Consequently, it is observable that defence sector has been revitalised by this gradually diffused risk perception, accompanied by the already mentioned structural and circumstantial issues that further pushed the EU-SA project forward.

Another strategic sector affected by the war, extremely related to the one of defence, is the industrial research and production in the technological and military field. The EU struggle to bolster the European industrial capacity has been brought forward by the newly established European defence industry reinforcement through common procurement act (EDIRPA). The objectives of this initiative are to improve the effectiveness and competitiveness of the European Defence Technological and Industrial Base (EDTIB), particularly by accelerating adaptation to structural changes and increasing production capabilities; and to promote collaboration among member states in defence procurement, enhancing interoperability, maximising cost-effectiveness, preventing fragmentation, and facilitating access to defence products, especially for those member states most affected by the new security landscape resulting from Russia's

aggression in Ukraine (European Parliament, 2022⁸²). After PESCO, once again, member states have been called to coordinate themselves in the field of industrial defence. Therefore, the war succeeded to give an additional impetus to this strategic sector.

Finally, energy issues arising from the war have been dealt with by the Repower EU Plan. The European Union's plan aims not only to achieve a climate-neutral economy by 2050 or to decrease the use of non-eco-friendly energy sources, but also to reduce energy dependencies on third countries, especially Russia. In fact, the Repower EU plan is contained within the EU External Energy Strategy, presented in the draft "EU external energy engagement in a changing world"⁸³ and has significant implications related to energetic EU-SA. The plan lies in the ability of the EU to diversify its energy supplies and to enhance the energetic relationship with non-Russian suppliers, such as the US, Azerbaijan, Algeria, Norway, and the United Kingdom. In addition, the creation of the EU Energy Platform will make negotiations and agreements between EU countries and these foreign suppliers easier and will prevent member states from outbidding each other. Furthermore, the increase of renewable energy may further reduce the external fossil-fuels dependency, even if, as already discussed above, the Union has to avoid getting into a new pattern of dependencies related to the critical raw materials. Actually, this concern is explicitly stressed in the draft, which depicts the present and future supply chain of the critical raw elements designed by the Union. In fact, the EU has already formed Sustainable Raw Material Value Chain Partnerships with Canada and Ukraine. In order to expand the diversification of its supply chains, the Commission has actively pursued the establishment of additional mutually advantageous partnerships for raw material value chains in Africa (such as Namibia), Latin America, the Western Balkans, and with Australia, through trade agreements or Memoranda of Understanding.

Finally, great emphasis has been put on green hydrogen use. The clean version of this element might be a key instrument to achieve an economic growth decoupled from CO₂ emission. A great advantage of green hydrogen is that it is more evenly distributed compared to fossil-fuels products, although it needs energy to be produced and the dilemma is about what energy should be used. This is extremely linked to the renewable energy development and efficiency: without efficient renewable energy, hydrogen production would rely on fossil fuels, making it less environmentally friendly. Only through the use of abundant and efficient renewable energy would be possible to achieve low or zero-emission hydrogen production, in line with the just green transition desired by the EU.

To conclude this chapter, the Union succeeded to organise far-reaching strategies and to protect its strategic sectors hit by the war. The European Union may become a prominent international actor, responsible and capable of taking care of its geopolitical interests, but this would be possible only through the development of its strategic autonomy and to date, the signals of this development appear promising.

⁸² [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2023/739294/EPRS_BRI\(2023\)739294_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2023/739294/EPRS_BRI(2023)739294_EN.pdf)

⁸³ <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=JOIN%3A2022%3A23%3AFIN&qid=1653033264976>

Conclusion

In the first chapter, we have seen how the evolution of the concept of strategic autonomy has undergone significant changes over time. A certain degree of autonomy has always been desired by the Union. This is somehow demonstrated by the failed EDC project and the not much successful creation of EURATOM, which, already from the origin, witness the will of the Union (European Community at the time) to avoid hard and unreliable dependencies and to exert a control over the matters related to the Old Continent. Although h, it is observable that initially, dependencies assumed a negative character only if their source originated from outside the Western bloc, considered solid and trustworthy. Later, after the end of the Cold War, Union slowly starts to reconsider its capacity to act, addressing the problem by embracing a more active role. The increase in responsibility deemed by the new international asset has been a bridge toward the enhancement of internal capabilities. When the transatlantic alliance experienced its rock bottom, the international system became more unsafe and the EU underwent a destabilisation from the inside caused by Brexit, the need of an ‘hedging’ became evident. PESCO and later EDF and EPF are sort of symbols of these internal capabilities enhancement and they undoubtedly paved the way for further improvements.

The idea of a European Union more autonomous is still controversial. On one hand, NATO and some member state fear an overlap of defence functions and see in the EU-SA project and in its manifestations a ‘poison pill’ capable of weakening the transatlantic alliance. On the other hand, others argue that an improvement of defence capabilities may just strengthen the European pillar within the North Atlantic Framework, making the alliance stronger and ensuring to Europe a sufficient degree of autonomy to deal with Petersberg-type problems.

However, the current political debate among policy makers sees ‘open’ strategic autonomy favoured over other kind of versions of this concept, whereby, a mere increase in responsibility is not enough and the emancipationist version would affect the European key values of multilateralism and cooperation. Most of the member states prefer to develop EU’s internal capability without preventing third-party actors from being involved in strategic sectors of the Union, such as defence, trade, and energy (where, however, emancipation is quite impossible). In other words, protectionism in the name of security is not wished.

In the second chapter, we have observed the strategic nature of energy, verifying the idea that economic growth presupposes energy resources. Even if the trend may change, as demonstrated by the Kuznet curve, dependencies would remain but under a different pattern. Therefore, the control of energy supply empowers states and weakens the actors who does not have the access to them. It is evident that such strategic sector needs attention by states and this concern has to be translated into control. This is why some emphasis has been put on the EU’s legal framework regulating the subject, to assess to what extent the Union can oversee its member state policies on energy. However, even if the legal framework presents a broad regulation on the matter, this did not impede to some Union states to sign bilateral agreement with Russia. In this sense, the

Repower EU plan has tried to contain the effects derived from the abrupt termination of energetic supply from the Russian Federation and to prevent the reoccurrence of the ante-bellum situation of dependency. To sum, the strategic nature of energy confers it a great relevance within the Union priorities. Therefore, energy security became a matter of crucial importance and further developments may come, in the name of an increasing cooperation in such strategic sector.

The third chapter has tried to demonstrate the link between the War and the enhancement of EU-SA, reporting the unprecedented EU's commitment in the conflict. Before the annexation of Crimea, and in some cases even after, most European states maintain close political and economic ties with Russia, but the negligence of the threat it represented has been counterproductive in terms of security. Fortunately, the outbreak of the War has put an end to the broad dissimilarities existing among member states in engaging with Russia, paving the way to a common European approach. Another consequence brought by the conflict is the general improvement of some strategic sectors. Defence and military industry have experienced an enhancement due to the growing risk perception felt by EU's states and finally, Energy sector has been completely renewed. The ante-bellum energetic asset has almost disappeared and a new one, more strategic and diversified, may come soon through the implementation of the Repower EU plan. These sectors were already increasing in relevance, due to the circumstantial and structural factors of the international arena which demanded to EU a higher degree of autonomy; but the necessity of protecting Union's geopolitical by actively (and indirectly) intervening in the conflict has undoubtedly bolstered this process.

Initially, in order to play a relevant role on the international chessboard, the European Union (EU) was expected to increase its level of responsibility within the transatlantic framework. However, current times and circumstances seem to demand more from the EU. In the view of partners who can change their behaviours by adopting a transactional and unilateral foreign policy, a deterioration of multilateralism and of the rule-based international system, as well as the emergence of new international actors, the EU can no longer limit itself to being a reactive player. Instead, it must become a proactive actor capable of withstanding geopolitical and international upheavals, or even preventing and resolving them.

Times have changed, and so have the priorities of the European Union (EU), which demands more from itself and less from others. However, this does not mean that the continent is heading towards an emancipationist foreign policy. Multilateralism has remained a key tool of European foreign policy, as it continues to serve as a means through which the EU promotes its values and engages in international cooperation. Nevertheless, there appears to be a renewed and heightened focus on enhancing and strengthening its strategic capabilities. Greater attention has been given to key areas that enable the European Union to enhance its autonomy and resilience. By way of illustration, the military sector has witnessed the establishment of ground-breaking structures and organisations, such as PESCO, the EDF, and the EPF, while the energy sector has started to gain more significance through the plans and initiatives of the European Union, which has effectively placed energy diversification at the forefront of its objectives in a practical and visionary manner.

However, integration within the European framework is a necessary condition for the improvement of EU-SA. In fact, based on what we have discussed so far, empirical evidence suggests that European strategic sectors can be better defended when they are the subject of shared concern among member states. If Europe wants to act autonomously and cover a prominent role in the new international order a higher degree of integration in its strategic areas is needed. The heterogeneity and the divergences of the states composing the Union made this process of integration hard, but, paradoxically, the War and the COVID-19 have bolstered it. The adversities faced by the Old Continent have reminded European states that regional security cannot be taken for granted and that, quoting the former High Representative Federica Mogherini:” no country is big enough to face this world alone”.

In times of crisis, the EU demonstrated the ability of taking care of its interests, currently represented by the stability of its neighbourhood, the protection of its borders and the development of multilateral cooperation, vital for coping with international crises, such as the current one. Protection of geopolitical interests and European security are the ends, strategic autonomy is the tool to achieve them. Behind all the debates, ideas, initiatives, plans, and strategies deployed, the main goal is a safe and prosperous continent, but the security of Europe has to be adapted to the changing time. In this regard, policymakers and European leaders understood the need for a general enhancement of internal capabilities in the view of an unsafe international arena.

War and pandemic have been crucial for alimenting the debate on EU-SA, which has now reached its peak in terms of popularity and consequently, European leaders seem to be much more concerned on the topic than they have ever been before.

As Jean Monnet wrote: “Europe will be forged in crises and will be the sum of the solutions adopted for those crises”.

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Riassunto della tesi in italiano.

Nel primo capitolo abbiamo visto come l'evoluzione del concetto di autonomia strategica abbia subito significative trasformazioni nel tempo. Un certo grado di autonomia è sempre stato desiderato dall'Unione. Questo è dimostrato in qualche modo dal fallito progetto della CED (Comunità Europea della Difesa) e dalla creazione non molto riuscita dell'EURATOM, che già sin dall'origine testimoniavano la volontà dell'Unione (all'epoca Comunità Europea) di evitare dipendenze rigide e non affidabili e di esercitare un controllo sulle

questioni legate al Vecchio Continente. Tuttavia, è osservabile che inizialmente le dipendenze assumevano un carattere negativo solo se la loro origine proveniva dall'esterno del blocco occidentale, considerato solido ed affidabile. Successivamente, dopo la fine della guerra fredda, l'Unione ha iniziato lentamente a rivalutare la propria capacità di agire, affrontando il problema ed assumendo un ruolo più attivo. L'aumento di responsabilità richiesto dall'assetto internazionale ha rappresentato un ponte verso il potenziamento delle capacità interne. Quando l'alleanza transatlantica ha toccato il punto più basso, il sistema internazionale è diventato più insicuro e l'UE ha subito una destabilizzazione dall'interno causata dalla Brexit, è diventata evidente la necessità di un 'hedging' (copertura). La PESCO e successivamente l'EDF e l'EPF rappresentano una sorta di simboli di questo potenziamento delle capacità interne e hanno senza dubbio aperto la strada a ulteriori miglioramenti. L'idea di un'Unione europea più autonoma è ancora controversa. Da una parte, la NATO e alcuni Stati membri temono una sovrapposizione delle funzioni di difesa e vedono nel progetto dell'autonomia Strategica dell'UE e nelle sue manifestazioni una "pillola avvelenata" in grado di indebolire l'alleanza transatlantica. Dall'altra parte, altri sostengono che un miglioramento delle capacità di difesa possa solo rafforzare il pilastro europeo all'interno del quadro nordatlantico, rendendo l'alleanza più forte e garantendo all'Europa un grado sufficiente di autonomia per affrontare i problemi di tipo Petersberg. Tuttavia, l'attuale dibattito politico tra i policy makers europei vede favorita una "autonomia strategica aperta" rispetto ad altre versioni di questo concetto, nella misura in cui un mero aumento di responsabilità non sembra essere sufficiente e la versione emancipazionista potrebbe compromettere i valori chiave europei del multilateralismo e della cooperazione. La maggior parte degli Stati membri preferisce sviluppare le capacità interne dell'UE senza impedire a terzi attori di essere coinvolti in settori strategici dell'Unione, come la difesa, il commercio e l'energia (dove, tuttavia, l'emancipazione è piuttosto impossibile). In altre parole, non si desidera il protezionismo in nome della sicurezza.

Nel secondo capitolo abbiamo osservato la natura strategica dell'energia, verificando l'idea che la crescita economica un massiccio utilizzo di risorse energetiche. Anche se la tendenza potrà cambiare in futuro, come dimostra la curva di Kuznets, le dipendenze rimarrebbero, ma con un modello diverso. Pertanto, il controllo dell'approvvigionamento energetico potenzia gli Stati e indebolisce gli attori che non vi hanno accesso. È evidente che un settore così strategico necessita di attenzione da parte degli Stati e questa preoccupazione deve essere tradotta in controllo. Ecco perché è stata posta un'attenzione particolare al quadro giuridico dell'UE che regola la materia, per valutare fino a che punto l'Unione possa sovrintendere alle politiche energetiche dei suoi Stati membri. Tuttavia, anche se il quadro giuridico presenta una vasta regolamentazione in materia, questo non ha impedito ad alcuni Stati membri dell'Unione di firmare pericolosi accordi bilaterali con la Russia. In questo senso, il piano Repower EU ha cercato di contenere gli effetti derivanti dalla brusca interruzione dell'approvvigionamento energetico dalla Federazione russa e di prevenire la ricomparsa della situazione di dipendenza prebellica.

Per riassumere, la natura strategica dell'energia conferisce una grande rilevanza alle priorità dell'Unione europea. Pertanto, la sicurezza energetica è diventata una questione di importanza cruciale e potrebbero arrivare ulteriori sviluppi, nel nome di una sempre maggiore cooperazione in questo settore strategico. Il terzo capitolo ha cercato di dimostrare il legame tra la guerra e il potenziamento dell'autonomia strategica, riportando l'impegno senza precedenti dell'UE nel conflitto. Prima dell'annessione della Crimea, e in alcuni casi anche dopo, la maggior parte degli Stati europei continuava a mantenere stretti legami politici ed economici con la Russia, ma tale negligenza della minaccia russa si è rivelata controproducente in termini di sicurezza. Fortunatamente, lo scoppio della guerra ha messo fine alle ampie differenze esistenti tra gli Stati membri nell'apportarsi con la Russia, aprendo la strada a un approccio Europeo comune. Un'altra conseguenza portata dal conflitto è il miglioramento generale di alcuni settori strategici. La difesa e l'industria militare hanno registrato un potenziamento a causa della crescente percezione del rischio da parte degli Stati dell'UE e infine, il settore dell'energia è stato completamente rinnovato. L'assetto energetico Europeo ante-bellum è quasi del tutto tramontato ed uno nuovo, più strategico e diversificato, potrebbe presto arrivare attraverso l'attuazione del piano Repower EU.

Questi settori stavano già crescendo di rilevanza, a causa di fattori circostanziali e strutturali dell'arena internazionale che richiedevano all'UE un maggiore grado di autonomia; ma la necessità di proteggere l'interesse geopolitico dell'Unione intervenendo attivamente (e indirettamente) nel conflitto ha sicuramente rafforzato ulteriormente questo processo.

Inizialmente, per svolgere un ruolo rilevante sulla scacchiera internazionale, l'Unione europea reputava dovesse solo aumentare il suo livello di responsabilità all'interno del quadro transatlantico. Tuttavia, i tempi e le circostanze attuali sembrano richiedere di più all'UE. Alla luce dei partner che possono modificare il loro comportamento adottando una politica estera transazionale e unilaterale, e a fronte della deteriorazione del multilateralismo e dell'emergere di nuovi attori internazionali, l'UE non può più limitarsi a essere un attore reattivo. Invece, deve diventare un attore proattivo in grado di resistere a cambiamenti geopolitici e internazionali, o addirittura di prevenirli e risolverli. I tempi sono cambiati, così come le priorità dell'Unione Europea, che richiede sempre di più da sé stessa e sempre di meno dagli altri. Tuttavia, ciò non significa che il continente si stia dirigendo verso una politica estera emancipazionista. Il multilateralismo è rimasto uno strumento chiave della politica estera europea, poiché continua a servire come mezzo attraverso cui l'UE promuove i suoi valori e si impegna nella cooperazione internazionale. Tuttavia, sembra esserci un rinnovato e maggiore focus sull'incremento e il rafforzamento delle capacità strategiche del continente. Inoltre, maggiore attenzione è stata data a settori chiave che consentono all'Unione europea di migliorare la propria autonomia e resilienza. A titolo esemplificativo, il settore militare ha visto l'istituzione di strutture e organizzazioni innovative, come PESCO, l'EDF e l'EPF, mentre il settore dell'energia ha iniziato a guadagnare maggiore importanza attraverso i piani e le iniziative dell'Unione europea, che ha posto efficacemente la diversificazione energetica al centro dei suoi obiettivi in modo pratico e visionario. Tuttavia, l'integrazione nel quadro europeo è una condizione necessaria per il miglioramento dell'autonomia

strategica Europea. Infatti, in base a quanto discusso finora, le prove empiriche suggeriscono che i settori strategici europei possono essere meglio difesi quando rappresentano interessi comuni a tutti gli Stati membri. Se l'Europa vuole agire autonomamente e svolgere un ruolo di rilievo nel nuovo ordine internazionale, è necessario un maggior grado di integrazione nelle sue aree strategiche. L'eterogeneità e le divergenze degli Stati che compongono l'Unione hanno reso difficile questo processo di integrazione, ma paradossalmente, la guerra e il COVID-19 lo hanno rafforzato. Le avversità affrontate dal Vecchio Continente hanno ricordato agli Stati europei che la sicurezza regionale non può essere data per scontata e che, citando l'ex Alto rappresentante Federica Mogherini: "nessun paese è abbastanza grande da affrontare da solo questo mondo". In tempi di crisi, l'UE ha dimostrato la capacità di prendersi cura dei suoi interessi, attualmente rappresentati dalla stabilità del suo vicinato, dalla protezione delle sue frontiere e dallo sviluppo della cooperazione multilaterale, vitale per far fronte alle crisi internazionali, come quella attuale. La protezione degli interessi geopolitici e la sicurezza europea sono gli obiettivi, l'autonomia strategica è lo strumento per raggiungerli. Dietro tutti i dibattiti, le idee, le iniziative, i piani e le strategie attuati, l'obiettivo principale è un continente sicuro e prospero, ma la sicurezza dell'Europa deve adattarsi ai tempi che cambiano. A tale riguardo, i responsabili delle politiche e i leader europei hanno compreso la necessità di un generale potenziamento delle capacità interne alla luce di un'arena internazionale sempre più insicura. La guerra e la pandemia sono state cruciali per alimentare il dibattito intorno l'autonomia strategica, il quale ha ormai raggiunto il suo apice in termini di popolarità, spingendo i leader europei ad essere molto più interessati all'argomento rispetto a quanto lo siano mai stati in passato. Come scrisse Jean Monnet: "L'Europa si forgerà nelle crisi e sarà la somma delle soluzioni adottate per affrontare tali crisi".