The war in Ukraine as a catalyst for change: the securitarian and constitutional awakening of the EU for the achievement of strategic autonomy

Prof. Sergio Fabbrini
_____

LUISS Supervisor

Prof. Maria Giulia Amadio Viceré
_____

Co-Supervisor

Prof. Giovanni Esposito
_____

ULB Supervisor

Antonio Sorbino
_____

Candidate
LUISS candidate number: 650922
ULB candidate number: 000586209

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List of abbreviations

AA = Association Agreement

AFCO = Committee on Constitutional Affairs

ASAP = Act in Support of Ammunition Production

CAP = Common Agricultural Policy

CARD = Coordinated Annual Review on Defence

CFSP = Common Foreign and Security Policy

CIVICOM = Committee for Civilian Aspects of Crisis Management

CJEU = Court of Justice of the European Union

CMPD = Crisis Management and Planning Directorate

CoFoE = Conference on the future of Europe

CSDP = Common Security and Defence Policy

CSP = Core State Powers

DI = Differentiated Integration

ECSC = European Coal and Steel Community

EDA = European Defence Agency

EDC = European Defence Community

EDF = European Defence Funds

EDIP = European Defence Industrial Programme

EDIRPA = European Defence Industry Reinforcement Through Common Procurement Act

EDIS = European Defence Industrial Strategy

EDTIB = European Defence Technological and Industrial Base

EEAS = European External Action Service

EP = European Parliament

EPF = European Peace Facility

ESS = European Security Strategy

EU = European Union

EUGS = EU Global Strategy

EUMC = European Union Military Committee

EUMS = Military Staff of the European Union

FAC = Foreign Affairs Council

LNG = Liquefied Natural Gas

MFA+ = Macro-Financial Assistance+

MFF = Multiannual Financial Framework

MSA = Multiple Stream Approach

NATO = North Atlantic Treaty Organization

NGEU = Next Generation EU

OSCE = Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe

PESCO = Permanent Structured Cooperation

PSC = Political and Security Committee

QMV = Qualified Majority Voting

SURE = Support to mitigate Unemployment Risks in an Emergency

TEU = Treaty on European Union

TFEU = Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union

UK = United Kingdom

UN = United Nation

US = United States

USSR = Union of Soviet Socialist Republics

Introduction

The return of war and the logic of power on the European continent has profoundly changed the *Weltanschauung* of the European Union (EU), provoking a tectonic shift in the history of European integration.

The war in Ukraine catalysed a significant identitarian rethinking within the Union, which, predominantly perceived as an economic actor, has begun to take its first steps toward becoming a security actor. This cognitive and military shock rattled the institutional and political foundations of the EU, creating strong pressures for integration in areas traditionally under the aegis of member states. This dynamic has pushed for the strengthening of the EU's international actorness and its foreign policy, whose goal is the achievement of strategic autonomy. In response to the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022, the EU accelerated the process of defence and security integration. The war has thus catalysed the EU's securitarian awakening, pushing for common initiatives such as joint defence procurement and the strengthening of a common strategic culture. By adopting a whole series of securitarian and industrial initiatives, the EU laid the groundwork for the creation of a Defence Union, an integrated defence framework between member states and European institutions. Despite these developments, the war in Ukraine has also amplified the constitutional weaknesses of the current EU architecture, as intergovernmental mechanisms have often limited the development of a common and coherent foreign policy line. For these reasons, although the EU with its foreign policy managed to react to the return of war, it struggled to act.

The Russian aggression against Ukraine catalysed the urgency to reconsider and reform European governance, seeking to revitalise the responsiveness of the EU's external action and its internal coherence. The war thus contributed to the EU's constitutional awakening, in which reforms returned after many years to the political agenda of European institutions, no longer just as a theoretical concept, but as a practical necessity. In perspective, this reformist impulse, aimed at redesigning the EU's institutional grammar and fostering greater integration, could be helpful in achieving greater strategic autonomy.

In light of this, the conflict in Ukraine represented a *Zeitenwende*, a paradigmatic shift in the "spirit of the time", or rather, the *Zeitgeist*, of the EU. The international uncertainty, generated by the return of power on European soil, revealed the fragility of the EU's continental and Kantian peace, accentuating the need for deeper unity between member states and European institutions. Therefore, the war stimulated not only the EU's securitarian awakening with developments towards the creation of a Defence Union, but also its constitutional awakening with commitments to change its complex institutional mosaic.

On this basis, this thesis aims to answer the following research question: *"How has the war in Ukraine impacted the European institutional architecture, particularly the foreign and defence policy, and to what extent has it prompted changes to achieve strategic autonomy?"*

To investigate the implications of this question, the thesis identified the war in Ukraine as the independent variable, strategic autonomy as the dependent variable and the diverging interests of member states and intergovernmental problems as the intervening variable. The war in Ukraine, as the main catalyst, triggered a series of changes in the EU's security and constitutional fabric. These changes, reflected in strategic autonomy, sought to equip the Union with the capabilities to act more autonomously on the international stage. However, divergent interests of member states and intergovernmental problems have modulated the effectiveness and speed with which the EU has sought to realise these changes towards strategic autonomy. The relationship between these variables highlights not only the internal and external dynamism of the EU in the context of the war in Ukraine, but also underlines the need for a coherent and unified approach towards strategic autonomy, where securitarian advances should be balanced by as many constitutional advances. That said, it is important to underline that there is no universal definition of strategic autonomy in the European literature, as it is interpreted differently depending on the policy domain of reference. In this thesis, it will be declined primarily in securitarian terms and analysed as the EU's ability to act and make decisions autonomously from both an external and internal perspective. Furthermore, in deciphering the nature of this concept, the thesis will take into account the three dimensions postulated by Helwig necessary to analyse strategic autonomy, namely material, political and institutional autonomy.

Based on this, the articulation of the chapters will be based on the theoretical framework of the Multiple Stream Approach (MSA). This model, developed by John W. Kingdon, is generally adopted to analyse how certain ideas and changes enter the political agenda of policy-makers. According to Kingdon, the convergence of three distinct but interconnected streams - Problem Stream, Political Stream and Policy Stream - opens a window of opportunity. The latter provides an opportunity for policy-makers to promote changes that respond to perceived pressures in the Problem Stream, mature solutions in the Policy Stream and the political context of the Political Stream. Through the use of the MSA, this thesis will attempt to answer the research question by analysing how the external shock generated by the return of war has catalysed the EU's securitarian and constitutional awakening. These two factors represent crucial steps towards achieving gradual strategic autonomy, as they aim to strengthen the EU's ability to act, and no longer merely react.

The first chapter of this thesis will investigate the multidimensional and polyhedral nature of European foreign policy in general, analysing the division of competences and focusing on the

intergovernmental policies of the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) and the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP). Later in the chapter, the concept of strategic autonomy, the main objective of EU foreign policy, will be addressed and explained, highlighting its importance for the EU's capacity to act. After this institutional and conceptual overview, the analysis will focus on the main issues that hinder European foreign, defence and security policy and that in turn prevent the full achievement of strategic autonomy. This chapter therefore represents the Problem Stream of this thesis. As will be seen, the main deficiencies in foreign policy governance are attributable to the monolithic intergovernmental logic, which hinders the development of strategic autonomy from a political, material and institutional perspective. The lack of a unified foreign and defence policy, the difficulty of coordinating common responses due to the intergovernmental decision-making system, the absence of a uniform and coherent vocabulary and the fragmentation of the defence industry are among the major obstacles. These problems undermine the EU's internal unity and coherence, which are fundamental prerequisites for achieving strategic autonomy.

The second chapter of this thesis will examine in detail the EU's response to the war in Ukraine, analysing the main foreign policy instruments employed, including sanctions, the strategic recalibration of the Strategic Compass and the various defence and security initiatives. In the chapter, the Political Stream of this thesis will be examined, focusing on the political change that resulted from the return of the war. The threat posed by the conflict in Ukraine prompted a renewed focus on defence, prompting European institutions and member states to recognise defence and security integration as an urgent political priority and raised awareness of the importance of strengthening the EU's capacity to act. The new political environment has thus revitalised the focus on common defence, strengthening the dimension of the EU's material autonomy (common defence procurement) and political autonomy (common strategic culture). These developments laid the foundation for the creation of a Defence Union, an initiative that aims to enhance collaborative efforts and operational capabilities, thereby strengthening the EU as a security actor and advancing the achievement of strategic autonomy. Despite the aspiration for a more integrated approach, the EU struggled to act and maintain a coherent foreign policy as the problems highlighted in the Problem Stream continued to damage European foreign policy and consequently the achievement of strategic autonomy. The divergent interests of member states, dependence on a decision-making system based on reaching unanimous consensus, and the instrumentalisation of vetoes to reduce the effectiveness of EU initiatives have limited the development of a solid institutional autonomy.

The third chapter will focus on the main policy proposals developed during the conflict in Ukraine, trying to understand what institutional changes and governance ideas were considered necessary to improve the EU's capacity to act. These proposals, emerging from the Political Stream, were deeply

influenced by an increased awareness of the security dimension due to the conflict, reflecting the need to address the specific problems identified in the Problem Stream and to develop solutions to improve European integration in terms of security and defence. This chapter therefore represents the Policy Stream of this thesis. From the analysis of these proposals, it is possible to trace elements that could theoretically strengthen the EU's institutional, material and political autonomy and bring it closer to achieving strategic autonomy in the future. In this chapter, the European Parliament's recommendations on foreign, security and defence policy developed following the war in Ukraine will be analysed. Next, the reforms proposed by the Conference on the Future of Europe (CoFoE) will be examined, with a focus on foreign policy, security and the EU's institutional and decision-making design. Subsequently, the analysis will focus on the call for federalism, primarily championed by citizens and prominent politicians, as a proposed solution to the structural vulnerabilities of the EU that surfaced during the conflict. Lastly, the report on the future of European competitiveness drafted by Mario Draghi will be examined, highlighting its potential for the achievement of strategic autonomy. In general, most of the main policy proposals postulate the need to address the historical change generated by the return of the war with greater integration to achieve strategic autonomy and with institutional changes to revitalise European governance.

In the fourth and final chapter, the window of opportunity that emerged from the convergence of problem recognition, political context and solutions will be examined. This window saw institutional reforms return to the EU political agenda after years of absence. In this context, the European Parliament played a pioneering role, being the first to put the issue of reforms concretely on the political agenda, for instance by launching a Convention to revise the treaties in 2022. In the following years, this reformist impulse was then amplified by other European institutions, mainly the Commission, and the member states, which recognised the need for internal reforms to make the EU stronger and strengthen European sovereignty. This sequence of events illustrates the role of supranational institutions as "policy entrepreneurs", actively advocating for significant policy changes in response to emerging challenges and opportunities within the Union. This chapter will examine how this institutional introspection varies significantly between supranational and intergovernmental institutions. The former tend to be more receptive to the ambitious proposal to amend the treaties, the latter tend to be open to reform but less inclined to substantive treaty changes. However, what can be deduced is that the European institutions are willing to embark on a path of change, opening up opportunities for the achievement of greater strategic autonomy.

In light of the above, this thesis will employ document analysis as the principal methodology, using a combination of primary and secondary sources to answer the research question.

Regarding the former, specific documents will be scrutinised, such as the EU Treaties, analyses and communications of the Commission, regulations adopted by the Council, proposals and recommendations of the Parliament, the CoFoE report and a number of public statements and reports of key EU figures. The use of these sources aims to provide a general overview of the main European political dynamics by analysing the institutional and security responses to the crisis in Ukraine. The analysis of these primary documents will therefore allow an examination of the foreign and defence policy, as well as the identification of the priorities and pressures that drove EU decisions during this critical period. Moreover, the examination of these materials will provide crucial insights into the return of institutional reform to the political agenda of policy-makers, highlighting how the presence of this reformist drive could enhance the EU's material, political and institutional autonomy.

The study of these primary sources will also be accompanied by an extensive consultation of secondary sources, which include reports produced by the European epistemic community, think tank analyses, and newspaper articles. These secondary sources will allow to decipher the complicated institutional mosaic of the EU and to contextualise and interpret the primary sources, offering a broader and more diverse view of strategic autonomy.

Through the use of document analysis, this research thesis aims to offer a clear and comprehensive view of how the war in Ukraine acted as a powerful catalyst for change, leading to the EU's securitarian and constitutional awakening, essential for achieving strategic autonomy.

1. The institutional architecture of the EU Foreign Policy and the concept of strategic autonomy

1.1 Introduction

Within the intricate international chessboard, where games of power and strategies shape the new world balances, the European Union emerges as a key player in influencing global dynamics. Indeed, over the years, the European institutional architecture has represented a political and economic archetype that has significantly marked the contemporary era, symbolising the banner of multilateralism and democracy. However, recent geopolitical developments, like the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022, have challenged the role of the EU as a regulatory power (Bradford, 2020), posing the identity problem of the EU as a security actor. In order to address these challenges and act dynamically in the face of international uncertainty, it is necessary for the EU to strengthen its strategic profile, starting precisely with its foreign policy. Indeed, the latter has a polyhedral nature, manifesting through a multi-faceted, multi-method and multi-level structure (Keukeleire & Delreux, 2022). Understanding the intrinsic nature of this system is crucial for deciphering the complex dynamics that constellate the European external dimension.

The aim of this first chapter (Problem Stream) is to examine in depth the complex institutional architecture governing the EU foreign and security policy and the constitutional problems that hamper its coherence and effectiveness. In section 1.2, the multidimensional nature of European foreign policy will be analysed, focusing on its various ramifications in the complex European system between strictly intergovernmental and Community policies. In section 1.3, the system of division of competences within the EU will be examined, with a particular emphasis on the competences governing the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) and the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP). In section 1.4, the CFSP will be analysed in depth, highlighting the main articles that structure its governance. The same will be done in section 1.5 with the CSDP. In section 1.6, the concept of strategic autonomy will be explored, highlighting its importance for the capacity to act of the EU. Section 1.7 will focus on the main institutional problems that hamper the European foreign, defence and security policy. These problems largely stem from the intergovernmental nature of the EU. These include the absence of a common defence policy, the issue of the language, the dependence on the political will of the member states, the decision-making system based on vetoes and unanimity, the EU's financial dependence on member states' contributions to support missions and many others. These factors significantly hamper the effectiveness of European foreign and security policy, thereby posing challenges to the achievement of strategic autonomy.

1.2 The multi-faceted, multi-method and multi-level foreign policy

The EU foreign policy reveals a multi-faceted structure as it branches into four macro-categories: the CFSP, the CSDP, external action and the external dimension of internal policies (Keukeleire & Delreux, 2022). The first two are intergovernmental in nature, where member states have control over foreign policy actions and positions. While the CFSP mainly concerns the diplomatic sphere, the CSDP, part of the CFSP, aims at the development of military and civil defence capabilities for crisis management, peacekeeping missions and stabilisation operations, thus representing the operational component. On the other hand, the last two reflect the areas in which supranational institutions have a certain margin for manoeuvre, unconstrained by intergovernmental logic. The external action, indeed, concerns the external sphere of trade policy and financial and economic cooperation. The external dimension of internal policies, on the other hand, concerns the spillover effects of certain internal policies, such as those related to the environment and migration, which have major consequences in the field of foreign policy. From this overview, it is evident that while the principal domains of high politics are subject to the unwieldy management of intergovernmental processes, there nonetheless exists a spectrum of areas traditionally deemed of lesser strategic significance, such as environmental and trade policies, which are categorized under the rubric of low politics. In these areas, the supranational entities of the Union have a capacity to intervene.

A direct and indirect consequence of this heterogeneous and multiform nature is the multi-methodological character of the European foreign policy. The latter is organized through two distinct policymaking methods, which in turn reflect two different ways of understanding the European integration process: the intergovernmental method and the Community method, characterized by a supranational soul and federal ambitions. This duality is an almost ontological feature of the European architecture, and, in the field of foreign policy, it derives from the elements outlined within two fundamental Treaties, the Treaty on European Union (TEU) and the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU), which define the institutional foundations of the EU.

The first treaty (TEU) follows an intergovernmental logic and contains the main CFSP and CSDP provisions. This treaty reflects the member states' desire to exert control over the classical policies of state sovereignty, those concerning the Core State Powers (CSP). In short, the TEU focuses on that prism of policies that substantiates "the reality and the symbols of national sovereignty, the historical *raison d'être* of the state's existence" (Fabbrini, S., p.36, 2021a). This system is defended by bodies such as the European Council and the Council of the EU ("the Council"), which dominate policymaking in these areas. In addition, these intergovernmental institutions are supported by the strategic guidance of the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and the European External Action Service (EEAS). The European Council and the Council, opposed

to the transfer of these policies to supranational entities, maintain this prerogative and pre-eminence through a decision-making process based on unanimity. This methodology attempts to ensure that decisions on the external dimension of the EU reflect a complete consensus among the members. Indeed, according to article 22 TEU, "the European Council shall act unanimously on a recommendation from the Council, adopted by the latter under the arrangements laid down for each area. Decisions of the European Council shall be implemented in accordance with the procedures provided for in the Treaties". In addition, this article establishes that the Council may receive proposals or initiatives from the High Representative concerning the CFSP and from the Commission concerning other areas of external action. However, unanimity has often hindered the responsiveness of EU foreign policy and the goal of an "ever-closed union", resulting in inaction and collective silence (Pirozzi & Ntousas, 2019). Furthermore, an indispensable feature of this methodology is the possibility for member states, represented in the Council, to exercise their right of veto. This means that each of them has the power to block decisions they do not consider to be in their national interest, even if this hinders the adoption of common policies and the effectiveness of collective action at the Union level. In this way, the veto becomes an important source of power for member states, but at the price of greater community cohesion (Slapin, 2011).

In the domain of the CFSP and CSDP, unanimity is the preferred mode for the adoption of decisions concerning strategic objectives, the implementation of the CFSP, as well as for international treaties with third parties on foreign policy and security issues. It should also be pointed out that under the CFSP/CSDP, decisions are taken without the issuance of legislation, reflecting the intergovernmental and consensual essence of this decision-making regime. However, the presence of the mechanism of constructive abstention should also be taken into account, whereby a member state, while not obstructing the adoption of a CFSP decision, is nevertheless not obliged to implement it. The objective is thus "to prevent Member States unwilling to commit to a CFSP action from necessarily finding themselves obliged to prevent the decision from being adopted, having no alternative but to vote against it" (Bartolini, p.1124, 2023). Furthermore, if more than one-third of the member states in the Council decide to opt for this abstention, the decision will no longer be adopted. Despite the symbolic value of this mechanism, it has rarely been used in practice (Keukeleire & Delreux, 2022).

Although unanimity reigns undisputed in many areas of the CFSP and CSDP, article 31 TEU provides for the possibility of the Council using the qualified majority method (QMV) as an exception in only four cases: "when adopting a decision defining a Union action or position on the basis of a decision of the European Council relating to the Union's strategic interests and objectives, as referred to in article 22(1); when adopting a decision defining a Union action or position, on a proposal which

the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy has presented following a specific request from the European Council, made on its own initiative or that of the High Representative; when adopting any decision implementing a decision defining a Union action or position; when appointing a special representative". In the European landscape, qualified majority voting occurs when 55% of the member states vote in favour of the proposal and that these states demographically represent about 65% of the total European population. In addition, it should be pointed out that the qualified majority method does not apply to decisions with implications on military or defence issues. All of this, then, limits the scope and strategic reach of the QMV, and when "a member state declares that, 'for vital and state reasons of national polity', it intends to oppose the adoption of a decision taken by qualified majority, the Council does not vote" (Keukeleire & Delreux, p.125, 2022). Moreover, in such cases, the Council can always resort to voting by unanimity when the QMV fails.

To cope with such decision-making problems, the European Treaties provide the existence of procedural devices that fluidify cooperation between member states, even when complete agreement between all states is not achievable. These instruments include enhanced cooperation and permanent structured cooperation (PESCO). The former, provided for in article 20 TEU, gives the possibility to a group of at least nine member states to use EU institutional structures for the integration of certain policies. However, this type of cooperation has not yet been applied in the field of foreign and defence policy. The second, on the other hand, focuses on defence and security issues and involves those member states that meet high standards and make more stringent commitments to enhance their military capabilities. Accordingly, under the intergovernmental method, the integration process takes place through consensual and voluntary coordination, where the aim is "facilitating the coordination of the policies of member states, but not their legal integration at supranational level" (Fabbrini, S., p.166, 2020).

The second treaty (TFEU), instead, contains the main provisions for European external action and for the external dimension of internal policies, which are organized according to the Community method. Built on a precise institutional balance, it involves the interaction of supranational bodies, such as the Commission and the European Parliament, with the intergovernmental Council: this method is called ordinary legislative procedure. Therefore, through this method, the member states have decided to transfer part of their competences to the Union, so as to share its powers. Furthermore, in this system, there is the possibility of qualified majority voting where the Council decides, in agreement with the European Parliament, on Commission proposals without the possibility of vetoes, thus facilitating timely decision-making and reflecting a more flexible approach to European governance. This precise decision-making manifests in the conclusion of trade and international

agreements on economic, technical and financial cooperation. However, two factors complicate the institutional process of such decision-making: the presence of different legal bases in the agreements and the fact that many agreements signed by the EU are mixed agreements, in which the competences of the EU and those of the member states intertwine and overlap (Keukeleire & Delreux, 2022). These mixed agreements, therefore, are an emblematic example of the inherent complexity of the EU's legal and institutional architecture. Based on the dictates of this method, European integration takes the form of a dynamic and participatory process that fosters synergetic institutional cooperation between the member states and the Union. Through the lens of the Community method, integration emerges as a mechanism aimed at strengthening cohesion among participating nations, promoting the adoption of shared policies and strategies that reflect collective European interests (Ponzano, 2011).

In light of this, the distinction between these two policymaking regimes translates into a difference in decision-making and this dichotomy underlines the complex power structure within the EU. Historically, this differentiation in governance regimes is due to the Maastricht Treaty of 1992, which introduced a distinction in how policies of national relevance, namely those concerning CSP, where the sovereignty of member states manifests itself most powerfully. Through the construction of the three pillars, this treaty established that the EU could only advance the integration of these policies by granting national governments a central or predominant role in their decision-making. This was primarily facilitated through the action of the Council and the European Council, thereby ensuring that the most sovereignty-sensitive issues remained under the control of the intergovernmental aegis. However, in 2009, the Lisbon Treaty demolished the pillars supporting the once-European temple, thus constitutionalising "the distinction between different decision-making regimes in relation to distinct policies. It strengthened the supranational decision-making regime for single market policies, which became the ordinary legislative procedure (based on the triangulation among Commission-Council-European Parliament (EP)), and it institutionalised an intergovernmental decision-making regime for policies traditionally partaking to areas of national sovereignty, with the European Council as a collegial executive" (Fabbrini, S., p.36, 2021a). Thus, the Lisbon Treaty sought to institutionalise the tension between these two approaches, thus creating a governance model distinguished by its complex power-sharing structure on both a horizontal and vertical level (Fabbrini, S., 2015). Horizontally, authority is distributed between the European Council, the Council, the Commission and the European Parliament, while vertically, decision-making responsibility is shared between the EU and its member states. This hybrid configuration has led to different methodologies and philosophies of integration depending on the area: as seen above, the Community method is prevalent in areas such as trade and development cooperation, while foreign, security and defence policy is managed through intergovernmental mechanisms. The latter sphere, moreover, is often subject to the

vetoes of member states, which may have diverging national interests, thus affecting the ability to act in a unified manner. The Lisbon Treaty, then, failed to remedy the problems of European foreign policy governance, but contributed to their formalisation.

A further aspect of the uniqueness of European foreign policy is the interaction between national and EU levels, which varies depending on the specific issue addressed. The multi-level nature of foreign policy does not allow a clear separation between the two levels, given that national actors play roles in key EU institutions, and EU policies are reflected within national policies. Therefore, "the EU foreign policy can be conceptualised as a complex multi-level foreign policy, reflecting the interconnectedness of multiple governance levels and policy arenas in the policy process. Depending on the policy issue and policy framework, the actors on the various levels have different competences, levels of legitimacy, obligations and resources" (Keukeleire & Delreux, p.17, 2022). It could be argued that this complex policy ecosystem reflects Putnam's two-level game, which, set in the European context, sees member states engaged in a constant balancing act between national and European interests, seeking to optimise their influence both internally and at the EU level (Da Conceição-Heldt & Mello, 2017). Furthermore, it is essential to emphasise that, within the branched system of global governance, the EU also represents an international entity in its own right. Consequently, EU foreign policy is closely linked to a wide range of multi-level foreign policy networks. This structure involves interactions with international organisations and agencies such as the United Nations (UN), the Council of Europe, the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and NATO (Keukeleire & Delreux, 2022). Consequently, the EU pursues the development of its foreign policies in relationships that may be cooperative or, in some cases, competitive with these institutions, all of which are committed to the promotion of democracy and the international liberal order.

In light of the aforementioned, a colourful mosaic emerges that reflects the complex and multidimensional fabric of EU foreign policy, where "each area of foreign policy decision-making in the EU seems to be inspired by different ideological approaches to integration favoured by the different foreign policy actors" (Bauer & Remacle, p.114, 2018). From this framework, an important area of tension emerges, which sees a bifurcation in the management of foreign policy: a supranational matrix regime based on a system of separation of powers, in which institutions cooperate and none of them can hold the final authority in decision-making (this can be seen in external action and the external dimension of domestic policies); and an intergovernmental matrix regime that, possessing complete control over policies sensitive to state sovereignty (the CFSP and CSDP), is organised through a system of confusion of powers. In this domain, decisions are taken by the leaders of national governments (through the European Council) or their ministers (in the

Council), who act in the dual role of executive and legislative bodies, all in the absence of checks and balances at the European level by supranational institutions (Fabbrini, S., 2015).

1.3 The division of competences

Reflection of the polyhedral nature of European foreign policy is the division of competences, which not only enshrines the legal perimeter within which the EU and its member states can operate, but also defines the dimension of power of these actors. Due to its multi-faceted nature, the EU also lacks a holistic and comprehensive legal basis for its foreign policy, as the competences required for CSFP and CSDP are different in nature from those required for external action and the external dimension of internal policies. Therefore, this division of powers and competences, created to ensure better governance, is uneven in nature and reflects the segmented character of EU foreign policy, which cannot be viewed as a single, unified entity. Instead, it results from a mix of authorities, responsibilities, and privileges granted to the Union across various policy areas (Keukeleire & Delreux, 2022). Thus, the partition of competences remains "a central concern and enfames high emotion among the general public, who fear the encroachment of supranational action into areas of national heritage, power, and tradition" (Leal-Arcas, pp.67-69, 2022). All this represents another vivid illustration of the ongoing power struggle between the EU and its member states.

Central to understanding the division of powers within the European architecture is the principle of conferral of powers, which highlights the limits of EU action. Enshrined in article 5 TEU, according to this principle, "the Union shall act only within the limits of the competences conferred upon it by the Member States in the Treaties to attain the objectives set out therein. Competences not conferred upon the Union in the Treaties remain with the Member States". Thus, the Treaties act as a source of legitimacy for the Union's actions by specifically conferring competences in certain fields on the Union: these external competences delineate the express powers of the Union. However, there is also a range of powers not provided for in the Treaties that enable the Union to act: these are called implicit powers and come from the EU's internal legislation. Acknowledged through practice and legal interpretation, the presence of these powers demonstrates the partial flexibility of the Union's legal framework, which can expand beyond the limits defined by the Treaties, all while respecting the principles of subsidiarity and proportionality.

In light of this, although the picture of the distribution of competences is quite nuanced and the division of powers complex, there are nevertheless three general categories of competences, which are contained in the TFEU: exclusive, shared and supporting competences.

Established in article 3 TFEU, the EU possesses exclusive competences in certain areas, including

customs policy, common trade policy and monetary policy for the euro area member states. In these areas, the EU can legislate liberally and adopt legally binding acts. In addition, the EU possesses the exclusive power to conclude international agreements in areas where the Treaties explicitly require it or where such agreements may affect internal laws or alter the competences of the member states. The existence of exclusive competences, therefore, serves to ensure that the Union acts in a unified manner in international contexts and maintains consistency in internal policies that require a coordinated and uniform approach.

Moving on, article 4 TFEU establishes the existence of shared competences between the EU and the member states. The areas in which both the Union and the states can legislate and adopt legislation cover a broad spectrum of policies, ranging in the case of foreign policy from development cooperation to EU security and justice. However, the deployment of competences by member states is constrained by the pre-emption principle, according to which member states may only exercise their competences to the extent that the EU has not yet exercised its competences. Furthermore, this principle reflects a federal nature in the field of regulatory conflicts, since, in the event of friction between two legal systems, the EU system prevails over the national system. The doctrine of pre-emption "serves as constitutional devices for systematising those species of conflict that have crystallised in a particular federal legal order. For the Community legal order, each pre-emption type should, then, correspond to an argumentative topos used by the European Court of Justice to justify the exclusion of national law as being in violation of Community legislation" (Schütze, p.1034, 2006). However, within a sub-category of shared competences, that of "parallel competences", the principle of pre-emption does not apply. As a general rule, the EU has the authority to take action and implement a unified policy, but this does not restrict member states from pursuing their own actions and implementing national policies (Keukeleire & Delreux, 2022). This manifests itself in multiple fields of great importance for foreign policy, such as in the case of humanitarian aid.

Finally, article 6 TFEU contains the provisions on supporting competences and states that "the Union shall have competence to carry out actions to support, coordinate or supplement the actions of the Member States".

By virtue of the aforementioned, the question arises as to the position of the CFSP and CSDP in the institutional framework of the distribution of competences. As enshrined in article 24 TEU and article 2(4) TFEU, the Union possesses competences that are inherently different in nature from the variety of competences previously examined: they have a "sui generis" nature (Keukeleire & Delreux, 2022). These Treaties, which outline the scope of EU authority, define CSFP and CSDP as distinct policies aimed at complementing member states' ongoing efforts and promoting the Union's strategic

objectives (Cremona, 2018). These policies are distinguished from the outset by their unique nature, which does not perfectly align with the areas of EU competence. Unlike the classic competences classified by the Treaties, these policies are distinguished by their ability to enable the EU to "define and implement a common foreign and security policy, including the progressive framing of a common defence policy". Furthermore, for example, the CFSP is not described as a sharing competence, which suggests that it is not intended to replace or override the foreign or defence policies of individual member states (Cremona, 2018). Although the Treaties establish that competences that are not expressly exclusive or supporting (articles 3 and 6 TFEU) are shared, the specific attribution of the CFSP in article 2(4) implies that this residual rule does not apply. On the contrary, the CFSP operates as a mechanism for coordinating and enhancing the collective foreign policy actions of EU member states, thus reinforcing the overall strategic objectives of the Union while respecting the sovereignty and different security commitments of its members. This balance between Community objectives and national sovereignty is a hallmark of the CFSP's competence. Furthermore, it should be emphasised that in the CFSP, the selection of the legal basis takes on a crucial connotation as it establishes the conditions of legitimacy under which the EU can intervene in certain areas. This choice, as a matter of fact, determines significant impacts on the involvement of European institutions and member states, decision-making procedures, the financing of initiatives and the possibility of recourse to the Court of Justice of the European Union (CJEU). This process is not purely technical or administrative, but highly political, reflecting the inter-institutional balance of power between the member states and the European institutions. The preference for one legal basis over another may be driven by strategies to maintain national control, influence the outcome of decisions or limit the involvement of specific institutions, such as the European Parliament (Keukeleire & Delreux, 2022). This complexity underlines how law and politics are closely intertwined, with the choice of legal basis becoming a strategic tool, making the management and interpretation of competences in the CFSP even more labyrinthine. Therefore, the ambiguity surrounding the CFSP's scope of authority serves as an additional indicator of the unfinished process of integration within the realms of security and defence. In this regard, "the fact that the distribution of competences is not particularly clear and that foreign policy matters can often be tackled from different policy perspectives results in inconsistencies and 'turf battles' between the EU's actors" (Keukeleire & Delreux, p.120, 2022).

1.4 The Common Foreign and Security Policy

Once having examined the multidimensional nature of European foreign policy and analysed the complex web of competences, this section is dedicated to understanding the institutional and

intergovernmental grammar of the CFSP, exploring the objectives and dynamics that govern this domain. As for the former, they are contained in article 21 TEU, which sets out the Union's strategic priorities. These include the strengthening of international security, the protection of human rights in accordance with the UN Charter, the defence of the Union's values and interests and the promotion of peace. The CFSP, born from the ashes of the Maastricht Treaty, is thus one of the main vectors for projecting European action on the international stage, thus contributing to the consolidation of a multilateral system based on good global governance.

To operationalise these objectives, article 25 TEU defines the *modus operandi* of the CFSP, according to which the EU conducts, or rather shall conduct, a common foreign and security policy. This is done through three steps that are exemplified by the various subparagraphs, namely the definition of general guidelines, the adoption of decisions and finally the strengthening of systemic cooperation between the member states. In this context, it is important to understand the institutional hierarchy since the "general guidelines are defined by the highest political authority, the European Council. The Council then adopts to further develop and implement policy, utilising operational actions and positions as well as arrangements to implement those actions and positions. And, to complement all this, member states strengthen their foreign policy cooperation" (Keukeleire & Delreux, pp.170-171, 2022). This institutional path thus reflects the intergovernmental essence of the CFSP, which is conducted precisely under the aegis of the member states. However, "general guidelines" are not properly defined in the TEU. On the contrary, similar expressions such as "strategic lines" or "strategic guidelines" are found in other articles of the TEU, which only creates a constructive ambiguity that confuses the overall picture. This terminological confusion highlights the lack of a uniform vocabulary and fuels linguistic vagueness, thus complicating the interpretation of the treaty by the member states.

Once the European Council "defines" the general guidelines, the latter are translated empirically through either the definition of Union positions or through operational actions. The legal nature of these instruments consists of decisions that, adopted by the Council, are binding in nature. The adoption of these decisions presupposes a series of obligations that reduce the member states' freedom of action in conducting their foreign policies, and these decisions are not implemented following a legislative procedure, thus escaping the legal control of the CJEU. Article 28 TEU clarifies the decisions that define operational actions: "where the international situation requires operational action by the Union, the Council shall adopt the necessary decisions. They shall lay down their objectives, scope, the means to be made available to the Union, if necessary their duration, and the conditions for their implementation". Operational actions may consist of diplomatic missions or the adoption of restrictive measures, such as sanctions. The latter, which require unanimity in approval, are a key

element of foreign policy and are used "to prevent conflict or respond to current or emerging crises. Although they are called 'sanctions', EU restrictive measures are not punitive. They are intended to bring about a change in bad or harmful policies or activities by targeting the non-EU countries, including organisations and individuals, responsible" (European Commission, 2024a). Furthermore, decisions on operational actions taken by the Council bind member states to adhere to certain positions and guide the way they conduct their activities. Another responsibility of the European Council is to issue decisions that determine the positions of the Union. Article 29 TEU states that "the Council shall adopt decisions which shall define the approach of the Union to a particular matter of a geographical or thematic nature. Member States shall ensure that their national policies conform to the Union positions". Although article 28 and article 29 TEU contain the legal nature of decisions defining actions and positions, the practice shows that member states often favour the use of other mechanisms. Generally, operational actions derive from the conclusions of the Foreign Affairs Council (FAC) or the conclusions of the European Council: these two conclusions do not have the same binding power as the decisions contained in articles 28 and 29 TEU and are in fact preferred by member states. Therefore, "the limited use of operational action on the basis of articles 28 and 29 TEU and the use of softer instruments reveal member states' attitude towards CFSP. Member states may want to avoid decisions on the basis of that article precisely because it potentially restricts their freedom to act" (Keukeleire & Delreux, p.172, 2022).

Finally, the last step described in article 21 concerns the strengthening of systemic cooperation between member states. In the area of common defence and security, a very high degree of cooperation is necessary to advance the integration process so as to increase the cohesion of the Union's actions. Furthermore, article 32 TEU amplifies the discourse on cooperation by stating that "before undertaking any action on the international scene or entering into any commitment which could affect the Union's interests, each Member State shall consult the others within the European Council or the Council. Member States shall ensure, through the convergence of their actions, that the Union is able to assert its interests and values on the international scene". This cooperation generally takes the form of exchanges of information, consultations and, above all, a continuous dialogue between the national foreign ministers and their representatives in Brussels. The aim of this cooperation is the development of a common vision that enables member states to act in a more coordinated manner, seeking not only to foster a climate of mutual solidarity but also to strengthen the Union's ability to respond to challenges (Keukeleire & Delreux, 2022).

However, despite the presence of these noble intentions, reality follows a somewhat different path from the one mapped out by the Treaties, where divergences between member states hinder a unified response from the Union. National policies, for reasons of realpolitik, often navigate in the opposite

direction to those developed within the EU through the use of vetoes. As a result, shared aspirations clash with the most pressing national interests. In this context, the effectiveness of common policies is thus called into question, requiring a delicate balancing act between state sovereignty and EU objectives. Moreover, this tension implies major challenges for European cohesion and solidarity, again complicating progress towards greater integration in the area of defence and security.

1.5 The Common Security and Defence Policy

In the early years of the European project, the topics of security and defence were always pieces that were difficult to fit into the complex European institutional mosaic. Historical differences between the member states created significant internal tensions in the creation of a European defence. However, it was only in the late 1990s with the crises in the Western Balkans and the Saint-Malo Declaration that awareness of the importance of enhanced cooperation in this area increased. In this regard, the 2008 Lisbon Treaty institutionalised the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP), which is the operational component of the diplomatic CFSP. Among the activities that fall within the scope of the CSDP, article 43 TEU states that the Union, having the opportunity to use civilian and military means, "shall include joint disarmament operations, humanitarian and rescue tasks, military advice and assistance tasks, conflict prevention and peace-keeping tasks, tasks of combat forces in crisis management, including peace-making and post-conflict stabilisation". However, these activities are somewhat "vague and ambiguous. This makes them both challenging to distinguish with any degree of accuracy, and inherently malleable so as to grant Member States considerable flexibility when they consider how to act in a given situation" (Koutrakos, p.59, 2013).

In addition, article 42 TEU defines the objectives and scope of the CSDP, which "shall provide the Union with an operational capacity drawing on civilian and military assets. The Union may use them on missions outside the Union for peace-keeping, conflict prevention and strengthening international security in accordance with the principles of the United Nations Charter. The performance of these tasks shall be undertaken using capabilities provided by the Member States". The article goes on to state that the Union "shall not prejudice the specific character of the security and defence policy of certain Member States and shall respect the obligations of certain Member States, which see their common defence realised in the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO)". It is important to emphasise how the article specifies the extraterritorial dimension of these operations, outside the territory of the EU. The defence of countries within the perimeter of the EU, in fact, is the responsibility not only of NATO but above all of the member states, which retain sovereignty and primary responsibility for the defence of their own territory by managing their own armed forces.

This is highlighted by article 4 TEU, according to which "the Union shall respect the equality of Member States before the Treaties as well as their national identities, inherent in their fundamental structures, political and constitutional, inclusive of regional and local self-government. It shall respect their essential State functions, including ensuring the territorial integrity of the State, maintaining law and order and safeguarding national security. In particular, national security remains the sole responsibility of each Member State". Consequently, the CSDP is not perceived as the main locus for the territorial defence of the Member States, as operations are mainly focused on peacekeeping and conflict prevention outside the EU borders. Moreover, such an approach runs counter to article 42(2) TEU, which postulates "the common security and defence policy shall include the progressive framing of a common Union defence policy. This will lead to a common defence, when the European Council, acting unanimously, so decides". In light of this, the term "defence" carries inherent uncertainties, as the CSDP is institutionally restricted from involving military and defence actions on European territory, limiting such interventions to third countries outside the Union's orbit that are not EU members (Keukeleire & Delreux, 2022).

Another point to highlight is the fact that the Union has to depend on the assets of the member states, as it does not have its own troops or "common instruments" (Keukeleire & Delreux, 2022). The lack of centralised military resources means that CSDP operations are strictly dependent on the financial capabilities and especially the willingness of member states to contribute their armed forces and other military assets. This cooperative and consensual defence model requires a high degree of coordination, not only at the strategic but also at the operational level, in order to ensure that joint missions are effective and this is often very difficult to achieve. In addition to the voluntary nature of asset supply, it is crucial to highlight that the commitment of member states to joint actions and capability development shows considerable variability. Deep economic disparities and differing strategic interests among member states lead to significant relativity in their military capabilities with respect to how they can and choose to contribute to the CSDP.

Based on the aforementioned considerations, one of the concepts that best sheds light on the nature of the CSDP is that of differentiation, which manifests itself in the adoption of four different approaches tailored to each member according to its capabilities and strategic priorities (Keukeleire & Delreux, 2022). The first assumes that the Council "may entrust the implementation of a task to a group of Member States which are willing and have the necessary capability for such a task". The second and third refer to enhanced cooperation and PESCO, both of which have already been dealt with above. The fourth, based on the provisions of the European Defence Agency (EDA), assumes, that specific groups shall be established within the Agency to unite Member States involved in collaborative projects. Furthermore, the EDA within the CSDP has a crucial task in promoting

defence cooperation from both a strategic and logistical point of view, facilitating the integration of member states' defence capabilities and aiming at improving the compatibility and interoperability of European armed forces. This framework shows a path towards integration through differentiation in the field of defence and security, as it allows member states to advance to different levels of commitment and cooperation according to their possibilities and interests.

The CSDP operations have both a military and a civilian dimension, both of which are coordinated under the authority of the High Representative and the Council. The former deal with crisis management, peacekeeping and conflict prevention: in these missions, speed and effectiveness of intervention are essential to mitigate the impacts of conflicts. Moreover, these operations require a high level of cooperation between member states, which must not only share resources and capabilities, but also align their national policies towards common objectives. Another factor that further complicates the process is the need for unanimous consent for many key decisions, which can delay the implementation of necessary actions. The CSDP's civil missions, on the other hand, involve the use of non-military actors involved to strengthen the security sector, the rule of law and civil protection and administration (Keukeleire & Delreux, 2022). Even in this case, the effectiveness of missions largely depends on the ability of member states to cooperate and the availability of resources: indeed, "governments can be rather reluctant to contribute certain resources, particularly where these are in relatively short supply at the national level (Keukeleire & Delreux, p.197, 2022).

The administrative architecture that deals with the management of the CSDP and its operations is quite articulated. In this area, the Council alone, with its intergovernmental nature, is known to be the driving force in the formulation of such policies, but it is not the only one. A central role, not only in the CSDP but also in foreign policy in general, is played by its specific configurations. Among the most important of these is the Foreign Affairs Council (FAC), which is chaired by the foreign ministries of the member states and the High Representative. This body has great strategic importance in European policymaking, as it has a direct role in crisis management, coordinating both immediate responses and long-term strategies. This includes the mobilisation of resources for humanitarian aid, the imposition of sanctions, and the management of peace operations, demonstrating a great capacity for coordination. Under the aegis of the FAC, an important function is played by the Political and Security Committee (PSC), consisting of an ambassador from each member state, a permanent representative of the European Commission, representatives of the European Union Military Committee (EUMC) and the EU Council Secretariat. This body recommends to the Council the best strategies to pursue and monitors international situations, providing political oversight and strategic guidance for crisis management operations. The PSC, therefore, "acts as the 'ear and eye' of the Union's foreign policy institutions" (Koutrakos, p.64, 2013). Furthermore, the work of the PSC is

supported by two other bodies: the European Union Military Committee (EUMC) and the Committee for Civilian Aspects of Crisis Management (CIVCOM). The former has the task of advising and advising the PSC on military issues and is strategically supported by the Military Staff of the European Union (EUMS), while the latter, acting as the civilian counterpart, collaborates with the Crisis Management and Planning Directorate (CMPD) to similarly provide advice and recommendations to the PSC on the civilian elements of CSDP missions. In light of this, "decision-making by the Union institutions in the area of CSDP draws upon the constant interactions among these bodies" (Koutrakos, p.65, 2013).

1.6 Strategic autonomy

In the previous sections, the main components defining European governance within its external dimension have been examined in depth, with more focus on the CSFP and CSDP. Intrinsically linked to the field of European foreign, defence and security policy is the concept of strategic autonomy. In the European literature, it is complicated to find a comprehensive and universal definition of the concept. Many decline it in terms of greater technological/industrial autonomy and capacity building in defence terms while others emphasise the need to be more autonomous from external actors (such as NATO) in the military and security sphere. Nevertheless, the common denominator of these visions is the desire to enhance the EU's capacity to act in order to increase its international role in a multipolar world where the logic of force and geopolitical competition have returned. In a certain sense, strategic autonomy represents an evolution from specific political mechanisms to a broader aspiration to strengthen the Union's global position. "Strategic autonomy obviously demands military capabilities, as well as apt decision-making structures. But most importantly, autonomy is a mindset. An actor that does not think autonomously will never act autonomously, regardless of its capabilities (Biscop, p.5, 2022a).

Strategic autonomy thus refers to the ability to make decisions and implement them autonomously not only from an external point of view but also from an internal EU point of view in order to defend one's own strategic interests and values. In this sense, "European strategic autonomy is about having the necessary means to achieve pre-defined foreign policy objectives, while cooperating with partners or acting alone if necessary. It is about turning a foreign policy strategy into concrete and effective action and relying on the EU's own capabilities. It means collaborating with others on European objectives, while keeping the door open to autonomous action" (Morillas, p.4, 2021). Thus, strategic autonomy constitutes a true objective of European foreign policy.

Terminological confusion often arises from the assumption that autonomy directly implies

independence, but this is not the case. In fact, "autonomy is - like the related term power - relational, in the sense that it is realised in relation to others. It may represent an objective but is not an end in itself; rather it is a means to protect and promote values and interests. Politically, this is about an increase in autonomy, a process of gradual autonomisation, rather than an absolute condition. Autonomy means neither autarchy nor isolation, nor rejection of alliances. An autonomous actor decides on its own, on the basis of its own priorities, with which other actors it wishes to seek partnerships and alliances. In an interdependent world autarchy is neither possible nor desirable. Partners are essential for protecting and promoting values and interests" (Lippert et al., p.5, 2019). Therefore, the goal of strategic autonomy does not translate into an abandonment of the transatlantic relationship, "given that European strategic autonomy does not imply that the EU prefers to act alone, there is nothing that suggests that pursuing such an agenda would be to the detriment of NATO or the transatlantic bond. Quite the contrary. That Europeans should do more on defence, beginning with defence spending" (Tocci, p.19, 2021).

The first theoretical premises for the concept of strategic autonomy can be found in the St-Malo Declaration of 1998, an agreement between the French and British authorities in which an attempt was made to revitalise European security by establishing the basis for the creation of an autonomous EU defence capability, independent of NATO but compatible with it (Keukeleire & Delreux, 2022). However, the term's first official appearance can be traced back to the December 2013 European Council conclusions, in which, the importance of strengthening the EU's Defence Technological and Industrial Base (EDTIB) was reiterated (Anghel et al., 2020). In the course of time, the term then became more attractive with implications that went beyond the field of defence and security, thus acquiring a transversal and multidimensional nature.

In a highly polarised geopolitical period, the need for the EU to be a political union capable of acting effectively on the international stage and to be autonomous in doing so has become increasingly urgent. In this regard, the High Representative Josep Borrell stated that Europe's weight in the world was gradually diminishing and emphasised the importance of acting united in the face of new challenges (Borell, 2020a). For Borrell, strategic autonomy was thus conceived as a process of political survival, in which a balanced combination of soft power and hard power elements would be essential to temper the resilience of the Union (Borrell, 2020a). This suggests the need for a recalibration of resources and strategies and a greater integration of defensive and diplomatic capabilities, so as to be able to cope with external and internal pressures and maintain an autonomous strategic position.

Strategic autonomy thus represents a call to act together, bringing all 27 member states together

under a single European flag, emphasising that only united the EU can overcome global challenges. In this perspective, the path towards a more autonomous Europe proceeds in parallel with the very essence of the European project, which began with the sharing of resources to prevent conflicts and is still evolving. Therefore, the realisation of strategic autonomy would represent a further development of this European integration process. Moreover, "by building an "effective strategic autonomy", the EU could reduce existing dependencies, better promote its interests and values worldwide and multiply its economic benefits while reducing risks" (Anghel et al., p.7, 2020)

However, in order to develop such strategic autonomy, it is important that the EU first manages to be internally coherent in order to be able to make decisions regarding its strategic posture in the world. Indeed, if by strategic autonomy is meant the ability to act autonomously, the EU, as will become clearer in the course of the thesis, has had difficulties precisely in acting and making decisions due to a whole series of constitutional and political problems. "Intertwined internal and external vulnerabilities hamper the EU's capacity to act autonomously. The EU's difficulty to get its 'internal act together' represents a vulnerability due to the length of the decision-making process and, in certain cases, inability to reach consensus as a result of persisting diverging national interests, thus placing the EU in a situation where its main global 'strategic rivals' - Russia, China or even sometimes the USA - could seek to capitalise on divergences of Member States' views in order to pursue their own interests" (Anghel et al., p.4, 2020).

Theoretically, achieving strategic autonomy would require a common political will, a common strategic culture, and strong internal unity and cohesion. In short, greater European integration would be a necessary element in achieving greater strategic autonomy (Burni et al., 2023). Practically, the success of strategic autonomy would depend on greater defence integration, large investments in own capabilities, reduced fragmentation in the defence sector and less military and security dependence on foreign actors such as NATO (Tocci, 2021). Therefore, achieving strategic autonomy would need "further integration in the domain of security and defence, the convergence of interests among EU institutions and member states, more flexible and efficient institutional frameworks, and a clear definition of the EU's interests and goals in its external action, including vis-à-vis its strategic partners" (Burni et al., p.8, 2023).

In light of this, in order to aspire to an accomplished strategic autonomy, the EU should first secure institutional, material and political autonomies (Helwig, 2020). These dimensions are essential to compose the mosaic of European strategic autonomy, serving as essential pillars that support and define the EU's ability to act on the international chessboard. The construction of such a mosaic would require a coherent and synergetic integration of these dimensions, each of which supports and

enhances the others within an overall vision of autonomy at the European level.

Institutional autonomy refers to the EU's ability to possess specialised structures and mechanisms for policy development and execution. "The EU's ability to further its own agenda as an international actor is traditionally linked to the features of its institutional structure and whether it facilitates member states' collective action. The discussion is often steered by three elements: decision-shaping and decision-making structures, policy-planning capacities, and transfer of competences to the EU level" (Helwig, p.8, 2020). With a more responsive and flexible decision-making system that facilitates joint decisions, with policy-planning capabilities that support the coordinated preparation and implementation of joint decisions, and with a transfer of powers and competences to the EU level in defence and security matters, the EU would establish itself as a more coherent actor on the international arena. Therefore, the consolidation of greater institutional autonomy would provide a more solid constitutional grammar for the achievement of greater strategic autonomy. However, policies that define the EU's international and strategic posture are subject to intergovernmental mechanisms, where the search for unanimous consensus can delay the EU's ability to act. "Political decisions and policy action under a consensus-driven framework are susceptible to the veto power of member states, if not to the temptation of some to act unilaterally or seek bilateral strategic ties with non-EU countries. In addition, these mechanisms are detrimental to a rapid response of the EU to world crises and events...Key to understanding the shortcomings of EU foreign policy and strategic autonomy is the fact that the EU prefers inclusivity and legitimacy over leadership and resolute action" (Morillas, p.7, 2021). Hence, the EU's ability to act autonomously in foreign and security policy matters is often limited by the internal constitutional configuration, where a single member state can undermine the EU's international coherence.

Another dimension to consider in order to better understand strategic autonomy is that of material autonomy. Indeed, "the extent to which the EU can act autonomously is also linked to material factors. At a minimum, member states can ensure their material autonomy through an enhanced sharing of goods and capabilities between them. Outside dependencies can be reduced through measures of supply diversifcation as well as stockpiling, or - when considering the defence dimension - enhanced capability investments. In the longer-term perspective, the strength of domestic industries is a decisive factor" (Helwig, p.10, 2020). Pooling resources would allow member states to optimally utilise critical assets and capabilities that are essential in policy implementation: such collaboration would promote a unified approach and strengthen common resilience. Moreover, through joint procurement, the EU would ensure the availability of essential capabilities and critical supplies, thus guaranteeing business continuity even in adverse conditions: the implementation of these measures would be crucial in sustaining the EU's autonomy from external influences, especially in times of geopolitical

tensions. Therefore, material autonomy, which includes the technological, industrial and military capabilities essential for the implementation of decisions, would be another crucial building block in the construction of a European strategic autonomy (Helwig, 2020). However, the pursuit of greater material autonomy is often compromised both internally and externally. "Internally, the fragmentation into national economies is preventing the EU from reaching its full industrial potential…This is particularly the case in the defence industry where "European governments still define defence-industrial autonomy in largely national rather than European terms". Externally, the dependence on the US as a supplier of defence products is notable. This is due not only to technological or economic aspects, but is also linked to political considerations. European governments support their bilateral ties with the US by buying American defence products" (Helwig, p.10, 2020).

Lastly, another important dimension to achieve strategic autonomy is political autonomy, which is articulated through an integrated and cohesive process that includes joint assessment, policy convergence and the sharing of a common strategic culture (Helwig, 2020). Indeed, "the lack of political cohesion is often seen as one of the biggest obstacles to greater strategic autonomy for the EU. At a minimum, it seems clear that member states need to seek a joint assessment of the challenges and engage in a common policy response in order to act with a degree of independence. Beyond this, the development of a shared strategic culture, which allows member states to base their joint action on a set of shared beliefs and behavioural patterns, is widely considered an important prerequisite for strategic autonomy" (Helwig, p.11, 2020). Nevertheless, as will become more clear in the course of the thesis, the ability to set common goals and converge member states' visions into a single community vision is quite difficult as it requires strong political will and trust among member states. This often leads to what can be described as a "strategic cacophony", where differing national priorities result in a fragmented approach that undermines collective action and effectiveness at the community level (Molnár & Varga, 2023).

That being said, these dimensions would constitute important progresses for the realisation of an effective and autonomous foreign, defence and security policy.

In this direction, an important development for the improvement of the European defence industry and thus integration in this sector was the creation in 2021 of the European Defence Fund (EDF), a mechanism established to facilitate the collaborative development of capabilities. "The EDF brought Community method elements together with a 'research window' funded from the EU budget, and intergovernmental elements with a 'capabilities window', allowing Member States to purchase certain assets in common, such as, for example, drones. A genuinely autonomous EU in defence

would require deeper integration, particularly on joint development, procurement and use of capabilities. The EU needs to have a comprehensive approach to capabilities and to consider, when developing them, the purpose they would be required to serve" (Anghel et al., pp.39-40, 2020). Furthermore, other mechanisms such as the Coordinated Annual Review on Defence (CARD), a tool designed to detect shortcomings in the capabilities of the member states, and PESCO, represent important steps towards a more comprehensive approach to defence. In addition, the creation of the Commission's Directorate-General for Defence Industry and Space (DG DEFIS) in 2020 was another case of applying the Community logic in defence. All these advances are relevant to achieve EU strategic autonomy, as they underline the importance of strengthening the European industrial and collaborative fabric in the defence sector. In addition, as will be seen in the second chapter, the war in Ukraine has led to a securitarian awakening of the EU, prompting an acceleration of efforts to strengthen its strategic autonomy with the intention of building a Defence Union. Despite this, the EU's foreign policy towards Russia, if in the short term it was successful in reacting, in the long term struggled to act as a number of factors prevented the EU from assuming political coherence. Therefore, both theoretically and practically, the current European institutional architecture presents difficulties due to different interests among member states, industrial fragmentations and intergovernmental logics that limit the achievement of strategic autonomy.

In light of this, "the question of greater European strategic autonomy is inextricably bound up with future constitutional developments in EU integration between deepening, differentiation and reversal. The current complexity of internal circumstances makes it difficult for the EU to render any effective contribution on strategic autonomisation: the CFSP and CSDP are inter-governmental and consensus-based, and therefore tend to be slow, indecisive and susceptible to blockades and vetoes of single member states. At the same time growing centrifugal forces are reflected in national unilateralisms and idiosyncrasies (Lippert et al., p.9, 2019). In addition to several industrial and political issues related to strategic autonomy, there are also institutional elements that influence the EU's ability to act effectively. Faced with these complexities, the path towards European strategic autonomy needs a concerted effort to overcome the institutional constraints that hinder the EU's effectiveness. Therefore, structural reforms could make European governance more flexible and responsive, facilitating faster and more coherent decisions at EU level. Such changes would constitute important developments to counter the unilateral policies of member states, allowing the EU to emerge as a more autonomous and influential player on the global scene.

1.7 Problems of the foreign, security and defence policy

The institutional architecture of European foreign policy, with its multi-faceted nature, with its complicated balance of power between the various institutions and with its preponderant intergovernmental management of CSP issues, present inherent structural problems.

Among these, there is a problem of consistency, which manifests itself in maintaining a coherent and unified foreign policy in the face of diverging national interests. By consistency, it is meant the absence of contradictions between the various policies, implying a strategic harmony between the various European and national centres of power (Reynaert, 2012). In practice, this consistency is difficult to achieve and often results in delays and inefficiencies in the EU's response to international crises, where prompt and decisive joint action would be crucial. Indeed, "a lack of consistency in EU external policies is detrimental to the EU's capacity to present a coherent message in international politics and mostly undermines its credibility as an international actor as well as its ability to achieve specific foreign policy goals" (Keukeleire & Delreux, p.139, 2022). This inconsistency is also plural and multidimensional in nature, as four types of inconsistency can be identified: horizontal, vertical, institutional and inter-state (Keukeleire & Delreux, 2022). The first refers to the lack of coherence between the various policies formulated in the EU policy system and occurs between the strategies formulated in the CSDP, CFSP, the external dimension of internal policies and the policies concerning external action: this inconsistency between policy frameworks thus leads to a lack of coordination between the various policies. The second refers precisely to this disorganisation between policies from a two-level perspective: between policies established at the European level and those pursued at the national level of member states. To optimise EU foreign policy capabilities, it is essential that member states not only adhere to common foreign policy positions, but also materialise them through concrete actions. Consequently, the success of such policies depends essentially on dynamic engagement and consistent implementation by each member state. Another type of inconsistency is the institutional inconsistency that refers to the various institutional *locus* in which various foreign policies are formulated, such as the Council, the Commission and other bodies. This inconsistency highlights a marked fragmentation within the policy arena in which different methodologies and philosophies clash. Finally, a last type of inconsistency is that of an inter-state nature, which denotes discrepancies between the national foreign policies of member states, despite the presence of a general and vague policy direction at EU level. This disharmony, characterised by these national inconsistencies, not only undermines the effectiveness of foreign policies, but gradually erodes the perception of the EU as a cohesive and unitary actor.

The issue of consistency is one of the main *leitmotifs* that has guided the path towards greater European integration. In this regard, article 21(3) TEU states that "the Union shall ensure consistency

between the different areas of its external action and between these and its other policies. The Council and the Commission, assisted by the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, shall ensure that consistency and shall cooperate to that effect". Despite the provisions formulated in the Treaties, the European political machine lacks "systematic mechanisms to translate these provisions into practice, with inter-institutional turf battles still at play" (Keukeleire & Delreux, p.140, 2022). This is related to the absence of a clear spirit of cooperation between the various European institutions, where the intergovernmental silo mentality of the Council prevents the development of an integrated vision necessary to effectively address transnational challenges. Thus, one of the weaknesses of European foreign policy is the "lack of a forceful and reliable unifying mechanism with the capacity to quickly and effectively synthesise member states' individual positions into a common EU stand. Instead, in situations requiring a timely common response...national instincts tend to prevail over unified actions" (Techau, p.77, 2010). Moreover, foreign policy often lacks a clear direction and a serious strategy, as national interests prevail over European unity, thus weaking the path towards the achievement of strategic autonomy. Although there have been attempts over time to create a common strategic culture (as will be discussed in the second chapter), these strategies have hardly succeeded in concretely guiding the Union's political ambitions and translating them coherently on the international stage. This is due to the inability of political leaders to "portray a common understanding of what the EU's foreign role should be and what goals should be achieved by it. Even though there is certainly no lack of declaratory output, this output falls short of producing clear political guidance going beyond the general and mostly vague default language" (Techau, p.78, 2010).

The language constitutes another structural problem that undermines the uniformity of European foreign policy messages. Indeed, as seen previously in many articles, recurring is the use of the verb "shall" which from a legal perspective imposes compliance and cooperation with the CFSP/CSDP. From a political perspective, on the other hand, the use of the verb "shall" presupposes a strictly conditional binding power (Keukeleire & Delreux, 2022). Indeed, the loyalty and proactive support of the member states envisaged by the Treaties derive solely and exclusively from the development of targeted policies, the definition of EU interests, and unified EU action on precise issues. The problem arises when these conditions are not met and the Treaties leave the member states to act almost arbitrarily, pursuing their national interests at the price of greater European cohesion. The actors in charge of monitoring and ensuring, not only the fulfilment of these commitments but also the smooth and proper functioning of the CFSP/CSDP, are precisely the Council and the High Representative. No fully supranational actors, such as the Commission or the CJEU, are involved in this process. However, the High Representative has no legal and political authority over the member

states, so he can hardly impose his will on them, and the Council has not yet implemented any enforcement instruments. Thus, the difficulty in formulating policies for CFSP/CSDP "is not always member states deliberately embarking on policies that run counter to those developed within the EU. Major problems include the often too-general nature of EU policies, which leave scope for member states' own interpretations and initiatives, and member states' indifference and lack of active support for specific policy initiatives" (Keukeleire & Delreux, p.170, 2022).

Another problem related to the lack of a unified and uniform European vocabulary concerns precisely the naming of the CFSP and CSDP. Both policies have the adjective "common" in their titles and this could imply the presence of a common budget, common instruments and common actors: in short, the presence of a communitarian dimension within foreign and defence policy. Indeed, the very word "common" often indicates in the European lexicon that the EU has exclusive competences, as in the case of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) or the Common Commercial Policy, so that there is an actual transfer of powers from the national to the European level (Keukeleire & Delreux, 2022). This, however, is not realised because the member states with the intergovernmental institutions representing them, namely the European Council and the Council, hold the reins of competence in these areas.

Moreover, not only is the term "common" misleading and deceptive, but also some of the provisions of the CFSP and CSDP are misleading. For example, article 24(1) TEU concerning the CFSP states that "the Union's competence in matters of common foreign and security policy shall cover all areas of foreign policy and all questions relating to the Union's security, including the progressive framing of a common defence policy that might lead to a common defence". However, the CFSP does not cover every foreign policy area and neither does it answer all questions related to European security. For the latter, NATO is the main answer for member states and, in addition, the defence of European territory is not part of the CFSP's activities (Keukeleire & Delreux, 2022). Moreover, the goal of a "common defence", a pivotal element of a complete strategic autonomy, remains rather complicated to realise with the current institutional configuration, which is gripped by the static and monolithic logic of intergovernmentalism. Article 24(2) continues by stating that "the Union shall conduct, define and implement a common foreign and security policy, based on the development of mutual political solidarity among Member States, the identification of questions of general interest and the achievement of an ever-increasing degree of convergence of Member States' actions". It follows from this that "political solidarity is not self-evident but must be developed…convergence cannot be assumed and that the aim is to increase the degree of convergence, not to reach full convergence. This also implies that member states still can undertake their own foreign policy actions" (Keukeleire & Delreux, p. 169, 2022).

Regarding the CSDP, as seen above, the EU does not have "common capabilities", such as its own army or its own budget to finance its missions. Moreover, article 41(2) TEU states that "expenditure arising from operations having military or defence implications" cannot be financed through the EU budget. Therefore, costs and responsibilities are borne mostly by the member states. The latter can choose not to participate in the formulation of CSDP policies, as in the case of Denmark, which only recently, following the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022, rejoined the programme after thirty years. In addition, there is great volatility in the participation of member states in CSDP missions, as each member state possesses profoundly different economic resources, military structures and geopolitical interests. For these reasons, the pursuit of a common path in the field of security is quite complicated if there is no collaborative and constructive effort by all member states, which, however, prefer to take the path of differentiation.

Therefore, the lack of a collective framework in the realm of security and defence not only represents an excessive leap in the integration process but also serves as a contributing factor to policy misalignment among member states.

To the lack of coordination and the persistence of fragmented national interests that undermine EU responses, it should be added that CFSP and CSDP policies are constrained by the achievement of unanimity and the presence of vetoes. Such intergovernmental logic hampers the effectiveness of European action in addressing international challenges and undermines the Union's ability to deal with critical situations, as decision inertia often prevails over the need for timely responses. Vetoes and unanimity thus represent two institutional burdens that weigh down the EU's development towards greater geopolitical responsiveness and strategic autonomy. Indeed, the extremization of these intergovernmental instruments can lead to political paralysis that hamper the EU's capacity to act (Morillas, 2021).

The realisation of a cohesive union is indeed threatened both by the decision-making paralysis of vetoes and by the difficulty of reaching unanimous consensus among all member states. Hence, the intergovernmental logic has contributed to a process of differentiated integration (DI) in policies sensitive to state sovereignty, which "has been made possible by governance differentiation, specifically by the institutionalisation of an intergovernmental governance regime based on voluntary coordination" (Fabbrini, S., p.41, 2021a). Member states have exploited these differentiations to pursue their own national interests, weakening the image of a united Europe and the achievement of strategic autonomy. Therefore, "a central limitation of EU foreign policy, and hence of strategic autonomy, relates to its intergovernmental, consensus-based process of decision-making" (Morillas, p.8, 2021). In the current institutional situation, strategic autonomy is thus constrained by a consensus

policy that requires unanimity among member states for every important decision related to external defence and security. This purely intergovernmental approach can slow down the decision-making process and limit the EU's ability to act quickly and decisively in response to emerging crises. Moreover, the imperative search for consensus among member states often results in compromises that can weaken the impact of proposed measures, thus undermining the effectiveness of European foreign policy. This process is further aggravated by the possibility of vetoes by individual states, which risks hampering crucial collective initiatives, making the Union less coherent and responsive in the face of urgent geopolitical challenges. In this regard, "the EU constitutional framework may prove an enabler of or an obstacle to the Union's quest for 'strategic autonomy'. The current mix of intergovernmental and community method elements makes it difficult for the EU to achieve 'strategic autonomy', particularly in those policy areas where the intergovernmental dimension prevails and Member States consensus is required, as is the case with the foreign and security policy. The more Member States fall back on intergovernmentalism, the more they put on hold, on grounds of national sovereignty, the quest for EU 'strategic autonomy'. Conversely, the deepening of the EU integration process, by pooling, and not by transferring, sovereignty could boost EU 'strategic autonomy' " (Anghel et al., p.5, 2020). Therefore, "the EU at times does not have the capabilities, the decision-making mechanisms and the strategic culture to intervene in the way other regional and global players do. This has its downsides, but it also its pluses, given the damage done by several military interventions in the past… Far more problematic instead is when the EU does have the capabilities to act, but member states concur in shying away from the risks this would entail" (Tocci, p.6, 2021).

Another reason that complicates the achievement of strategic autonomy is that member states have different geopolitical perceptions and different strategic cultures that influence their choice of alliances (Tocci, 2021). In this regard, the geopolitical understanding of strategic autonomy is based on the rapid evolutions of the geo-strategic landscape, where the return of international disorder has led to the crisis of the international liberal order (Morillas, 2021). "According to a geopolitical understanding, strategic autonomy therefore emerges as a necessity but also as a conceptual hurdle for many member states" (Morillas, p.5, 2021). The latter have different geopolitical visions and undertake individual foreign policies often in the opposite direction to European ones: hence, it follows that each member state declines strategic autonomy differently for historical, geographical and geopolitical reasons. The Atlanticist-European divide constitutes an important example of differentiation that illustrates these diversities. This bipartition highlights the contrast between member states that favour a strong transatlantic partnership with the United States (therefore, NATO) and those that push for greater European integration and independence. This divide not only reflects the conflicting strategic priorities among member states, but also underlines the challenges in the

search for a shared foreign and defence policy that is effective and cohesive within the European Union. The presence of these divisions shows how crucial it is to address and harmonise these differences in order to move towards a more consolidated strategic autonomy. Nevertheless, it is important to reiterate that no member state is totally Atlanticist or pro-European, as all European member states fall somewhere in between the two visions.

From an industrial perspective, the achievement of strategic autonomy is hindered by consolidated industrial fragmentation, rooted in an approach that privileges national over European policies in research and development and defence procurement. One of the reasons for this problem of the defence industry is that it is inherently perceived by member states as a field subject to their sovereignty and this perception continues to influence the stability of the EDITB. In this regard, Article 346 TFEU states that "any Member State may take such measures as it considers necessary for the protection of the essential interests of its security which are connected with the production of or trade in arms, munitions and war material; such measures shall not adversely affect the conditions of competition in the internal market regarding products which are not intended for specifically military purposes". The recognition of this autonomy in national policies, as expressed in the article, highlights the tension between the need for a common European defence and the sovereignty of member states. This duality represents a significant obstacle in building a more integrated and autonomously operational European defence industry. Therefore, the main challenge remains the reconciliation between national security measures and the objectives of a shared defence policy, which requires not only legislative alignment and internal coherence but also a strong political will and trust to overcome differences and promote effective collaboration at the European level.

In light of this, the intergovernmental approach has fuelled not only a political and industrial division but also an identitarian and constitutional fragmentation that has gradually eroded the sense of belonging to a shared European community and provoked growing disillusionment with the European project.

Historically, this disillusionment can be traced back to a series of institutional projects, both in the defence and constitutional fields, which unfortunately were never realised. These projects would have radically changed the European foreign policy and laid a more solid foundation for the achievement of strategic autonomy. The hindrance of these developments in European integration can be attributed to the volatile political will of some member states, which hampered the implementation of these initiatives. The war in Korea in 1950, the fear of a Soviet attack by the USSR, the gradual construction of NATO, and the problem of the rearmament of West Germany constituted a whole series of issues that gave the necessary historical and political impetus to the integration process in Europe (Vellano

& Miglio, 2023). Among the leaders of democratic Europe, the need for order, peace and greater institutionalisation within a supranational framework emerged. This awareness was at the origin of the Schuman Declaration of 9 May 1950, which is considered to be the birth certificate of an integrated Europe. From this document emerged two different but intrinsically linked supranational projects: the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) project and the European Defence Community (EDC) project (Fabbrini, S., 2022a). The stated aim of this declaration was the construction of a federation, where member states would transfer spheres of sovereign powers, the CSP, from themselves to the Community (Vellano & Miglio, 2023). In the wake of the success of the ECSC, stipulated in the Treaty of Paris of 18 April 1951, the six original member states that joined the ECSC (Germany, France, Italy, Belgium, Luxembourg and the Netherlands) decided that the time was right to also move forward in the area of defence. Therefore the Treaty establishing the ECSC, an ambitious project to build a European army, was signed in Paris on 27 May 1952. According to many scholars, such as Alcide De Gasperi and Altiero Spinelli, the construction of the CED was to be accompanied by the idea of a European homeland, inclusive of national homelands but at the same time greater than their sum. The search for a common, constantly vigilant political will that embodied the noblest ideals of the associated nations and illuminated them within a common flame was of paramount importance (De Gasperi, 1951). The realisation of a European Defence Community would have completely transformed the system of sovereignty from a supranational and federal perspective. The CED, therefore, represented a unique opportunity that had to be grasped and inserted into the logic of history (Fabbrini, S., 2022a). Consisting of 132 articles, the CED was supranational in nature as it presupposed common institutions, common armed forces and even a common budget. Moreover, Article 38 of the CED anchored military integration to the necessary political union (Vellano & Miglio, 2023). However, resistances to the CED's founding treaty came swiftly. Despite the American pressure to achieve an autonomous European defence capability as soon as possible, the logic of the internal politics of the individual member states led in the opposite direction. On 30 August 1954, the French National Assembly decided not to ratify the CED, under pressure from the opposition of both the communist left and the Gaullist right (Fabbrini, S., 2022a). The fall of the CED, due to the lack of political will of a member state, also brought with it that of the political community and the abandonment of a European defence community also brought that of a common foreign policy (Vellano & Miglio, 2023).

Another attempt in the political and institutional dimension was made when the European Parliament in 1984 adopted with a large majority a "Draft Treaty establishing the European Union", better known as the "Spinelli Plan" (Vellano & Miglio, 2023). It was essentially a "constitutional" project with a strong federal core and supranational aspiration, which distributed foreign and security

policy competences not only to the member states, but also to the Union itself. However, this avant-garde proposal did not have sufficient political force to overcome the opposition of the governments most jealously safeguarding the prerogatives of national sovereignty. Indeed, the favourable orientation of the six original founding countries and Ireland clashed with opposition from England, Denmark and Greece (Vellano & Miglio, 2023). Although there was an innovative supranational thrust, the logic of individual states and the lack of political will among member states prevented the realisation of the Spinelli Plan, causing political integration to take a step backwards. It was back to the path of intergovernmental conferences that laid the foundations for the adoption of the Single European Act in 1986 and later the Maastricht Treaty in 1992. The latter anchored foreign policy, or rather the CFSP, to intergovernmental logic: the CFSP was thus presented as a form of consensual cooperation between states characterised by a weak unitary vision and a reduced degree of integration, embedded in a heterogeneous context with too many cores of power (Novi, 2019).

A further "constituent" attempt was the "Draft Treaty Adopting a Constitution for Europe" in 2004, which in a way mirrored the Spinelli Plan's ambition for greater political integration. Once again, this initiative clashed with the reluctance of governments, particularly the French and Dutch, to cede portions of sovereignty. These states obstructed the constitutional treaty that made provisions for a more structured and manageable common security and defence policy (Vellano & Miglio, 2023). The project could have been the answer to Henry Kissinger's question of who would govern Europe, but fear and jealousy drove the actions of the states that blocked this EU development that would have given an impetus to not only the political but also the identity integration of the EU. Subsequently, the integration process continued with the 2007 Lisbon Treaty which, as seen above, institutionalised the dichotomous nature of the EU and left the management of the CFSP and CSDP to the logic of the Council and the European Council.

In the light of this, the lack of political will prevented the realisation of projects that would have profoundly changed the grammar of European foreign policy, leaving unresolved tensions and missing synergies that could have consolidated the Union as a decisive global and autonomous player. This current structure facilitates the emergence of internal fragmentations due to diverging interests among member states on critical issues, making Europe less influential in international crisis areas. Moreover, this problem of political will is also evident in Orbán's vetoes of EU measures in response to the war in Ukraine, demonstrating how national positions can still dominate and complicate a unified European response.

The presence of these structural problems of foreign policy within the European institutional architecture has contributed to increasing and widening the capability-expectations gap, which is a

deep dichotomy between what the Union is expected to do and what it can actually do: in short, a gap between the will and the power to do something. The Union's capabilities refer to "its ability to agree, its resources, and the instruments at its disposal" (Hill, p.315, 1993). Thus, the origin of this gap stems from the difficulty of reaching consensus among member states, the scarcity of EU resources, and the inadequacy of the instruments the Union possesses for the effective implementation of its foreign policies. This concept thus refers to the "discrepancy between the expectations that the outside world and actors inside the EU may have of the EU's ability to carry out particular policies or take on particular functions and the EU's capability of fulfilling those expectations" (Larsen, p.995, 2020). The widening of this discrepancy could lead to negative consequences for European foreign policy, causing disappointment and resentment when expectations are not fulfilled. Although the Union has undergone various institutional evolutions over the years, this gap continues to exist for two reasons: "firstly because a coherent system and full actorness are still far from realisation; and secondly because this inconvenient fact has often been ignored, (in Brussels as much as in the 'demandeur' states), in the heady swirl of international transition. Not just in terms of substantive resources - money, arms, room for immigrants - but in terms of the ability to take decisions and hold on to them" (Hill, p.318, 1993). The Lisbon Treaty tried to bridge this gap in foreign policy, for instance by strengthening the position of the High Representative and with the creation of the EEAS, but at the same time increased expectations that these instruments could resolve the differences between the member states. Despite the introduction of these elements, the empirical reality has shown the opposite: the EEAS, despite having its own resources, finds itself operating within a context where national policies often prevail over EU interests; the High Representative, on the other hand, does not have the same level of structural authority as the member states as it lacks tangible and concrete resources, such as financial means and military forces, and the democratic legitimacy necessary to mobilise these resources (Helwing, 2013). There are basically two reasons why the Lisbon Treaty has failed to meet foreign policy expectations, one institutional and the other political. The first relates to the current institutional set-up of the EU, which has often been slow in dealing with international crises, as a decision-making process based on unanimous consensus and dimmed by vetoes slows down the ability to respond effectively. The second reason, on the other hand, "sees EU foreign policy as a function of the political will of the Member States. The success and failure of the Lisbon-treaty reform is less a function of the actions of institutionalized agents, but more of the structural prerequisites it is nested in, meaning the distribution of interests and power between Member States within the EU...the 'political will' of Member States becomes the crucial necessary condition that translates knowledge and tools of EU institutions into actions" (Helwing, p.237, 2013).

The European path towards genuine external unity and a cohesive foreign policy remains

constellated with significant obstacles, the main ones being the lack of common will among member states and the intergovernmental structure. These problems undermine the EU's internal unity and coherence, which are fundamental prerequisites for achieving strategic autonomy.

Moreover, the coherence of European foreign policy can also be compromised a member state, when assuming the six-month presidency of the Council of the European Union, takes unilateral and arbitrary actions that profoundly affect the external dimension of the EU. This is the case with Viktor Orbán's Hungarian Presidency, which took control of the Council's next priorities as of July 2024 under the motto of "Make Europe Great Again", echoing Trump's nationalism and sovereignism. The European treaties specify that the rotating government does not represent the EU in foreign affairs in any way. Indeed, "this is the prerogative of the president of the European Council, the president of the European Commission, and the High Representative for the common foreign and security policy. Still, Orbán has used the logo of Hungary's Council Presidency during his trips so far, repeatedly alluded to his position at the helm of the council, and did not contradict President Vladimir Putin when he announced that he represented the EU during their meeting" (Hegedüs, 2024). At the time of writing, Orbán has made a whole series of trips, or as he calls "peace missions": to Ukraine to meet Zelenskyy; to Russia for Putin; to America for Trump; and to China for Xi Jinping. Some of these diplomatic missions were not planned and coordinated with either the EU or NATO, thus hiding this sensitive information especially in times of great international uncertainty. During these trips, defined by Von der Leyen as "appeasement missions", Orbán proclaimed himself to be the representative of the EU and this triggered indignation from all the European high government spheres and member states, who reiterated that the rotating presidency does not represent the EU (Hegedüs, 2024). Visiting a country, Russia, subject to continuous EU sanctions for militarily attacking another country, Ukraine, is unprecedented in the history of Council presidencies. Yet, Orbán, by exploiting this intergovernmental dynamic, which in theory serves to give greater representation to the 27 member states, has been able to do what he wanted undisturbed. Moreover, Orbán's activities are also in breach of the EU treaties, which exclude any initiative that could hinder the achievement of the Union's goals. Apart from the Ukrainian leader, Orbán has met a whole range of personalities who are either considered enemies of Europe (Putin) or are extremely critical of the EU in general (Trump) or represent economic and trade adversaries (Xi Jinping). The common denominator linking all these personalities to Orbán is the presence of authoritarian and nationalist elements. This alignment with figures who embody such ideologies antagonistic to European values creates dissonances within EU foreign policy that risk fragmenting the EU's political and strategic unity. In a period characterised by the return of war and the consequent logic of power, Orbán's unilateral initiatives undermine the EU's internal cohesion and also negatively affect European political stability. By means of

unconventional practices and an unpredictable foreign policy, Orbán aims to highlight the EU's impotence in sanctioning continuous violations, underlining the EU's inability to maintain internal cohesion (Hegedüs, 2024). All this shows how transparency can be easily compromised and how a member state can in a short time abuse certain positions to destabilise the EU's foreign and defence policy, which itself already struggles to hold "common".

In light of this, the multiple existence of these structural problems in foreign policy undermines the EU's actorness on the international stage and the achievement off greater strategic autonomy. These difficulties have become more evident during the conflict in Ukraine, where the EU's ability to respond in a united and timely manner has been put to the test, due to vetoes and the necessity of reaching a unanimous consensus. This situation has underlined the importance of a more responsive foreign policy, enabling the EU to adopt decisive and synchronised positions in response to geopolitical emergencies.

1.8 Conclusion

In this chapter, an attempt was made to understand the polyhedral nature of the institutional system governing the external dimension of the EU, between policies managed at the intergovernmental level (CFSP and CSDP) and community-managed policies (external action and the external dimension of internal policies). The first ones deal with sensitive spheres of state sovereignty, whose decision-making process remains anchored to the achievement of humanity and repeatedly blocked by vetoes. These decisions, therefore, are taken on the basis of an intergovernmental method. In the other two policies, on the other hand, supranational institutions enjoy greater operational freedom and the decision-making process is more flexible, thanks to the adoption of the community method. Thus, while on one hand there is a policy deeply rooted in political consensus among the Member States, on the other hand, there is a precise institutional balance that necessitates cooperation among the various institutions.

Subsequently, the division of competences in the European institutional architecture was analysed, with a focus on the CFSP and CSDP. The CFSP and CSDP competences, characterised by their "sui generis" nature, operate in a unique way to strengthen collective efforts and promote the Union's strategic objectives, without replacing the national security and defence policies of member states. Furthermore, it was examined how the selection of legal bases directly influences the involvement of European institutions and decision-making dynamics, highlighting how politics and law are closely intertwined in the management of EU security and defence competences. Then, the institutional functioning of the CFSP and CSDP was studied, and the complicated concept of strategic autonomy

was analysed.

In this first chapter, the Problem Stream of this thesis was analysed, namely the main hindrances to European coherence on the international chessboard, most of which can be attributed to the monolithic intergovernmental logic. Intergovernmentalism thus represents an obstacle not only to the development of a coherent and responsive foreign policy but also to the development of strategic autonomy from a political, material and institutional point of view. The lack of a unified defence policy, the difficulty of coordinating common responses due to vetoes and unanimity, the EU's dependence on member states' assets to finance missions, the lack of political will in some communitarian initiatives and the fragmentation of the defence industry are among the main problems. Together, these factors make the EU struggle to act on the international stage, undermining its ability to pursue a cohesive foreign and defence strategy. The presence of these structural vulnerabilities therefore limits the EU's effectiveness and coherence and its ambition to achieve the strategic autonomy.

As will be examined in the following chapter, in the context of the war in Ukraine, these problems emerged, showing the Union's difficulties in coordinating a unified response in the medium to long term. With this structure, the EU was able to react, but still struggled to act in a cohesive and efficient manner. The Ukraine crisis has shown the institutional vulnerabilities and limitations of European foreign and security policy. At the same time, as will be seen, the return of war to the European continent catalysed a movement towards a more integrated approach to defence and security, prompting a significant shift (Political Steam) among European institutions and member states and laying the foundations for a "Defence Union". This has led to defence and security integration being seen as an urgently needed political priority.

2. The EU Foreign Policy response to the war in Ukraine

2.1 Introduction

The return of the logic of the war in 2022 on the European continent marked a decisive turning point in the global landscape, acting as a catalyst for the securitarian awakening of the EU (Sorbino, 2024). The resurgence of the Westphalian mentalities has deeply affected the European *Weltanschauung* and the way the EU shapes its policies. In this context of international disorder, "the absence of a predominant authority has created fertile ground for ambitions, such as those expressed by Putin, that can quickly destabilise the fragile global balance" (Sorbino, 2024). In order to cope with this international uncertainty, the EU has been engaged in shaping a whole series of initiatives and strategies in the field of foreign and security policy in order to respond to the geopolitical challenge imposed by Russia. To paraphrase Fukuyama, history is gradually returning. A history in which the logic of force reigns supreme and in which greed for power become the ultimate goal of states. In this context, the European path towards greater international assertiveness finds itself again influenced by the "era of permacrisis" (Zuleeg et al., 2021) and the war in Ukraine is a tragic symbol of this era. This conflict has revealed the fragility of continental peace and the need for a deeper unity between member states and European institutions. However, on a practical level, the search for this unity has been undermined by diverging interests among member states and structural problems in the European institutional architecture that have affected the coherence of foreign policy.

The purpose of this second chapter (Political Stream) will be to analyse the EU's response to the unjustified invasion of Ukraine in 2022. Indeed, the Political Stream of this thesis concerns the political change induced by the war, which prompted European institutions to take defence and security integration more seriously as an urgent political priority and made European actors aware of the need to strengthen the EU's capacity to act. The focus on this dimension represents forward progress in the direction of strategic autonomy, as during the conflict the EU has launched a whole series of important initiatives in the field of defence and security, laying the foundations of a Defence Union. Despite the aspiration towards a more integrated approach, the reality has revealed that the problems highlighted in Problem Stream continue to persist, even in times of war. In light of this, in section 2.2 it will be examined how the relationship with Russia has contributed to the evolution of the European foreign policy narrative, where defence and security have gradually become important for the future of the EU. Section 2.3 will serve as a preliminary overview to explain the war in Ukraine. Section 2.3.1 will examine the strategic recalibration prompted by the narrative of the Strategic Compass, which represents an attempt to develop a significant common strategic culture essential for achieving strategic autonomy. In section 2.3.2, all sanctions packages developed by the

EU up to the time of writing will be analysed, as sanctions were among the most frequently used foreign policy instruments during the conflict. In section 2.3.3, the main progress made in the integration of European security and defence will be analysed, highlighting how most initiatives in these areas sensitive to the sovereignty of member states reflect a more integrated approach. Section 2.4 will explore the concept of Defence Union, referring to the securitarian integration of military defence frameworks across member states and European institutions, a key element in achieving strategic autonomy.

2.2 The change of narrative

Since the beginnings of the European project, the EU had been described with the epithet of "civilian power", meaning a non-military power acting mainly through diplomatic and economic means (Bull, 1982). Its influence was more evident in the promotion of shared norms and values than in military force. The aetiology of this view stems from the historical belief that with the end of the Cold War and the increasing assertiveness of NATO, the security of European countries was no longer in danger (Fabbrini, F., 2022a). On the contrary, with the dissolution of the Soviet Union "history was over" for the Union, in the sense that liberal democracy had triumphed as the universal archetype for governing modern societies and that the bellicose logic of war was only a memory of the past. This kind of philosophy prompted the Union to exercise a leadership role in promoting international cooperation and global stability by becoming a model of soft power (Tulmets, 2008). Indeed, European leaders developed the belief that the conflict for domination between states would give way to a pacified international politics through the work of regulated international institutions (Fabbrini, F., 2022a). European countries thus believed in the Kantian project of perpetual peace, where international order and regulation would replace the disorder caused by war. According to this idealist vision, the norms and expectations of such regimes would have contained the warlike tendencies of states (Salikov, 2015). For a long time, this scenario did in fact become a reality: economic interconnectedness and various forms of regional integration contributed to the emergence and development of a system of international institutions in which diplomacy, not violence, formed the core of international relations.

However, to cope with post-Cold War geopolitical realities, the EU still decided to equip itself with its own defence and security mechanisms, well aware that the main provider of continental security remained NATO. Indeed, following the crisis in Yugoslavia, the EU tried to initiate the integration process also in the field of defence by establishing the CFSP and CSDP through various treaties. These institutional innovations, however, hardly fit in with the peaceful and non-belligerent

narrative of "civil power" (Moser, 2020). Over the years, the EU gradually changed and recalibrated its perception as an international actor. (European Council, 2001). Such a configuration contributed to redefining the image of the EU as a "normative power" exporting rules, where soft power was the main vector of the Union's external action (Fabbrini, S., 2022a). According to this new epithet, "the essential characteristic of the EU as an international actor was ... to be a "normative power of an ideational nature" capable of framing discourses and setting opinions. In other words, the EU was seen an exemplary soft power" (Moser, p.3, 2020).

This soft power narrative also influenced the first EU security strategy of 2003, the European Security Strategy (ESS), in which the EU was described as a "force for good" (Council of the European Union, 2003). The iconography of the EU as a value-promoter was well present in this strategy, which functioned as a sort of "act of self-perception", by which the EU intended to position itself on the world scene... the ESS bore a quite normative flavour. Under the title 'A secure Europe in a better world', the document praised extraterritorial governance reforms and capacity building as 'the best means of strengthening the international order' " (Moser, p.4, 2020).

Nevertheless, the Union's transformative and cosmopolitan ambition to reshape the world order through a system of rules clashed with the overwhelming geopolitical developments of the twenty-first century, which radically changed the balance of the international liberal system (Barbé & Morillas, 2019). Indeed, Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014 reminded the EU that the logic of power had not been abandoned, but temporarily neglected. Russia's act of aggression had economic, political and, above all, identity motivations (Saluschev, 2014). In fact, with the dissolution of the Soviet empire, Russia repeatedly tried to re-integrate the former Soviet satellites, for instance through the creation of a Commonwealth of Independent States and a Customs Union (Saluschev, 2014). Due to its trade openings and strategic positioning, Ukraine was one of the main targets of Russian integration. However, at the time, Ukraine was progressively intensifying its relations with the European Union, which was inclined to ratify the Association Agreement (AA). Therefore, Russia, by threatening to use economic retaliation, pushed then Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovych to abandon the AA. This geopolitical manoeuvre increased the discontent of Ukrainian civil society, which gave birth to the Maidan Revolution in 2014 (Saluschev, 2014). This event led to the end of Yanukovych's pro-Russian government and the adoption of a military realpolitik strategy by Russia, which culminated in the annexation of Crimea. In this regard, the European response, while consistent in condemning the unjustified annexation, was characterised by internal fragmentation due to energy dependence on Russia and reliance on consensus politics in European decision-making (Smith, 2014). These factors hindered a quick and effective response to the Ukrainian crisis. Furthermore, some EU member states even pursued selective engagements with Russia, which led to a lack of consistency

in the EU's foreign policy response. In addition, the sanctions policy adopted by the EU against Russia was neither effective in stopping the annexation nor in preventing Russia from taking further aggressive steps, remaining rather weak. This occurred because the EU continued to bet on maintaining a cooperative relationship with Russia, an approach that lasted until 2022. In light of this, the EU's inability to effectively pursue its interests was compounded by a number of elements that deeply affected its foreign policy responses: "'firstly, the EU miscalculated both Ukraine's and Russia's response to its foreign policy initiatives. Secondly, the EU's normative power role identity resulted in a rigid normative policy. Lastly, due to a lack of coherence, the EU failed to formulate both a strong enough initial policy (the AA) as well as swiftly and adequately respond to the unfolding Ukraine crisis" (Smith, pp.65-67, 2014).

Thus, the Russian realpolitik, combined with other geopolitical developments (such as the Brexit, for example), triggered a significant shift in narrative, in which the limits of the normative approach in foreign policy have been exposed. These events thus changed the fabric of international relations, gradually pushing the EU to reconsider its image internationally. In this regard, in 2016, the EU released its second security strategy: the EU Global Strategy (EUGS), which presented a less ambitious and more realist connotation of European foreign policy (Barbé & Morillas, 2019). The EU's strategic adaptation to global changes thus marked a shift from an idealised transformative ambition to an approach that embraced "principled pragmatism". The latter refers to a foreign policy philosophy that aimed to balance idealism and realism. In this framework, the Union, while pursuing its strategic interests, would hold steadfast to its values and ethical standards: in short, a realpolitik with European characteristics (Biscop, 2022b). From all this emerges a peculiar narrative, or as Manners (2010) would say, a mythology of the EU based on the concept of resilience, thus becoming more pragmatic than the previous transformative 'autobiography' (Mälksoo, 2016) of the ESS. The EUGS succeeded in reducing the constructive ambiguity of the ESS and demystifying the EU's regulatory role, providing not only a more defined framework for external action, but also reaffirming the importance of the concept of strategic autonomy. Therefore, the EUGS has skilfully intertwined political realism and strategic aspirations, thus balancing security needs and internal cohesion with core EU values (Barbé & Morillas, 2019).

This more pragmatic view of international relations paved the way for the introduction of hard power in the European path, where security and defence saw a significant increase in integration. For instance, as seen in the first chapter, PESCO and the EDF are two initiatives that both aim to strengthen the European external dimension through increased coordination and cooperation between member states. These measures mark a strategic turning point in European history, directing the EU towards a more functional defence posture, which is essential to address global security challenges.

Thus "as hard power rhetoric has gained traction in Brussels due to the increasingly tense international climate, we witness a gradual shift from a fairly normative to a more assertive stance...the soft power dimension of the Union has, eventually, been complemented by a hard power aspiration" (Moser, pp.5-6, 2020).

In the light of this, it can be observed how certain Russian-driven developments (such as the end of the USSR and the unilateral annexation of Crimea) have had a significant impact on European identity over the years, thus changing existing narratives. This precise historical and geopolitical pattern becomes even more evident in the case of the invasion of Ukraine in 2022, where the EU responded by introducing a new narrative, the Strategic Compass. In their ongoing interactions, Russia and the EU continue to communicate with two inherently different languages: the former with an exquisitely realist and imperialist grammar; the latter with a liberal and multilateral syntax.

2.3 The war in Ukraine

The return of the logic of power on European territory has generated a "tectonic shift in European history" (European Council, p. 3, 2022a), profoundly changing the strategies adopted by the EU and the perception of its foreign dimension, re-evaluating the issue of security from a proactive perspective. From an economic union designed to guarantee peace, recent geopolitical developments have underlined the need for the EU to learn the language of power. This metamorphosis is well underlined by the High Representative who stated that "the origin of European integration had stemmed from a rejection of power politics among the participating states. The European project had succeeded by turning political problems into technocratic ones and by supplanting power calculations with legal procedures. In the history of international relations and our war-torn continent, this was a Copernican revolution. It was also spectacularly successful, cementing peace and cooperation among previously warring parties, creating institutions, mental maps and a vocabulary that were unique. But this historic chapter has ended" (Borrell, 2022). Consequently, a new chapter in European history has opened, in which the concept of "hard power" has regained a prominent place, marking a significant turning point in the pages of European discourse (Borrell, 2020b). A hard power that should not be conceptualised solely and exclusively from a military point of view, rather, according to the High Representative, "it is about using the full range of our instruments to achieve our goals. It is about thinking and acting in terms of power. And, bit by bit, the conditions for this to happen are being fulfilled" (Borrell, 2022). Thus, the war in Ukraine contributed to a rethinking of European identity and pushed towards a more integrated security strategy. Indeed, the EU, perceived as an "economic leviathan" (Schickler, 2024) promoter of norms, is now being pressured to reshape its nature in order

to emerge as a security actor.

The war in Ukraine proved the EU's "mercantilist" vision towards Russia has been disproved. This vision was based on the idea that, through the development of economic and trade interdependencies with Russia, it would be more difficult for the latter to develop an antagonistic vision towards Europe. The idea was therefore to domesticate Russia through trade so as to make it a co-participant in the survival of the global order. However, on 24 February 2022, this bet was officially broken when Putin launched a military operation to invade Ukraine, forcibly restoring the war in European history. Indeed, as the High Representative stated, "one of the lessons of the war in Ukraine is that economic interdependence alone cannot guarantee our security. On the contrary, it can be instrumentalised against us" (Borrell, 2022).

The German Chancellor, Olaf Scholz, referred to this event as an epochal turning point, using the term *Zeitenwende* (Blumenau, 2022), thus indicating a paradigm shift in the EU's "spirit of the time", or rather *Zeitgeist*. This cognitive and military shock manifested itself in a renewed strengthening of military capabilities and a heightened focus on European security. This marked an irreversible shift in the EU's view of history, or rather *Weltanschauung*.

That being said, this paragraph will be divided into three macro-areas: the first deals with the strategic recalibration of the EU through the Strategic Compass; the second deals with the analysis of sanctions; and the third focuses on the progress made in European integration in the area of defence and security. Taken together, these parts outline the foreign policy instruments adopted by the EU with regard to both the CFSP and CSDP. The link that unites these sections is the intention to adopt a more coherent and integrated approach to defence and security, useful for achieving strategic autonomy. In this way, the war in Ukraine laid the foundation for the creation of a Defence Union. In this regard, the High Representative stated that "the best way to exert influence, shape events and not be driven by them, is at the EU level: by investing in our collective capacity to act" (Borrell, 2022). Moreover, in a speech to the European Parliament on the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the Commission President Ursula von der Leyen said: "[w]hen we are resolute, Europe can rise to the challenge. The same is true on defence. European security and defence has evolved more in the last six days than in the last two decades...This is a watershed moment for our Union. We cannot take our security and the protection of people for granted. We have to stand up for it. We have to invest in it. We have to carry our fair share of the responsibility' (European Commission, 2022a). These words were then translated into action through the construction of a new narrative, the imposition of sanctions and a whole series of other initiatives in the field of defence and security, demonstrating an active commitment to supporting the Ukrainian people.

2.3.1 Strategic recalibration

The war in Ukraine drastically changed the rhetoric of the EU and further emphasised the need to strengthen defence capabilities in Europe (Biscop, 2022c). The European call to arms and support for a military victory for Ukraine emphasise the presence of a military component within the language of foreign policy. This conflict is "not only between two geopolitical giants (one of them, the EU, was 'woken up' precisely by this), but between two world-views. To the EU's rules-based international order, Russia would oppose a power-based international order. The EU presents itself as champion of legality against competitors who are moved by Realpolitik, such as Russia' (Lonardo, p. 46, 2022). In this regard, the President of the geopolitical Commission, in her State of the Union 2022, emphasised the almost ideological nature of the conflict, describing it as a "war on our values and a war on our future. This is about autocracy against democracy" (European Commission, p.3, 2022b). In a way, the Russian invasion "strengthened the kind of camp politics or block politics which polarise international relations, escalate political and ideological tensions, and contribute to further militarisation" (Kusa, p.11, 2022).

The EU's response was quite revolutionary in that it contributed to the geopolitical awakening of the EU. This is most evident in the Versailles Declaration of March 2022, where the member states "decided to take more responsibility for our security and take further decisive steps towards building our European sovereignty, reducing our dependencies and designing a new growth and investment model for 2030" (European Council, p.3, 2022a). Based on this declaration, the member states committed themselves to enhancing their defence capabilities through increased defence spending, collaborative investments such as joint procurement, the development of military capabilities and the strengthening of the EU defence industry (Przetacznik, 2022). Still in Versailles, the President of the European Parliament Roberta Metsola reiterated the need to strengthen the European defence architecture, telling national heads of government and European leaders that "we urgently need to boost our investment in defence and in innovative technologies and continue to build a real Security and Defence Union. One that can be proactive, flexible, agile and resilient. One that is capable of countering new threats" (European Parliament, 2022a).

All this prompted member states to adopt on 24 March 2022 the Strategic Compass, an ambitious project to strengthen the Union's foreign and defence policy by 2030 (Przetacznik, 2022). This security manual "aims to foster a common European 'strategic culture', pushing member-states towards a common understanding of the key threats to Europe and how to counter them together. The Strategic Compass is designed to maintain momentum and inject coherence into European defence" (Scazzieri, p.1, 2020). The Strategic Compass, the result of extensive collaboration among the

member states, the High Representative, and the EEAS, was drafted prior to the outbreak of the war in Ukraine. Despite its earlier formulation, it was profoundly influenced by this external shock. Indeed, the Russian invasion contributed to the rewriting of the document and substantially changed the EU's perception of the Russian threat, a threat seen as a challenge to the Union's interests and objectives (Fiott, 2023). In the preface of the Strategic Compass, the High Representative stated "the war against Ukraine is making it more urgent to achieve a sea change in EU security and defence. This too we have known for years but not always acted upon. Today, no one denies that we need robust capabilities and the willingness to use them against the full spectrum of threats we face. How to get this done in practice is the purpose of the Strategic Compass. In other words... the purpose of the Strategic Compass is to guide the necessary development of the EU security and defence agenda" (Council of the European Union, p.5, 2022a). Therefore, the document remains the main benchmark for EU security and defence policies after the conflict in Ukraine and lists over 80 specific policy actions in response to Russian aggression (Fiott, 2023). In this regard, the Strategic Compass identifies "four strands of EU foreign policy, committing the EU to develop a rapid deployment capacity; to enhance its ability to anticipate threats through greater intelligence sharing; to invest in technological capabilities and the military-industrial base; and to reinforce strategic partnerships" (Fabbrini, F., p.12, 2022a). In short, the pillars guiding the Strategic Compass are 'act', 'secure', 'invest' and 'partner'. Through the identification of these pillars, the Strategic Compass outlines a narrative for European defence, offering a roadmap guiding the evolution of the EU as a security actor.

An essential component of this strategy is the threat assessment process, which enables the EU to identify, analyse, and prioritize threats to its security. This holistic assessment is crucial for the adaptation of defence policies and the development of effective responses, as it recognises not only risks in the short term, but also geo-economic factors that could affect European security in the long term. Thus, the document invites member states to increase their collaboration, for instance through information sharing: in this way, more effective cooperation in identifying threats (such as terrorism, hybrid threats, cyber-attacks and disinformation) could be established, laying the foundations for a shared security vision. Thus, the Strategic Compass, by proposing a more integrated approach to defence and security, seeks to provide a common sense of purpose and greater coherence between the EU and its member states. This demonstrates that both national and European actors perceive the security of the European project as threatened by a belligerent state, Russia. In the end, both the actors underline the need for a shared response. However, as will be analysed in the following pages, although on paper there is a willingness to develop a shared vision of the threats, the reality of the situation shows that the 27 EU countries have different visions, both in their perception of the threat and in the development of military strategies.

Moving forward, the Strategic Compass goes beyond previous strategies developed by Brussels, setting concrete actions with clear deadlines (Council of the European Union, 2022a). In contrast to the tepid reception of the 2016 EU Global Strategy, the Strategic Compass enjoys strong support from Member States, highlighting the EU's leading role in security policies until 2030. This endorsement is crucial in shaping the future trajectory of EU defence strategies (Fiott, p.449, 2023). For these reasons, some scholars define the Strategic Compass as "EU's first-ever dedicated security and defence strategy" (Fiott, p.449, 2023).

This Compass represents a sort of manifesto for the achievement of strategic autonomy and thus a future Defence Union (Sweeney & Winn, 2022). Indeed, the European Parliament "considers the Strategic Compass a major impetus that could generate the necessary momentum towards a genuine European Defence Union, build on the EU's integrated approach, and enable the EU to act as a capable security actor and a reliable partner" (European Parliament, 2023a). The Strategic Compass also emphasises the importance of enhancing the EU's military mobility especially in the context of Russian aggression against Ukraine by recalibrating the focus on the defence of the Union's territory. This constitutes an important step towards the realisation of a Defence Union. In this regard, with the strategic direction of the Compass, the EU launched a project called Action Plan on Military Mobility 2.0 for the period 2022-2026 which aims to strengthen military mobility by removing barriers to the movement of troops on EU soil. The plan focuses on connecting military transport infrastructure (such as railways, roads and air routes) more efficiently and incorporates adjustments in response to the ongoing conflict in Ukraine. It emphasizes the rapid and efficient movement of troops and equipment across EU borders and with external partners. In summary, the Action Plan on Military Mobility 2.0 "will contribute to a well-connected military mobility network, with shorter reaction times and capable, secure, sustainable and resilient transport infrastructure and capabilities" (European Commission, p.1, 2022c).

Overall, the Strategic Compass demonstrates an increased awareness on the part of the European institutions of the need to strengthen European defence and European funding mechanisms in the defence and security realm. These perceptions and efforts promote the enhancement of the Union's action and consequently, of its strategic autonomy. Regarding the war in Ukraine, the High Representative said that "if we do want to avoid being a bystander in a world shaped by and for others, we need to act - together. That is the philosophy of the Strategic Compass" (Borrell, 2022). From this point of view, it can be observed that one of the driving forces of European integration was precisely war, or rather the fear of war and the desire to ensure peace (Fabbrini, F., 2022b). The various European crises could be considered to have shaped the nature of CSP, encouraging greater integration (Genschel and Jachtenfuch, 2018), which is also observable in the war in Ukraine. Both

WW2 and the end of the Cold War led to the birth and expansion of the European Union, fostering the creation of the European Coal and Steel Community (and the European Defence Community) and EU enlargement, respectively (Fabbrini, F., 2022b). Against this historical backdrop, the conflict in Ukraine pushes towards the realisation of a Defence Union, a hitherto missing piece in the vast mosaic of European integration. In this respect, the document sets the goal of creating an EU rapid deployment capability of 5,000 troops with the aim of achieving full operational readiness by 2025. It promises an increase in defence spending through investment in strategic tools and advanced capabilities, as well as an increased focus on technological threats (Council of the European Union, 2022a). Therefore, the Strategic Compass aims to enhance the EU's security offer and its global role in peacekeeping and security (Hartley, 2024).

Based on the aforementioned reflections, it can be deduced that this defence document is an attempt to improve the EU's capacity for action through the creation of a common strategic culture. In this way, the Compass promotes the strengthening of the political autonomy of strategic autonomy as it aims to define the common priorities of EU and provide a joint assessment of international threats. Further, this document underscores the necessity of aligning the strategic objectives and defence capabilities of the member states. This alignment is crucial not only for the effectiveness of collective defence and security measures but also for ensuring that the EU can wield its influence globally as a coherent and unified entity. By promoting political cohesion and fostering a shared strategic culture, the Compass lays the groundwork for a more assertive and self-sufficient Union, trying to establish a strategic culture that will facilitate joint actions.

In short, the Strategic Compass "represents the willingness of 27 countries with different strategic cultures to better coordinate, invest in capability development and collaborate with international organisations... knowing that a secure environment is crucial for European security" (Rodriguez, 2022). Therefore, the fate of the Strategic Compass crucially depends on the political will of EU Member States to advance in defence cooperation, an area in which they have historically encountered obstacles. Implementing EU policy effectively is complex, given the difficulties associated with decision-making processes, political determination and lack of operational resources (Clapp, 2022). This is the reason why the Compass has at its core the " "high risk - high reward" pressure: if it succeeds, a huge step forward for European defence will have been taken by 2030; if it fails, the EU's credibility as a nascent defence actor will be seriously - perhaps irreparably - damaged" (Fiott, p. 450, 2023).

In light of this, the Strategic Compass is characterized by evocative language, yet it possesses limited practical substance (Hartley, 2024). While proposing the enhancement of European hard

power as a response to the return of history, the document did not actually transform national practices but only promoted an ideal sharing of national sovereignty (Hartley, 2024). Although it provides funding for collaborative research and production, these spending targets are optional and there are no sanctions for not achieving them. Furthermore, the initiative to create an EU rapid reaction force, which envisages the deployment of 5,000 troops in adverse contexts by 2025, appears insufficient and belated (Fabbrini, F., 2022a). Therefore, the EU's aspirations in the Common Security and Defence Policy do not seem to match the scale of the military threats posed by Russia, highlighting the Member States' persistent hesitation to fully step up their defence cooperation (Fabbrini, F., 2022a). All of this widens the capability-expectations gap, making the gap between what the EU aspires to achieve and the actual capabilities at its disposal even more evident. The High Representative himself acknowledged this dynamic in the path of defence integration. Indeed, the High Representative stated that "security and defence is probably the area in EU integration with the biggest gap between expectations and results. Between what we could be and what citizens demand - and what we actually achieve" (Borrell, 2022). The difficulty of achieving a strong consensus among member states on defence and security issues and the discrepancy between expectations and actual capabilities undermine the EU's ability to act as a unified bloc. Consequently, the Strategic Compass, despite being an ambitious attempt and a narrative that pushes for greater integration and seeks to bridge the gap, risks remaining a document that, in the absence of the political will and trust of member states, does not guarantee a transformation in the European defence landscape. "This matched further challenges in Common Foreign and Security Policy, which, given its strong intergovernmental outlook, remained an area of diverging interests for Member States" (Fabbrini, F., p.14, 2022a). Indeed, the Compass does not address the limitations due to the EU's institutional structure. It recognises the need for a faster and more efficient foreign policy but runs up against the unanimity rule. Moving on, the Compass suffers from the typical slowness of EU implementation, with many objectives planned for 2025 or beyond: these timeframes are not compatible with the operational needs that the war in Ukraine has made necessary and urgent (Fabbrini, F., 2022b).

Defence and security decisions are therefore dependent on national priorities and threat perceptions, which vary significantly between EU members. This relates to the concept of "strategic cacophony", whereby there are different perceptions of a threat among member states, each with their own priorities (Giusti & Grevi, 2022). Such "strategic cacophony" hampers the common path in defence policy, which is diminished by national divergences, and the creation of a solid strategic culture (Giusti & Grevi, 2022). In fact, the threat of war has resonated differently in different parts of the EU, where the absence of adequate centralisation and legitimacy has prevented the EU from formulating a unified European position, forcing it rather to make the European interest coincide with

the sum of national interests (Fabbrini, S., 2024). Furthermore, the Russian threat promoted the formation of alliances between countries based on geographical proximity and cultural homogeneity (Fabbrini, S., 2024). A group of northern nations, including Germany, argued that defence should remain a national prerogative, financed from domestic resources. This group saw the European Commission's proposal to support the defence industry with a specific programme (i.e. EDIP) as intrusive. On the contrary, southern European countries considered it essential for European defence to make a qualitative leap that would require significant funding, possibly through the common European debt (Fabbrini, S., 2024). These countries, already constrained by national budgetary constraints, see European debt as the only way to adequately finance defence, as demonstrated by the effectiveness of the Next Generation EU (NGEU) programme during the pandemic (Fabbrini, S., 2024). Finally, Eastern European countries, which are directly exposed to the Russian threat, show deep divisions in their interpretation of the danger: Poland sees this threat as a matter of national survival; Hungary, on the other hand, sees Russia as a privileged partner (Fabbrini, S., 2024). Hence, the geographical location and historical context of these countries significantly influence their perception of the conflict in Ukraine and choice of consequent strategies, contributing to a lack of cohesion in European foreign policy. On this point, the strategic impasse between France and Germany on how to support Ukraine militarily was a clear manifestation of the difficulty in establishing an unambiguous foreign policy direction. On the one hand, there was Macron's France, which argued that the action of the European member states for the defence of the Ukrainian people should have no limits and that, looking to the future, the sending of Western troops could not be excluded; on the other hand, there was Scholz's Germany, which peremptorily ruled out sending troops, even denying the sending of long-range Taurus missiles: Germany, therefore, wanted to avoid '"provoking" Putin's Russia too much, avoiding at all costs the scenario of an escalation (Gallo et al., 2024). Hence, while France nurtured a hegemonic ambition to think "big", Germany, on the other hand, set out to think "small" (Fabbrini, S., 2023a). "The dispute between Macron and Scholz during this acute crisis phase has significantly undermined the credibility of the European Union…The spectacle of public dispute between the two largest countries of the Union reveals the risks of political fragmentation and institutional disintegration" (Gallo et al., pp.6-7, 2024). In order to resolve their disagreements, the two countries had to re-exhume the Weimar Triangle (a pact of cooperation between the two countries and Poland) to try to mediate between positions that could hardly be mediated: the German position of appeasement towards Russia and the French position of opposition to the latter (Fabbrini, S., 2023a). What came out of the meeting was a sort of agreement on the need to ensure the delivery to the Ukrainian army of a greater quantity of long-range weapons, without, however, openly threatening Russia. What is clear is that both France and Germany had difficulty in

elaborating a shared foreign and military policy (Fabbrini, S., 2023a).

In light of this, "the EU is structured around groups of states that have distinct positions on war. The EU is centrifugal, whereas it needs to become a centripetal organisation" (Fabbrini, S., 2024). According to some scholars, "efficient European defence solutions require a single European state such as a federation. Without a single European state, the inefficiency of the existing national state solutions will continue to be reflected in the costly duplication and fragmentation of military capabilities and defence industries" (Hartley, p.580, 2024).

2.3.2 Sanctions

The sanctions, a classical tool of the CFSP, have been the main vector of EU foreign policy in response to the return of war on the European continent. At the time of writing, the EU has implemented the fourteenth sanctions package, overall demonstrating a solid response capability and exerting significant pressure on the Russian economy. The aim is to limit the ability to finance Russian military operations, so as to prevent Russia from continuing its aggression and halt its imperialist ambition. These restrictive measures are a continuation of the sanctions imposed in 2014 following the annexation of Crimea, but compared to the latter, the 2022 sanctions regime has been considered more rapid and coordinated (Bergmann et al., 2023). Indeed "since Russia launched its brutal invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, the high degree of political unity demonstrated by the European Union's response has surprised many observers, who expected Vladimir Putin to use Russian influence, particularly Europe's long-recognised dependence on Russian hydrocarbons, to effectively...incapacitate the bloc. But Putin's bet that Europe would not put its economic well-being at risk for Ukraine has proved wrong" (Bergmann et al., pp. 2-3, 2023).

In general, these sanctions represent the most severe measures ever imposed by the EU. They are designed to isolate the Russian economy by reducing Russia's access to international financial markets and restricting trade in critical sectors such as defence and energy (Lonardo, 2022). These measures, planned in rapid sequence, exerted direct economic pressure on Russia's political and economic elites, thus influencing the Kremlin's foreign policy decisions. In this context, the EU consolidated its approach to sanctions, going beyond individual punitive measures to include a range of economic, diplomatic and visa restrictions (Sánchez, 2023). Indeed, the EU has broadened the criteria for these targeted restrictive measures, applying them more systematically in various sectors of the Russian economy to increase the impact of its economic pressure (Bergmann et al, 2023). In general, the sanctions regime so far has encapsulated three main components: individual sanctions targeted at those directly involved in the threat to Ukraine's sovereignty, territorial integrity and

independence; economic sanctions aimed at undermining Russia's ability to sustain its aggressive actions; and diplomatic sanctions, including the suspension of visa facilitation agreements (Sánchez, 2023). In addition, the EU imposed similar sanctions on Belarus, Iran and North Korea for their role in supporting Russia's military efforts. Overall, as argued by many analysts, these sanctions have succeeded in achieving three macro-objectives: "they have sent the Kremlin a strong signal of Western resolve and unity, they have permanently degraded Russia's military capabilities, and they are asphyxiating its economy and energy sector, with long-term consequences" (Caprile & Delivorias, p.1, 2023).

As seen in the first chapter, although sanctions are fundamentally preventive and not punitive measures, the reality of the facts proved otherwise: indeed, they were introduced as a response to specific behaviour, rather than to prevent it. For example, faced with the buildup of Russian troops on the Ukrainian border, the EU did not activate sanctions to prevent aggression but prepared measures to be taken in the event of an attack. These measures were to be applied when the intensity of the conflict made it necessary, indicating a strategy of post-escalation intervention. All this confirms that the EU has a good capacity for response, indeed reaction, but that it struggles to have a capacity for action, which is further undermined by structural logics of an intergovernmental nature. Moreover, the implementation and enforcement of sanctions fall mainly on the member states: it is therefore an intergovernmental responsibility, not a community one. Indeed, it is precisely the European unity line that is undermined by internal national divergences. Thus, the complexities of the Union's decision-making structures in the field of foreign policy hinder a coherent and timely response to international challenges, as this intergovernmental set-up often leads to fragmentation of collective action, thus undermining the EU's ability to act as one uniform and cohesive entity on the international stage.

Going in order, the first package of sanctions was adopted very quickly on 23 February 2022 following Russia's illegal recognition of the non-government-controlled areas of Donetsk and Luhansk (Council of the European Union, 2022b). These sanctions aimed at restricting Russia's access to EU financial and capital markets, imposing restrictions on economic relations with the two separatist People's Republics and a series of targeted sanctions on 351 members of the Russian State Duma. On 24 February, the day of the invasion in Ukraine, European leaders met for a special session of the European Council, where they condemned the unjustified Russian aggression, guilty of undermining Ukrainian territorial and national sovereignty and destabilising European stability and security.

The second package of sanctions (Council of the European Union, 2022c), adopted on 25 February

2022, the day after the invasion, essentially contained restrictive measures against members of Russia's National Security Council (Lonardo, 2022). In addition, these sanctions aimed at freezing the assets of President Vladimir Putin and Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov. These punitive measures affected crucial sectors such as finance, energy, transport and technology: the purpose was to limit financial inflows from Russia to the EU and to penalise the Russian economy in order to influence political decisions in Moscow.

Three days later, on 28 February 2022, the EU adopted the third sanctions package (Council of the European Union, 2022d), which "cemented the isolation of Russia and its economy. It contained a ban, for any EU citizen, bank, or company, on transactions with the Russian Central Bank. The EU also banned the overfight of EU airspace and access to EU airports by Russian carriers. It was also the 'turn' of other Russian banks: seven of them were cut out from SWIFT, which is the communication system that banks usually use between themselves" (Lonardo, pp.68-69, 2022).

With the fourth sanctions package (Council of the European Union, 2022e), implemented on 15 March 2022, the EU targeted the Russian energy sector with bans on new investments and transactions, while oil and gas imports remained unchanged. The restrictions also included a ban on exports of luxury goods to Russia and imports of iron and steel from it.

Moving on, on 8 April 2022, the EU adopted the fifth sanctions package (Council of the European Union, 2022f), severely restricting Russia's access to the European market, as it affected imports of energy products such as coal, and banned Russian ships and Belarusian and Russian road hauliers from EU ports and territory. Imports of wood, cement, fish products and alcohol were also banned, with exceptions made for gas and oil.

So far, the EU managed to manifest strong unity in its foreign policy, showing remarkable speed in implementing sanctions. However, starting with the sixth sanctions package, the initial unity began to erode due to the divergent interests of certain member states, particularly Hungary. By leveraging their preferred intergovernmental instruments, namely the veto and unanimity, some states started to undermine the fragile uniformity of EU foreign policy. Indeed, the presence of disagreements among member states on how to pursue foreign policy undermined the EU's internal coherence, limiting its ability to effectively continue its sanctions policy. Indeed, "due to a veto by Hungary, the sixth package of sanctions, including a ban on oil imports, was held ransom for weeks in May 2022 because Prime Minister Viktor Orbán, a staunch friend of Russian President Vladimir Putin, sought to leverage approval of the sanctions to secure funds owed to Hungary under the post-pandemic recovery plan but currently frozen due to the rule-of-law crisis in that Member State" (Fabbrini, F., p.15, 2022a). Therefore, Hungary delayed the approval of sanctions proposals, especially those

targeting Russia's oil and gas sectors, which represent a crucial source of tax revenue for the Kremlin. Moreover, in this sixth sanctions package, Hungary prevented approval of the proposal by rejecting the addition of Patriarch Kirill, leader of the Russian Orthodox Church, to the EU asset freeze and visa ban list. Moving forward, Hungarian obstructionism continued to undermine the coherence of European foreign policy. For instance, in September 2022, Hungary demanded the exclusion of three oligarchs from the full sanctions list, risking the unanimous approval needed to extend the measures and obstructing the procedural renewal of the sanctions packages. This pattern of behaviour underscores a significant challenge for the achievement of strategic autonomy, especially regarding how internal consensus is undermined by external influences. Hungary's obstructive actions, apparently influenced by its economic and political ties with Russia, have undermined the coherence of the EU sanctions regime. This dynamic reveals the vulnerability of EU foreign policy to external influence, compromising not only the uniformity and strength of its sanctions regime, but also calling into question the very principle of European collective action. Such instances of national policies, driven by relationships with non-EU states, challenge the Union's ability to present a unified front in global affairs, thereby complicating its journey towards a true strategic autonomy. Nevertheless, on 3 June, the Council, after the stalemate caused by Hungary, managed to adopt the sixth sanctions package (Council of the European Union, 2022g), imposing a partial ban on imports of crude oil and refined petroleum products. In addition, the sanctions package extended the restrictions to include the exclusion of additional Russian and Belarusian banks from the SWIFT system, the suspension of Russian state media broadcasts to the EU, and the addition of dozens of individuals and entities to the sanctions list.

Moving on, the seventh sanctions package (Council of the European Union, 2022h), called the "maintenance and alignment" package, was adopted on 21 June 2022 and "aimed to tighten the previous economic sanctions, this included prohibition on any transaction concerning golf of Russian origin. Moreover, this package reinforced export control of all dual use goods, and further detailed exiting measure in terms of aviation, justice and public procurement. This package was mainly used as a reinforcement to the tackling of the Federations' economic sector" (Sánchez, p.43, 2023).

The eighth package of sanctions (Council of the European Union, 2022i), implemented on 6 October 2022 by a unanimous vote of the Council, expanded earlier restrictions to encompass a ban on importing items such as cigarettes and luxury goods. Additionally, it introduced a specific exemption that allowed the importation of oil and petroleum products via maritime transport (Lonardo, 2022).

On 16 December 2022, the ninth sanctions package was adopted (Council of the European Union,

2022j), which was delayed due to a disagreement among some member states, particularly Lithuania and Poland. The implementation of this sanctions package was slowed down due to concerns that the proposed new exemptions would undermine existing sanctions by facilitating payments to Russian oligarchs running agricultural and food companies. This question raised doubts about the consistency of the Union's restrictive measures. In general, these sanctions curbed exports of drone engines and dual-use technologies, halted new investments in Russia's mining sector, restricted dealings with the Russian Regional Development Bank, and banned services related to advertising and market research (Sánchez, 2023).

The tenth package of sanctions (Council of the European Union, 2023a) was implemented by the Council on 25 February 2023 and had a significant symbolic value as it marks one year since the unjustified Russian aggression against Ukraine. This package mostly targeted the energy sector with the aim to curtail the potential for Russia and to leverage gas supplies as a geopolitical tool. In this regard, this has been achieved by prohibiting Russian nationals from storing gas within the European Union, thereby reducing Russia's ability to influence the EU's energy market strategically.

Moving on, the eleventh package of sanctions (Council of the European Union, 2023b), adopted on 23 June 2023, included "measures to: strengthen bilateral and multilateral cooperation with third countries to impede sanctions' circumvention; prohibit the transit of goods and technology via Russia; tighten export restrictions" (Vataman, p.1705, 2024).

On 18 December 2023, the Council continued its sanctions policy through the 12th package (Council of the European Union, 2023c), which included measures aimed at strengthening trade bans with Russia through tighter restrictions on imports and exports. It also introduced a ban on exports of Russian diamonds and reinforced control over the maximum price of oil. (Vataman, 2024).

With the thirteenth sanctions package, agreed and implemented on 23 February 2024 (Council of the European Union, 2024a), the EU extended sanctions to numerous individuals and entities, targeting various sectors including the military and defence, as well as local political and judicial figures involved in the forced deportation and re-education of Ukrainian children. Entities supporting the Russian military industry were also added, including some in third countries that facilitated the circumvention of sanctions. In addition, restrictions on drones and on exports of goods that favour Russian industry have been tightened.

Finally, on 24 June 2024, the fourteenth sanctions package was adopted (Council of the European Union, 2024b), with which the Council addressed practical challenges and enforcement issues. Indeed, this package specifically targeted key sectors of the Russian economy such as energy, finance, and trade, enhancing the measures to prevent the circumvention of existing sanctions. Moreover, it

included specific measures such as banning reloading services for Russian liquefied natural gas (LNG) on EU territory, intended for transshipment to third countries. Additionally, the package prohibited new investments in LNG projects that are currently under construction, tightening restrictions around strategic energy resources linked to Russia.

2.3.3 Initiatives in the field of defence and security

As observed so far, the war in Ukraine and the return of history to European soil have catalysed the urgency to improve the European defence architecture, seeking to provide the necessary tools to deal with Russian imperialism and the volatile geopolitical landscape. This need was reiterated several times by President von der Leyen, who stated: "We need to start working on the future of the European security architecture. In all of its dimensions and with all of the speed and political will that is required…Europe must spend more, spend better, spend European… Taking this step together on defence will not be easy. It will require bold decisions and political courage. And it will require above all a new European defence mind-set from institutions to industry to investors alike" (European Commission, 2024b). All this underlines how this external shock has pushed European actors to rethink the defence and security of the European continent through a more integrated approach. Faced with the need for a common response to the geostrategic threat of war, for the EU the advancement of the defence integration process has returned to the centre of the political-institutional debate (Miglio et al., 2024). In this regard, defence has also become one of the priorities of the Strategic Agenda of 2024-2029, representing one of the cornerstones for building a "strong and secure Europe". Indeed, the Agenda reads: "Europe must be a place where people are and feel free and safe. The European Union and Member States have taken bold steps to strengthen the Union's defence readiness and capacity, including increased defence spending…We will mobilise the necessary instruments to bolster our security and the protection of our citizens, and to respond to new emerging threats" (European Council, p.4, 2024a). This strategic reorientation implies a change in European foreign policy, marking the overcoming of soft power and the adoption of hard power measures. The latter manifested itself through a whole series of initiatives that contributed to strengthening both the Union's defence capability (Viceré, 2022) and European integration in this high-political sphere. These developments laid the first foundations for a Defence Union, prompting the EU to reconfigure its identity: from a regulatory power to a security actor.

One of the main vectors of this dynamic was the European Peace Facility (EPF), a CSDP mechanism outside the European budget through which the EU, or rather the member states, supported the provision of military equipment and aid to Ukraine. Indeed, the financial resources

come from the member states and not from the European budget, thus outside the Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF). The EU with the EPF has provided a financial framework through which it has allowed member states to transfer military instruments to third countries: the EU thus only coordinates the financing of such military assistance, but not finances it directly (Lonardo, 2022). This is constitutionally justified by article 41(2) TEU, which states that "expenditure arising from operations having military or defence implications" cannot be financed through the EU budget. Therefore, costs and responsibilities are borne by the member states, underlining the inherent intergovernmental nature of such an instrument. Besides article 41, the legal basis of this instrument is also justified by articles 30(1), 28(1), 42(4) TEU, which basically provide the EU the ability to act when international circumstances demand it, to combine resources for this reason, and to adopt Council resolutions unanimously (Fabbrini, F., 2023). Nevertheless, the adoption of the EPF triggered a revolutionary dynamic in the European approach: in fact, "the EU's move to explicitly provide military aid to a third country during a war is unmatched in the history of European integration and extraordinary, given the EU's previous narrative of being a civilian power" (Viceré, p.2, 2022).

The EPF, created in March 2021 by the Council Decision (CFSP) 2021/509, aspires to make the EU more geopolitically responsive, covering a wide geographical area, including Africa, the EU's neighbours and other areas with urgent security threats. The EPF's mission is to enhance the EU's readiness and responsiveness in crisis management and to support the reaction capabilities of allied countries. Basically, the EPF was designed to combine two security and defence funding instruments, namely the Athena Mechanism and the African Peace Facility. Through this union, the EPF seeks to ensure effective financing of CSDP operations (Fiott, 2023). After the outbreak of war in Ukraine in February 2022, the EU reactively decided to use the EPF to economically support the Ukrainian armed forces through the financing of lethal armaments. Under the EPF framework, four days after the Russian attack, the Council approved the Decision 2022/338 (Council of the European Union, 2022k) thus authorising assistance for the delivery of military equipment to the armed forces of Ukraine. At the time of writing, from 2022 to 2024, the EU allocated €6.1 billion to meet urgent military and defence requirements in Ukraine. Moreover, in March 2024, the EU opted to raise the funding cap of the EPF by an additional €5 billion, through the creation of a specific Ukraine Assistance Fund within the EPF, thus elevating the total financial aid provided via the EPF to €11.1 billion. This shows how the war, with the EPF, accelerated the process of "defence weaponization" (Fiott, 2023), thus pushing the EU to reevaluate and enhance its strategic capabilities. In addition, "the requirement that a greater part of military operations be financed by the facility has an important consequence: namely, that member states which do not participate in a given operation still have to contribute to its funding. Placing such a demand on the member states is a step towards joint

operations along the lines of a defence union" (Britz, p.229, 2023).

At the time of writing, the Council disbursed seven tranches of financial support to the Ukrainian armed forces through the EPF, totalling EUR 500 million for each instalment. The EU was also ready to prepare an eighth tranche of aid through the EPF. However, this proposal was once again blocked by Hungary through the intergovernmental veto dynamic. Indeed, "Hungary opposed the proposed eighth regular tranche of €500 million in military assistance to Ukraine, as a bargaining tool in return for the removal of the Hungarian OTP Bank from the Ukrainian list of 'international war sponsors' " (Bilquin, p.3, 2023). Similarly, Hungary also opposed another initiative under the auspices of the EPF, namely the High Representative's proposal to provide up to EUR 5 billion per year over the next four years, in total EUR 20 billion for the period from 2024 to 2027. This *modus operandi* is not new in Budapest's policy towards Brussels, a policy aimed at generating pressure on European institutions and other member states, thus obstructing military aid to Kiev and undermining the political unity of the Union. Such obstructionism, as with the sanctions, only undermines the coherence of European foreign policy, further complicating the EU's efforts to establish stable and continuous funding for assistance to the Ukrainian people. Once again, the veto and the threat of the veto drove the unilateral and solitary actions of Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán, who, by resorting to the vulnerabilities of the Lisbon Treaty, weakened the EU's ability to act unitedly and effectively on the international chessboard. This "intergovernmental fallacy" (European Parliament, 2010) weakens the European governance and its external action, where the interest of a single member state prevails over the Community interest. This only proves how an intergovernmental foreign policy can undermine the European solidarity and compromise the EU's ability to respond in a cohesive to international crises.

In light of this, the EU also sought an alternative way to promote funding in support of Ukraine, going beyond intergovernmental constraints and the limited size of the EPF. In 2022, the Commission proposed a military aid programme for Ukraine, the Macro-Financial Assistance+ (MFA+), independent of national financial idiosyncrasies (Fabbrini, S., 2023b). The European executive then introduced a funding instrument of a supranational nature of around EUR 18 billion, ratified by the two co-legislators (European Parliament and the Council). Through this, the Commission succeeded in issuing joint debt backed by state guarantees, thus allocating its own resources to Ukraine in 2023 (Fabbrini, F., 2023). The legal basis for this instrument, established through the Regulation 2022/2463 (European Parliament & Council of the European Union, 2022), can be traced back to article 212 TFEU, which states that "the Union shall carry out economic, financial and technical cooperation measures, including assistance, in particular financial assistance, with third countries other than developing countries". However, the institutional implementation process of the MFA+ has not

occurred without difficulties. Although it has been approved by the European Parliament and the Council, it is precisely in this last European institution, conceived as the bastion of national sovereignty, where the problems of implementation have manifested themselves (Fabbrini, F., 2023). Indeed, the Commission's proposal on the creation of the MFA+ was hindered and slowed down by the interest of one member state, Hungary, which once again vetoed it, for strictly personal and arbitrary reasons. This prompted the Council to reformulate the original financial structure of the MFA+, which assumed issuance through the EU budget, in preference to the adoption of member state guarantees (Fabbrini, F., 2023). Nevertheless, it is important to reiterate the purely supranational essence of the MFA+ as opposed to the EPF. Indeed, "from a governance viewpoint, the MFA+ regulation vests the key decision-making power in the European Commission... From a financing viewpoint, the MFA+ instrument is based on the issuance of common EU debt, rather than member states' transfer... The supranational dimension of EU common debt, though, is counter-balanced by the intergovernmental left-over of member states' guarantees" (Fabbrini, F., p.55, 2023).

On the basis of the aforementioned, it is possible to trace an interesting dynamic with the adoption of the MFA+, namely a path at EU government level towards the consolidation of a "fiscal capacity" (Fabbrini, F., 2022c). In this regard, the war prompted the member states and European institutions to adopt a precise supranational funding mechanism, MFA+, which bears similarities to the measures used during the pandemic period, in particular the Temporary Support to Mitigate Unemployment Risks in an Emergency (SURE) and the NGEU. Indeed, "the MFA+ scheme tracks SURE, to the extent that both mechanisms rely on member states' guarantees to empower the Commission to issue EU common debt. Moreover, like SURE, the MFA+ provides loans rather than grants. At the same time, the MFA+ also draws from the example of NGEU and specifically the Recovery and Resilience Facility" (Fabbrini, F., pp.55-56, 2023). Therefore, in order to respond to the geostrategic danger triggered by the war in Ukraine, the EU, inspired by the political models adopted in the pandemic, tried to transcend the intergovernmental brakes that slowed down its ability to act in the face of crises. In parallel to the EPF, dedicated to the financing of lethal weapons to Ukrainian militias and dependent on member states, the Parliament and Council authorised the Commission to issue joint debt on behalf of the EU via the MFA+ to support the government of President Volodymyr Zelenskyy. This only confirms that in some ways, sudden external shocks remain an important driver of European integration, in this case fiscal, gradually inducing more structured supranational interaction (Fabbrini, F., 2023).

Nevertheless, the road to the consolidation of a European fiscal capacity remains fraught with institutional and governance issues that undermine the EU's ability to act as a cohesive actor. Indeed, the work of the EU still remains hampered by a range of constitutional constraints, which undermine

the development of a durable fiscal capacity (Fabbrini, F., 2023). These constraints limit the EU's ability to raise fiscal resources and mobilise them when needed, as the dictates of article 41(2) TFEU prevent expenditure with military implications, and thus outside the MFF, from being charged to the EU budget. Moreover, a further constraint is the intergovernmental governance. As already stated in chapter one, the CFSP and CSDP are ontologically intergovernmental policies and "supranational institutions like the European Parliament and the Commission have hardly a role and decision-making power is fully vested in the member states in the Council and European Council. These arrangements however constantly subject EU actions to member states' vetoes, and, as a result, the EU has so far punched well below its weight in foreign relations" (Fabbrini, F., p.57, 2023). This intergovernmental structure has also influenced decisions in the area of public funding. In fact, the member states only and exclusively by unanimity approve the MFF and this provides fertile ground for certain countries to act as "*franchi tiratori*", allowing them to use, indeed, instrumentalise the veto to their own advantage. This was indeed the case with Hungary, which, for idiosyncratic reasons, vetoed a crucial aspect of the MFA+.

Although these constraints limit the EU's ability to act more effectively, it is nevertheless important to emphasise the Union's attempt to transcend monolithic intergovernmental thinking. These efforts and developments in integration are fundamental for the realisation of a Defence Union, conceived as a process that aims at a gradual integration of common defence capabilities, where financing through common debt remains crucial for its realisation. As will be elaborated in the subsequent section, the path towards the full implementation of a Defence Union remains complex and fraught with obstacles: constitutional reforms could be useful for its materialisation. Despite this, it is nevertheless encouraging to note the presence of progress in this direction. These advances not only demonstrate a renewed commitment to the goal of a common defence, reflecting aspirations for a more integrated approach, but also underline the willingness of supranational entities to take a more active role in areas traditionally dominated by intergovernmental dynamics. This willingness constitutes an important element in achieving strategic autonomy and enhancing the EU's capacity to act.

Further efforts in this direction are represented by the EDIRPA, ASAP, EDIS and EDIP initiatives, which symbolise major turning points not only in the field of security integration but also in that of the European defence industry, thus in industrial integration. These initiatives help to equip the EU with useful tools and capabilities, contributing to its initial and gradual evolution into a security actor. By boosting the production and procurement of defence resources internally, these initiatives strengthen the material autonomy of strategic autonomy. Through collaborative projects and joint procurement agreements, these projects aim to create a unified approach to defence challenges,

thereby not only improving response efficiencies but also fostering a deeper industrial base capable of sustaining long-term defence and security needs. These advances mark a significant step towards realizing the EU's ambition of achieving a robust, self-reliant defence mechanism that underpins its strategic autonomy on the global stage. "The war in Ukraine has also impacted on the EU industrial policy strategy, leading to a rethink of the role of public intervention in the economy in pursuance of geo-strategic priorities" (Fabbrini, F., pp.68-69, 2024).

In general, the aetiology of these proposals stemmed from an analysis of defence investment shortfalls with the aim of promoting new measures to strengthen the defence industrial and technological base in Europe. Moreover, this analysis arose from the need to respond to two closely related factors that help to understand how the war in Ukraine revealed not only a decline in arsenals but also a limited military capability among the member states of the European project. The first, more strategic, concerns the reduction in defence spending due to the post-Cold War climate of peace; the second, more operational, concerns the duplication and waste of military resources due to poor coordination among member states (Fabbrini, F., 2024). This analysis on the shortcomings of European defence came immediately after the meeting of key European and national leaders in Versailles in March 2022, which, as seen above, also laid the conceptual foundations for the adoption of the Strategic Compass. A particular aspect to examine is that this analysis was not carried out following an intergovernmental logic, but rather the "heads of state and government tasked the Commission and the EDA to put forward new proposals to strengthen European defence considering the pressing security situation" (Håkansson, p.13, 2024). Thus, at a time of crisis generated by the return of war, the member states asked "the 'EU level' and the institutions to 'do more'" (Håkansson, p.13, 2024). In May 2022, the Commission then presented the results of its analysis highlighting the need to increase European collaboration projects and joint procurement (European Commission, 2022d). Furthermore, these reflections were perceived as a push towards integration as they introduced the opportunity for joint procurement of materials (Håkansson, 2024).

These developments catalysed the creation of the European Defence Industry Reinforcement Through Common Procurement Act (EDIRPA), proposed by the Commission in June 2022 and approved by the two co-legislators in the summer of 2023. This short-term instrument, intended to run from 2024 to 2025, is designed to strengthen the European Defence Technological and Industrial Base (EDTIB). In this regard, the EDIRPA, established by the Regulation 2023/2418 with legal basis in article 173 TFUE, encourages collaborative defence procurement among Member States, with the aim of coordinating and securing urgently needed essential defence products, in particular to enhance the European defence response to the Russian threat (European Parliament & Council of the European Union, 2023a). The EDIRPA not only represents an attempt to reinvigorate the EU defence industry

through joint procurement but also the Commission's first effort to assist Member States in arms procurement. The added value of this instrument lies in the fact that it goes beyond mere coordination and harmonisation, opting for an economic incentive for cooperation through the allocation of European funds (Miglio et al., 2024). Margarethe Vestager, Executive Vice President, stated that "the proposal for the EDIRPA Regulation is a historical milestone in establishing the EU Defence Union, increasing the security of EU citizens and making the EU a stronger partner for our allies" (European Commission, 2022e). In detail, this defence instrument, supported by the European budget, has allocated around EUR 310 million to promote joint procurement in three key areas: munitions, air and missile defence, as well as the replacement of existing platforms and systems. In summary, this instrument has contributed to the "industrial rehabilitation" of the EU (Fiott, 2023) and is part of the European legal framework regulating the defence industry of the member states and, more specifically, defence procurement (Miglio et al., 2024). However, it should be pointed out that the approval of the EDIRPA was complicated by member states slowing down the negotiations (Biscop, 2024). Indeed, "one of the most significant reasons why the process has been both prolonged and watered down from the original Commission proposal is due to the divergent interests, strategic cultures, and threat perceptions of the member states" (Håkansson, p.13, 2024).

Closely linked to EDIRPA's strategic, institutional and industrial dynamics is the Act in Support of Ammunition Production (ASAP), which enables the EU to tackle a more challenging geo-strategic landscape through a supranational approach (Fabbrini, F., 2024). Established in June 2023 by the Regulation 2023/1525 (European Parliament & Council of the European Union, 2023b), the purpose of ASAP is to "ramp up production capabilities of the EU defence industry. In a novel foray in the field of industrial defence, the EU will accelerate the delivery of ground-to ground and artillery ammunitions, as well as missiles, which are needed by Ukraine on the battlefield, funding for the first time ever with EU money ammunitions' production and procurement" (Fabbrini, p.68, 2024). Within the complex mosaic of European defence, ASAP represents a key piece in advancing European integration in this field of high politics, increasingly responding to the need for a more integrated response to the return of the logic of power on European soil. The genesis of this initiative can be traced back to the tripartite approach (Council of the European Union, 2023) announced by the Council in March 2023. The first phase (Track 1) included the invitation to member states to urgently deliver munitions and missiles on the ground; the second phase (Track 2) envisaged the joint procurement of 155mm munitions and missiles, where necessary, within a set deadline; finally, the third phase (Track 3) consisted of presenting concrete proposals to expand the European defence industry's production capacities, improve supply chains and facilitate more efficient procurement procedures also by using the European budget. Subsequently, in May 2023, the Commission put

forward a proposal for the ASAP as a supplement to the EDIRPA, which only came into force in June 2023. The ASAP embodies precisely the industrial ambitions of Track 3, offering an example of a particularly strong synergy between CSDP objectives and industrial policy instruments (Miglio et al., 2024). As stated in the article 5 of the Regulation 2023/1525, "the financial envelope for the implementation of the Instrument for the period 25 July 2023 to 30 June 2025 shall be EUR 500 million in current prices" to support the European sector in enhancing its capacity for ammunition manufacture and preparedness. The legal basis of the ASAP can be found in the articles 114 and 173 TFUE. The latter, also used for the EDIRPA initiative, allowed direct intervention in the defence industry, far beyond traditional research and development activities, by also financing the production and procurement of munitions. These developments reflect a commitment by the EU to mobilise resources and expertise to respond quickly to urgent crises, an approach similar to that adopted to address economic and health challenges during the Covid-19 pandemic with the NGEU initiative (Fabbrini, F., 2024). Thus, these changes confirm the complexity and flexibility of the EU system of competences outlined in the TFEU, which allows the EU institutions to adapt and act according to the principles of subsidiarity and proportionality in response to changing circumstances. Furthermore, an institutionally relevant aspect of the ASAP is that it does not collide with the dictates of article 42(1) TEU, which prohibit expenditure arising from security/defence operations to be financed from the European budget. On the contrary, ASAP circumnavigates this dynamic because "regulation (EU) 2023/1525 is focused on defence production, which entails the development of the capabilities, not defence operations, which rather concerns the deployment of these capabilities. However, through its internal market and industrial policy competences the EU has taken an inroad into the domain of military capabilities - which so far remained essentially a purview of the Member States, either separately or jointly. In fact, ASAP goes beyond the purely intergovernmental mechanisms ... by providing a truly supranational solution to the defence industrial challenges posed by the war in Ukraine" (Fabbrini, F., p.80, 2024). Therefore, the EU, by playing the market card (Brandão & Camisão, 2022), has sought to penetrate traditionally intergovernmental spheres in this way, thereby strengthening its role. In light of this, the ASAP "contributes to strengthening the EU's role in building common defence capabilities, and can be seen as a positive step towards developing a real EU defence union" (Fabbrini, F., p.80, 2024). Although ASAP represents a significant advance towards greater European defence and security integration, there are a number of weaknesses that limit its scope, such as financial sustainability. As a matter of fact, the ASAP's budget (of EUR 500 million for two years), compared to the other instruments used, is rather low, representing approximately 0.04% of the MFF (Fabbrini, F., 2024). Furthermore, the ASAP shows weaknesses in its final regulation compared to the Commission's original proposal. The original proposal included potentially strong mechanisms,

such as the possibility for the Commission to issue priority orders that would have obliged defence industries to produce specific goods on demand. However, these capabilities were removed in the final version of the regulation, thus limiting ASAP's effectiveness in directly guiding defence industrial production (Fabbrini, F., 2024). These changes reflect the existing tensions between European sovereignty goals and practical defence capabilities, showing the structural challenges related to CFSP and CSDP policies, industrial policy and EU fiscal resources.

The last two relevant initiatives in European defence and security integration concern the European Defence Industry Programme (EDIP) and the European Defence Industrial Strategy (EDIS). Both the EDIP and EDIS represent a kind of extension of the two legislative initiatives seen above, as they aim to further consolidate the European defence industrial and technological base (Scazzieri, 2024). Both the initiatives were released by the Commission on 5 March 2024, only that the EDIS was released through a joint communication (European Commission, 2024c), classic soft law practice, while the EDIP through a proposal for a regulation (European Commission, 2024d), ergo a practice of hard law. Furthermore, the EDIP represents the long-term evolution of the short-term ambitions of the EDIRPA (Fiott, 2023), as it extends these initiatives by focusing not only on strengthening defence production, but also on integrating a common approach to defence procurement. This programme aims to establish a common defence procurement system, promoting uniformity and synergy among EU member states. The aim of the EDIP and EDIS is to overcome existing fragmentation in the European defence market by better coordinating procurement policies and contributing to a more strategic and optimised management of European defence resources. Thus, the EDIP and EDIS are two key initiatives for achieving strategic autonomy, as they aim to intensify defence and security integration. Both instruments focus on harmonising defence capabilities through joint research and development projects, with the aim of minimising dependence on external sources and consolidating a more robust and interconnected European defence industry.

Specifically, the EDIS articulates a defence industrial policy agenda, focusing on the consolidation of the EU's industrial infrastructure and the expansion of its defence production capabilities, while also facilitating cooperation among member states on armament programmes and reducing foreign dependence (Scazzieri, 2024). Similarly, the EDIP supports these objectives by providing financial, approximately EUR 1.5 billion from the EU budget for the period 2025-2027, and regulatory support for defence-related research and development, promoting the joint procurement of defence equipment and aiming to rationalise the defence market within the EU. In addition, the programme offers financial and regulatory incentives for member states to cooperate more. The EDIP is thus designed to increase the competitiveness of the European defence industry and ensure that a greater share of defence procurement is provided within the EU (Scazzieri, 2024). Consequently, "the EDIP is meant

to steer member states on a course where common procurement will be the rule, rather than the exception. In terms of resources, this would ensure that the money invested by the EDF in R&T and R&D is not wasted but results in cooperative armament programmes leading to actual acquisitions by EU member states in the future. The EDIP is therefore meant to lead to a re-balancing of the European defence market in favour of the EDTIB, with the further strategic aim of reducing Europe's strategic dependency" (Maulny, p.19, 2023).

This direction towards a common defence procurement would not only increase efficiency in defence and industrial policies, but also strengthen the EU's strategic autonomy. The consolidation of these initiatives is vital for progress towards a European Defence Union, aiming at an integrated and collective defence that enhances the EU's common security and capacity for strategic action. Furthermore, "it should also be emphasised that the publication of EDIS and EDIP confirms that the Commission and the EEAS are taking a political (market-correcting) rather than an economic (market-making) approach to European public action in the defence industrial sector"(Faure & Zurstrassen, p.9, 2024).

In light of this, both the EDIS and EDIP reflect a more integrated approach to security and defence within the complex European institutional ecosystem. These initiatives thus aim to enhance the EU's strategic autonomy and improve the European defence architecture. Both initiatives encourage European and national actors to engage in collaborative defence projects, a step towards more integrated defence capabilities. By focusing on joint acquisitions and shared defence initiatives, these instruments aim to reduce duplication of effort and costs, improving efficiency and interoperability among EU armed forces. The EDIS and EDIP represent further EU efforts to overcome purely national approaches to defence, thus building a more cohesive and integrated European defence posture and reinforcing a comprehensive security framework for the EU.

2.4 Defence Union: towards strategic autonomy

In the recent political guidelines for the next Commission 2024-2029 presented by Ursula von der Leyen on the occasion of her re-election in July 2024, building a true Defence Union is one of the top priorities for the future of the European project. As stated by the re-elected President of the Commission: "our work in the next five years will be focused on building a true European Defence Union. Member States will always retain responsibility for their own troops, from doctrine to deployment, but there is a lot Europe can do to support and coordinate efforts to strengthen the defence industrial base, innovation and the Single Market" (European Commission, p.13, 2024e). All this confirms the Commission's political and institutional will for a more integrated approach to

European defence. This willingness is also reflected in the creation of a Commissioner for Defence who represents a novelty in the history of the European legislature and who will be entrusted with the task of strengthening the EDTIB and coordinating the development of the Defence Union. The introduction of this new figure in the European institutional landscape marks a shift in the balance between the member states and the Commission, namely between the intergovernmental and Community levels. This gradually contributes to the construction of an autonomous role for the Commission in the defence field, seeking to overcome the logic of the Lisbon Treaty (Marrone, 2024). It is thus a structural change of balance and powers in favour of the Commission, favouring the formation of a unified European defence for a future evolution of the EU into a security actor. The commitment of von der Leyen in promoting this structural transformation represents a step forward in the construction of the Defence Union, as a Defence Commissioner could regain certain previously nationally managed powers and competences in the service of the EU's international activities, including the power to define regulatory criteria. This new configuration confirms the gradual transformation of the EU's international role from an economic to a security actor. Moreover, the Commission's agenda for the next five years expresses the intention to strengthen joint European defence projects, such as the European Air Shield project. According to the re-elected Commission President, this initiative would symbolise the European unity in the field of defence and contribute to the construction of a Defence Union to the EU's security (European Commission, 2024e). The European Air Shield would thus represent a further step in the direction of a common European defence, strengthening the integration process in a traditionally intergovernmental field and contributing to the achievement of strategic autonomy. Indeed, such an initiative would consist of coordinating and optimising the procurement of missile defence systems, thereby improving not only the effectiveness of air defences among member states but also the EU's material autonomy. However, the realisation of such an initiative would require large investments in defence. For this reason, Von der Leyen stated the ambitious project of building a Single Market for Defence services and products, seeking to improve production capacity and promote joint procurement. This reaffirms the Commission's determination to try to insert supranational market logic into purely intergovernmental dynamics. This approach fits into the vision of creating a Defence Union, which would not only represent a qualitative leap forward in terms of military and defence cooperation, but also a strong signal of political and strategic integration at European level useful for achieving strategic autonomy. Through the Defence Union, the EU aims to maximise the effectiveness of shared resources and strengthen the collective security posture against external threats.

In light of this, it can be highlighted that the war in Ukraine (Political Stream) led to a political change, which prompted an increased reconsideration of integration in the field of defence and

security, useful for achieving strategic autonomy.

The war has revitalised interest in this field, not only among the member states, which have increased their military spending, and the European institutions, which have put these issues high on the political agenda. The return of war to the European continent has also deeply influenced civil society. In fact, according to a Eurobarometer released in May 2024, a large majority of European citizens expressed their support for a common defence and security policy, with 77% in favour (European Commission, 2024f). Furthermore, 71% said that strengthening the capability to produce military equipment is essential to strengthen European defence and 69% were in favour of a common foreign policy among member states (European Commission, 2024f). These results show how the European community is increasingly calling for a more integrated approach in the policies governing CSP and this desire is in line with the project of building a Defence Union. This underlines the importance of overcoming idiosyncratic national interests, pushing to think more in terms of "union" rather than division, thereby seeking to strengthen the EU's collective resilience.

Based on what has been said so far, it is possible to trace a whole series of elements that are fundamental to building a Defence Union. One of these is the presence of a common threat assessment. Indeed, "in a defence union, capabilities (civilian and/or military) are built up on the basis of a shared threat assessment. The member states can then prioritise their use of resources as is needed in order to counter this threat... the question of a common strategic culture is more important for a defence union than it is for policy-based flexible integration. Strategic culture is held to set the framework for when and where military capabilities can be used" (Britz, p.219, 2023). In this context, the Strategic Compass, deeply influenced by the war in Ukraine, represents the most recent attempt at the creation of a common strategic culture. Despite the presence of this narrative, the Union's foreign and defence policy "continues to be hampered by varying threat perceptions and strategic priorities... Some European nations have clearly signalled their lack of appetite for a wider confrontation with Moscow or to risk an escalation (Ratti, p.83, 2023). Although the Compass presents a number of problems related to the concept of strategic cacophony and intergovernmental dynamics, it nevertheless constitutes a development towards the realisation of a Defence Union, as it offers strategic direction to the Union and catalyses the focus on defence, military mobility and joint procurement.

Closely linked to a common strategic vision for the creation of a Defence Union is the presence of common resources. The latter "should be available not only in the form of capabilities, but also in the form of budgetary resources for joint procurement as well as for research and development. This means that a defence union... is jointly funded by all member states. The financing can take the form

of a common defence budget, or the member states may defray the costs after they have occurred according to pre-determined rules" (Britz, p.220, 2023). As seen in the previous pages, in order to respond to the challenges posed by the war in Ukraine, a whole series of initiatives have been implemented that have contributed not only to increasing the defence integration process, but also to promoting the Union's fiscal and industrial integration. For example, the MFA+, which was used to somewhat bypass the EPF (which in any case constitutes an unprecedented initiative in the history of European integration), is a financial instrument of a supranational nature with which the EU helped the Ukrainian government, slowly tracing the path towards 'fiscal capacity' (Fabbrini, F., 2023). Through the MFA+, the Commission was able to issue joint debt over the transfer of member states: however, the MFA+ was counterbalanced by the intergovernmental mechanism of member state guarantees. Moving on, security initiatives such as the EDIRPA, ASAP, EDIS and EDIP, financed by the European budget, aim to use a joint procurement system to strengthen the European defence industry. These programmes are essential steps to promote integration in the defence sector, crucial for the development of a Defence Union and strategic autonomy (Britz, 2023). Furthermore, it is interesting to note that these initiatives in a way go in the direction outlined by article 24 TEU, that is, towards a "progressive framing of a common defence policy that might lead to a common defence". Thus, constitutionally, the Treaty grants the EU the possibility of creating a Defence Union (Britz, 2023). However, complicating matters on a practical level are the intergovernmental logics of the EU's founding Treaties, which limit the full efficiency of these instruments. Specifically, the Treaties prohibit expenditures related to operations with military or defence consequences from being financed through the Union budget, thereby preventing the Commission from purchasing weapons directly.

In light of this, Britz defines a Defence Union as "a cooperative arrangement in the area of defence that shows a clear chain between (a) a common threat assessment, (b) a political will to act based on that assessment, (c) an ensuing strategic direction, (d) a development of capacities to deal with the threat, and (e) a determination to use such capacities if necessary. Furthermore, all of these steps require clearly established rules for joint decision-making. Individual member states cannot exercise a veto. Moreover, in the case of the EU, a defence union would necessitate a clear view on where its capabilities are to be used, and what its relationship to NATO is to be. Such a defence union cannot be dependent on other countries or organisations to make decisions on or draw on its capabilities" (Britz, p.233, 2023). However, the EU has not yet fulfilled all these characteristics, it has not yet forged a real defence union. On the contrary, the Russian aggression in 2022 and the consequential return of power logic have intensified certain union-type characteristics: indeed, "the war in Ukraine has shown that the union both has the ability and the willingness to use these capabilities" (Britz,

p.233, 2023). Although the war enhanced the material and political dimensions of strategic autonomy, the road to a complete and effective Defence Union, capable of strengthening the EU's capacity for action and ensuring a strategically autonomous future, is still a long one.

As seen in the previous pages, intergovernmental governance, dominated by unanimity and vetoes, and the limited resources and financial powers of some EU defence instruments have heavily influenced the coherence and effectiveness of the Union's foreign and defence policy. Although there have been developments in European integration, the concrete implementation of foreign and security policies has often been complicated, as among the dilemmas the EU faced during the war period was the difficult balance between the different positions of its members and the resulting competition between various power centres in Brussels. These factors contributed to a consensus process that developed slowly and often failed to respond adequately to intricate geopolitical challenges (Taylor, 2023). For this reason, although the EU responded very quickly to Russian aggression in the beginning, it then found it difficult to operate coherently and effectively in the long term: the EU has been able to react but still struggles to act. The current institutional structure of the EU has greatly strengthened the powers of national heads of government, who have taken advantage of the instruments granted by the Treaties to paralyse and slow down EU initiatives. The war in Ukraine reconfirmed the nature of the Council as a diplomatic arena where any member state can veto, thus slowing down crisis response. These intergovernmental mechanisms have contributed to the lack of unity in EU foreign and security policy, leading to fragmented collective action and reducing the institutional autonomy of the EU.

As discussed earlier, during the Russian-Ukrainian conflict, Hungary's use of vetoes disrupted the consistency and speed of the EU sanctions regime. This action undermined the effectiveness of the various sanction packages and delayed military support to Ukraine. Furthermore, in the UN multilateral forum, Hungary used its veto power to block an EU proposal to involve the UN Human Rights Council. The proposal aimed at appointing a special rapporteur to investigate and report on human rights violations in Russia. This veto effectively prevented the EU's collective diplomatic efforts to address these violations internationally. Furthermore, Orbán's Hungary has repeatedly used the veto and threatened to use it to block military aid (e.g. by preventing the reimbursement of arms expenditures provided to Ukraine for almost a year in the context of the EPF), humanitarian and financial aid (e.g. by blocking an EUR 18 billion financial aid package) by attempting to pressure the EU into releasing certain previously suspended EU funds. These funds had been suspended in response to EU concerns about the erosion of the rule of law and thus the weakening of democracy in Budapest. In addition, Hungary also opposed a declaration shared by European leaders promising unwavering support for the Ukrainian government and repeatedly questioned Ukraine's future EU

membership, asking the European Council President Charles Michel to remove this item from the political agenda of the December 2023 Council meeting. Immediately after the December summit, Orbán then vetoed the more imminent EUR 50 billion support package, forcing the 27 leaders to meet again and thus slowing down negotiations. In addition, Budapest also tried to slow down the implementation of the agreement to use the profits from billions in frozen Russian assets to finance arms purchases for Ukraine. Only recently, in July 2024, the EU managed to initiate this procedure by transferring EUR 1.5 billion from frozen Russian assets to support Ukraine. Through the excessive use of vetoes, Hungary managed to hold the decision-making process and thus the EU's response to the war in Ukraine in check. Therefore, this conflict demonstrated "just how detrimental the unanimity requirement is to the EU's capacity to act" (Koenig, p.2, 2022). It should be underlined that Hungary's unilateral actions were constitutionally made possible by the current institutional architecture of the EU, which leaves the almost exclusive management of CSPs to the intergovernmentalism of the member states. Indeed, as seen in the first chapter, most EU governance rules related to the sphere of high politics are subject to the monolithic logic of unanimity. This implies that any action must receive the constant assent of all 27 EU members in the Council and the European Council. Consequently, each national government has the power to exercise its right of veto, thus being able to prevent the advancement of common initiatives. Therefore, this type of intergovernmental decision-making process, based on unanimity and vetoes, slows down the evolution of an effective and cohesive Defence Union, significantly hindering the path towards a full strategic autonomy, which is crucial for the EU to act decisively and independently on the international stage. This system of seeking consensus among all member states tends to generate protracted and often inconclusive decision-making dynamics, where the need to accommodate each country's reservations can dilute the strength and coherence of adopted policies. Moreover, dependence on unanimous agreement for foreign and security policy decisions severely limits the EU's agility in positioning itself as an autonomous and influential entity on the global stage, often leaving the Union in a reactive rather than proactive position. These obstacles, inherent in the Council's intergovernmental decision-making system, erode the concept of collective sovereignty, undermining the EU's ability to develop an integrated defence strategy and exercise fully realised strategic autonomy.

Furthermore, another factor to consider for the development of the Defence Union and the achievement of strategic autonomy was NATO's presence in the Russian-Ukrainian conflict, which highlighted the EU's strategic dependence on the alliance. This dependence manifested itself particularly in military decisions, where NATO was more responsive than the EU. This context highlighted the need for the EU to develop greater political and industrial autonomy in order for it to

emerge as a decisive player in future global crises. The Russian-Ukrainian conflict has thus revived the political debate on the inadequacy of the EU's military capabilities, caused by underinvestment and the disintegration of national defence interests (Ratti, 2023). This once again confirmed NATO's central role as the bulwark of European security, while the EU struggled to fill its own defence gaps. In this respect, with the war in Ukraine, the attention of some member states towards NATO increased considerably. Indeed, both Finland and Sweden, which have historically taken a neutral stance, changed their defence stance and applied to join NATO: Finland became a member of the Alliance on 4 April 2023 and Sweden on 7 March 2024. Therefore, this scenario has exacerbated the difficulties in increasing defence cooperation between member states, despite an increase in defence spending. In the face of the persistent Russian threat, the EU found itself inadequate to manage security crises on its own, remaining anchored to significant support from NATO, ergo the United States, and unable to effectively bridge the divisions between member states exploited in the defence field. Thus, "the war has made it evident that when it comes to deterrence and defence, NATO is clearly the indispensable organisation for European security. It is through NATO's military structures that most European states organise their collective defence and allied armed forces get used to operating together effectively. While the EU is gradually stepping out of its previous role as a crisis manager, its contribution to Euro-Atlantic security continues to be hampered, however, by a number of shortcomings" (Ratti, p.85, 2023). This confirms that, even with an active conflict on the continent, member states have not yet fully exploited the potential of a consolidated European defence and that they have relied on the support of an organisation outside the Union for many decisions.

Although the war in Ukraine created a new political context which gave new impetus to the construction of a Defence Union with a new strategic culture, common defence capabilities and joint procurement (Tocci, 2018), all elements important fort the goal of strategic autonomy, the war also exposed the weaknesses of the European institutional system in dealing with international crises in a coherent and effective manner. Moreover, the war saw the emergence of the Commission, a supranational body, as a genuine geopolitical actor, becoming more influential in the security and defence sphere (Håkansson, 2024). Indeed, "the Commission has seized on the opportunity of advancing EU policy in the area of common defence procurement. Yet it has only done so with the express consent and direct tasking of the European Council. Clearly, Member State leaders believed that the Commission was the most suitable EU institution to deal with a collective challenge such as common defence procurement, and that no single EU Member State could solve this challenge it on its own. In this sense, Russia's war on Ukraine has not only exposed the costs of fragmentation in Europe's defence market, but it has provided a political impetus to organise defence procurement at the Union level" (Fiott, p.455, 2023). However, the war did not lead to a centralisation of foreign and

defence policy and thus there was no effective transfer of powers to supranational bodies (Genschel et al., 2023). On the contrary, the war has strengthened the power of the member states that continue to remain the main decision makers of policies sensitive to national sovereignty. Unanimity and vetoes still dictate the rules of EU foreign, defence and security policy, and the war in Ukraine demonstrated how profoundly these mechanisms can affect the EU's responsiveness and effectiveness in responding to international crises.

In light of this, it is interesting to note how the dichotomous nature of the EU still influences integration, especially in times of war (Genschel et al., 2023), and how the development of these policies has been driven by both the supranational and intergovernmental levels. "In the end, the integration outcome is controlled by both the supranational entrepreneurship and the overall political will of the member states" (Håkansson, p.14, 2024). Based on these considerations, the construction of a European Defence Union assumes a very important strategic relevance but simultaneously reveals the inherent complexity in balancing supranational aspirations with national prerogatives. Many of the pillars for the design of a Defence Union are in place (Britz, 2023), but the persistent tension between intergovernmental requirements and the desire for a shared defence policy shed light on the ontological dilemma the EU faces in the evolution of its security architecture: in perspective, this makes the achievement of strategic autonomy very complicated. The dynamics of decision-making during the war in Ukraine highlighted not only the limitations of the current system, but also the urgent need for a more integrated and coordinated European response capability.

The realisation of a federal Defence Union is a difficult project to realise in the short term, especially in light of all the constitutional weaknesses that afflict the EU (Britz, 2023). A federal union remains an ambitious chimera for the time being. However, it is important to emphasise the presence of certain elements from the perspective of a federal EU. For example, the existence of numerous security initiatives that allocate an EU budget for capability development, defence research: this therefore presupposes financial burdens that must be borne by all member states (Britz, 2023). Next, another aspect of a federal nature is the increased interest in the creation of joint capabilities and areas of high military specialisation: the aim is thus to strengthen integration in European defence through a better optimisation of resources (Britz, 2023). A further aspect is the focus on EU territorial defence through initiatives such as the Action Plan on Military Mobility 2.0, which derives from the narrative proposed by the Strategic Compass. "Put differently, an EU engaged in territorial defence-in which the member states share capabilities, and which is financed from a budget to which they all contribute-begins to resemble a federal union. Granted, such an arrangement is not a federal union in the traditional sense, but rather a union with federal elements. Nevertheless, the outline of a federal union is becoming evident" (Britz, p.236, 2023).

In order to utilise the full potential of the Defence Union and be closer to achieving strategic autonomy, constitutional reforms could be useful. Therefore, a change of the European institutional architecture could be helpful to remedy the problems of foreign and defence policy. In this respect, the war in Ukraine has underlined the need to reform the EU so that it can finally not only react but also act to the unstable developments in the international system. But what are the main policy proposals for improving the EU's capacity for action in foreign and defence policy and how would they help the achievement of strategic autonomy? The task of the third chapter, concerning the Policy Stream, will be precisely to answer this question, trying to bring to light the main ideas considered for improving the EU's collective resilience and illustrating how these proposals could potentially help the achievement of strategic autonomy.

2.5 Conclusion

In this chapter, the EU's response to the return of war on the continent generated by Russian imperialism towards Ukraine was analysed. It has been observed how certain developments in relations with Russia have contributed to a gradual change in narratives, thereby altering European identity. This is even more evident with the war in Ukraine in 2022, which contributed to the gradual evolution of the EU from an economic to a security actor.

In this context, the EU used a whole range of foreign policy instruments: from classic sanctions to innovative projects that stimulated integration in the field of defence and security. This integration, due to the historical need to respond to the return of power logic, has also encouraged a certain kind of fiscal and industrial integration. The war in Ukraine has thus influenced the process of European integration and catalysed a change within the intricate European institutional architecture. Furthermore, the EU's actions were guided by a new narrative, the Strategic Compass, which introduced a strategic recalibration, aiming for a more coherent approach in defence policy. The Compass sought to harmonise threat perceptions among member states and promote greater collaboration and integration of defence capabilities. Indeed, the link that unites these sections is the intention to adopt a more integrated approach in these areas sensitive to national sovereignty.

However, as examined in the previous pages, although these actions reflect a political shift triggered by the war (Political Stream), they also reveal several structural vulnerabilities. These weaknesses have exposed the inherent limits of European foreign and security policy (Problem Stream), which remains bound to monolithic intergovernmental logics and makes European governance less able to operate efficiently. In this context, the EU managed to react, but as seen, struggled to act as Orbán's vetoes, limited fiscal capacity, dependence on unanimous consensus and

divergent interests among member states hindered a coherent and effective response.

Despite all these limitations, the war in Ukraine revitalised defence issues and laid the foundations for a Defence Union, prompting the EU institutions to reconsider and strengthen common instruments such as joint planning and defence procurement. These efforts were important for advancing the material and political dimensions of strategic autonomy because the promoted a more integrated approach to defence and security, which is critical in responding to external threats efficiently and effectively. These elements were a strategic response to the fragmentation of defence capabilities in the member states, which has led to inefficiencies and increased costs in the past. By streamlining these processes, the EU would aim to improve interoperability among national armed forces and harness collective bargaining power in the acquisition of defence technologies and services. This approach would not only strengthen the EU's defence posture but also reduce its dependence on external powers, thereby increasing its ability to act independently in international affairs. Moreover, these developments underline a commitment to a more unified and robust defence strategy, which is fundamental to the EU's ability to project power and protect its interests globally. The integration of these common tools marks a significant step towards achieving the kind of strategic autonomy that could enable the Union to navigate more effectively through the complexities of modern geopolitical scenarios.

In building the Defence Union, the Commission, a supranational body, gained more manoeuvre in an area traditionally controlled by the intergovernmental mindset of the Council. The Commission used the opportunity to promote EU policy, for instance in the area of defence procurement. However, this action was only taken with the formal consent and under a direct mandate from the European Council. Nevertheless, these changes mark a significant step towards the integration of a collective European defence capability.

Nevertheless, the war has not led to the centralisation of foreign defence and security policies, as the constitutional weaknesses of the EU remain: a complete Defence Union with this institutional grammar is not possible. In this context, reforms could be useful to achieve a full and functional Defence Union in the short term and in the long term achieve strategic autonomy. The return of war has not only catalysed greater integration in foreign and defence policy, but also the need to reform and rethink European governance. New ideas are needed to reshape the EU's external dimension more effectively, enabling it not only to react, but also to act proactively. In the next chapter (Policy Stream), an attempt will be made to explore the main policy proposals considered necessary to strengthen EU cohesion and to show how these federalism-oriented ideas could lead to a more distinct strategic autonomy.

3. Policy proposals

3.1 Introduction

The return of great power logic on the European continent has led to important structural developments in the field of defence and security, pushing towards a more integrated approach and laying the foundations for a Defence Union. However, the war in Ukraine has exposed a number of constitutional weaknesses of the EU's institutional architecture, such as decision-making problems, restricted financial means in sustaining a unified response and a lack of supranational competence in areas that define the EU's strategic posture on the international chessboard. In short, the EU has struggled to have a truly "common" policy in foreign affairs and the proper functioning of European governance has often been constrained by intergovernmental processes and mindsets. Therefore, "EU action fell short of expectations of a global player in a number of dimensions, proving either ineffective or watered-down by the need for compromise" (Fabbrini, F., p.15, 2022a). The war has amplified the echo of these problems, making them more visible in the eyes not only of European and national leaders, but especially of civil society. The prospect of greater European solidarity and a more coordinated collective response to global challenges has become a necessity to protect the future of the European project. The Russian aggression towards Ukraine has therefore catalysed the urgency to reconsider European governance in order to improve its effectiveness and legitimacy, fostering the capacity to act rather than merely react. In this regard, many solutions have been put forward and most of them move in a federal direction, with greater integration in foreign policy and more intervention by supranational institutions in CSP-related areas.

The aim of this third chapter (Policy Stream) will be to analyse the main policy proposals developed during the conflict in Ukraine, trying to understand what institutional changes were considered necessary for the EU to respond more effectively to the growing threats of international disorder. The policy proposals selected in the chapter derive from official institutional sources such as the European Parliament and the Conference on the Future of Europe (CoFoE), as well as statements and reports by eminent European figures. These sources offer valuable insights into the strategic directions taken at the highest levels of European governance, highlighting the institutional orientation towards strengthening the EU's strategic autonomy. From the analysis of these proposals, it is possible to trace elements that could theoretically bring the EU closer to strategic autonomy. With a Defence Union unconstrained by current constitutional problems, such as limited fiscal capacity and unanimity decision-making, the EU could establish itself as a powerful autonomous actor. However, the realisation of such a metamorphosis is constrained by the presence of a strong political will and trust between the member states and the European institutions. The ideas considered

in this Policy Stream reflect the increased importance of the securitarian dimension of the Political Stream and are deeply influenced by the war in Ukraine.

In this regard, section 3.2 will focus on the European Parliament's recommendations on foreign, security and defence policy in the light of the war in Ukraine, which push for more action at the Union level and for the realisation of a Defence Union. Subsequently, section 3.3 will introduce the CoFoE, an innovative transnational participatory democratic exercise. Section 3.3.1 will deal with the reform proposals of CoFoE, with a particular focus on issues related to foreign policy, security and the EU's institutional, decision-making and fiscal design. In section 3.4, the call for federalism will be analysed in light of the issues that emerged during the Ukraine conflict. Section 3.4.1 will analyse the federalist perspectives developed by citizens, and Section 3.4.2 will examine those of politicians. The fact that federalism has been invoked as a possible solution to address the constitutional and securitarian problems highlighted by the return of the logic of power highlights how certain ideas could help the achievement of a major material, political and institutional autonomy, in short strategic autonomy. Section 3.5 will provide a general overview of the report on the future of European competitiveness drafted by Mario Draghi, highlighting its potential for the achievement of strategic autonomy. Section 3.5.1 will focus on the report's proposals to strengthen the EU's defence and security dimension in which Draghi stresses the need for greater integration between industries and the use of common debt. Section 3.5.2 will explore the report's policy proposals aimed at restructuring EU governance to establish a constitutional framework that more effectively enhances the Union's capacity for action.

3.2 Recommendations of the European Parliament

Four months after the Russian aggression against Ukraine, the European Parliament on 8 June 2022 proposed a set of recommendations to the Council and the High Representative on how to improve EU foreign, security and defence policy in light of the return of war to European soil. This list of recommendations, which passed with 438 votes in favour, 65 against and 94 abstentions, aimed to reiterate support for Ukraine's territorial integrity and strengthen the EU's strategic posture, calling for greater European integration in these policies.

In clause (a), the Parliament stressed the need to materially, financially, militarily and humanitarianly assist Ukraine and to prepare for the post-war reconstruction of the country. Subsequently in clause (b), Parliament recommended to "make genuine progress in foreign policy and defence cooperation at Union level, as expressed in the Versailles Declaration and the Council's conclusions of 24 and 25 March 2022" (European Parliament, p.8, 2022b). This underlines the need for greater EU involvement in foreign and defence policy: in short, this recommendation conceals a

federal desire for gradual integration in dynamics and areas mainly relegated to the member states.

In clause (d), the Parliament suggested the introduction of the "qualified majority voting for certain foreign policy areas, as already provided for in the Treaties, for example the adoption of EU personal sanctions regimes, and … to extend qualified majority voting to foreign policy in the Council, in order to increase the effectiveness of EU foreign policy" (European Parliament, p.8, 2022b).

Particularly important is clause (f), in which the Parliament urged the European institutions and the member states to "make swift progress in establishing a defence union with more ambitious short-, medium- and long-term objectives by implementing the concrete actions laid down in the Strategic Compass, which would serve as a starting point for implementing common EU defence, in line with the provision laid down in Article 42(2) TEU" (European Parliament, p.8, 2022b). The emphasis on building a Defence Union and a genuine European defence highlights the aspiration for greater integration in these areas sensitive to national sovereignty and thus a federal desire for a common security and shared defence policy. The creation of a Defence Union would mark a fundamental step towards the progressive institutionalisation of a truly European defence policy, turning the EU into a security actor.

Moving on, in clause (h) the European Parliament proposed the establishment of an EU defence minister council and in the subsequent clause (i) it recommended to "make the Union's strategic autonomy an overarching aim in all areas and a fundamental and holistic approach to its foreign, security and defence policy and external action, to give it the ability to act alone when needed and with partners when possible and therefore enable it to play an important role on the international stage" (European Parliament, p.8, 2022b). This indicates the Parliament's intention to strengthen the Union's ability to act without being strategically and logistically dependent on the support of foreign actors. However, this could only be achieved by overcoming the brakes and institutional limits of foreign policy that have repeatedly led to the fragmentation of communitarian action. Greater integration between the Union and its member states in foreign policy would be essential to achieve a more strategic and comprehensive autonomy. This process would require not only a constitutional reform of the treaties but also a strong and shared political will and trust. Moreover, in clause (m), the European Parliament proposed the launch of "another off-budget financial facility which would address the entire life-cycle of military capabilities at EU level from collaborative R&D and joint procurement to joint maintenance, training and security of supply" (European Parliament, p.9, 2022b).

Concerning the adoption of the Strategic Compass, the Parliament urged in clause (n) to improve intelligence sharing and cooperation between member states, the Union and other countries. In this

clause, the democratic legislative body stressed the fact that the threat analysis, elaborated from the strategic recalibration of the Compass, "should strengthen the Union's strategic culture and provide guidance on prioritising policy objectives in the field of security and defence" (European Parliament, p.9, 2022). In clause (p), the Parliament encouraged the swift implementation of the most crucial aspects of the Strategic Compass, including: the deployment of specific actions to consolidate the resilience of vital infrastructure in the Union; security of supply; the concrete and decisive commitment of Member States to increase defence investment and address capability shortfalls. In addition, the clause pushed for the development of a Union's cyber defence policy (European Parliament, 2022b). In addition, clause (u) proposed the establishment of a fully operational EU military command, which would support the construction of the Defence Union by providing a centralised structure for the coordination and implementation of defence policies (Britz, 2023).

In the direction of strengthening the strategic dimension, the Parliament in clause (v) recommended the establishment of a "joint situational awareness centre, which would be a crucial tool for improving strategic foresight and the Union's strategic autonomy" (European Parliament, p.9, 2022). Furthermore, in clause (w), the Parliament urged to "make full use of EU capability development initiatives, notably the EDF and PESCO, to refill Member States' military stockpiles and enhance the Union's defence capabilities, including air and missile defence, while increasing the efficiency of PESCO" (European Parliament, p.9, 2022b).

Regarding the recommendations on parliamentary oversight, clause (ar) proposed to "involve Parliament in the proper further implementation and scrutiny of the European Peace Facility, which is an off-budget instrument; ensure Parliament is meaningfully involved in the scrutiny, implementation and regular review of the Strategic Compass; foster exchanges with national ministers in the European Parliament on topics that are current EU priorities" (European Parliament, p.13, 2022b). Further on, the subsequent recommendations sought to expand the Parliament's powers on budgetary issues in the context of foreign and security policies. To this end, clause (at) aimed to give Parliament "a comprehensive budgetary function in foreign security and defence policy, which Articles 14(1), 16(1) and 41 TEU provide for, in particular for decisions taken pursuant to Articles 42(2), 45 and 46 TEU" (European Parliament, p.13, 2022b). In addition, clause (au) pushed for the consolidation of "fiscal capacity" in the defence field and recommended to "make appropriate assessments of the common financial means of the Union and the instruments needed for a more effective and credible EU security and defence policy, while also supporting the possibilities for synergies with other EU funds, such as complementing the EDF with a joint procurement task force and a joint procurement mechanism, thereby strengthening the security of the EU Member States, and provide adequate security to everyone in the Union" (European Parliament, p.13, 2022b).

As recommendations, they do not have binding power and therefore cannot oblige the Council to implement them. However, what emerges is the need for a more integrated approach in foreign affairs with the aim of stimulating defence and security cooperation also at Union level. In response to the war in Ukraine, the Parliament stressed the creation of a Defence Union that could stimulate the Union's ability to act, for instance through changes in decision-making, institutional, financial and strategic levels. Based on these recommendations, the proposals examined could strengthen the EU's material, political and institutional autonomy, bringing it closer to the ambitious federal goal of a common EU defence, with a common strategic culture, flexible decision-making and common resources. In prospective, this would increase the Union's potential to establish a functional strategic autonomy, strengthening its ability to operate autonomously in the international arena and increasing internal integration among member states.

3.3 The Conference on the Future of Europe

The Conference on the Future of Europe (CoFoE) was an innovative and ambitious deliberative project to expand the European democratic space by giving citizens the opportunity to propose ideas to improve European governance. The CoFoE initiative, launched in May 2021 and concluded in May 2022, was a pioneering bottom-up platform for dialogue between European citizens and the EU institutions. Through this transnational participatory democratic exercise, the CoFoE succeeded not only in identifying the EU's main structural vulnerabilities, but also in outlining possible solutions. The return of war in Europe profoundly influenced the outcome of the Conference, "prompting participants to reflect on how to strengthen the EU in the face of unprecedented geopolitical challenges. The CoFoE charted a route to strengthen the EU by reforming it, including through treaty changes" (Fabbrini, F., p.11, 2022a).

The idea to start such a project can be traced back to French President Emmanuel Macron and Commission President Ursula Von der Leyen in 2019. Their idea was the creation of a democratic forum on a transnational scale to reflect on the future of the European project, with the aim of making proposals that would make Europe more sovereign and geopolitically responsive. Subsequently, the leaders of the three main European institutions (European Parliament, Council and Commission) adopted a Joint Declaration in March 2021, in which the mission and governance of the conference was explained. In the Joint Declaration, it was expressly stated that the "Conference on the Future of Europe will open a new space for debate with citizens to address Europe's challenges and priorities. European citizens from all walks of life and corners of the Union will be able to participate, with young Europeans playing a central role in shaping the future of the European project" (European

Parliament et al., p.1, 2021).

At the organisational level, the architecture of CoFoE presented a multilevel structure, since there were three main macro-levels (Ondarza & Ålander, 2022) The first concerned the public participation and represented the most innovative component of the conference. Indeed, the first level was articulated in a Multilingual Digital Platform, events organised within the Conference framework and citizens' panels at national and European level. The latter, seen as citizens' agora with 200 participants each, were divided thematically into four transversal groups: (1) a stronger economy, social justice, jobs/ education, culture, youth, sport/digital transformation; (2) European democracy/ values and rights, rule of law, security; (3) climate change and the environment/health; (4) EU in the world/ migration (Conference on the Future of Europe, 2022a). The second level was the Plenary of the Conference, an inter-institutional body of 449 members in which the various EU institutions, multiple civil society organisations and members of national Parliaments were represented. The third level was the Executive Board, the holder of the actual decision-making power. The Board consisted of "three Commissioners, three Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) from the main political groups and three representatives from the Council Presidency troika, was tasked by the Joint Declaration to steer the work of the CoFoE" (Fabbrini, F., p.18, 2022a). The three main European institutions, excluding the European Council, were thus involved in the drafting of the final text of the CoFoE, which comprised 49 proposals with a list of 326 recommendations, encompassing all areas of EU policy-making.

3.3.1 Final proposals

Most of the proposals adopted by the CoFoE reflected the desire of European civil society to want "more Europe" not less, more integration and less fragmentation especially when certain international challenges could have been better managed through common and coordinated action. (Editorial Comments, 2022). The CoFoE essentially symbolised a call to develop more effective European solutions and to expand the EU's powers and competences. What emerged from the Conference plenary was the need for a more sovereign and autonomous federal EU (Fabbrini, 2022). Therefore, the ultimate aim of the CoFoE's groundbreaking reforms was to restructure the EU in such a way as to ensure its strategic autonomy (Conference on the Future of Europe, 2022a).

In light of this, this section will examine in detail the recommendations and proposals adopted in the final report concerning the EU's foreign policy, security, institutional and fiscal structure. These thematic areas were chosen following the significant problems that emerged in these fields during the war in Ukraine, thus underlining the urgency of revisiting these areas to ensure the effectiveness of

European action both outside and inside its borders. It should be noted that the final report clearly states that some of the proposals/recommendations can be implemented using the full institutional potential of the treaties. However, many others can only and will only be realised through the introduction of the treaty revision process.

From a fiscal point of view, the CoFoE's ambitious proposals aimed at overcoming institutional weaknesses stemming from the current EU structures. Besides the strengthening of an inclusive labour market (Proposals 13 and 14), the CoFoE advocated to draw examples from supranational instruments such as NGEU and SURE to better finance European action in the face of certain external threats. Indeed, proposal 16 expressly stated that the "EU needs to take into account the social and economic impact of the war against Ukraine and the link between the EU economic governance with the new geopolitical context and by strengthening its own budget through new own resources" (Conference on the Future of Europe, p.60, 2022). Furthermore, recommendation 5 pushed for more "consideration to common borrowing at EU level, with a view to creating more favourable borrowing conditions' (Conference on the Future of Europe, p.60, 2022a). Hence, it is evident how the CoFoE proposals called for more measures of a supranational nature to stimulate the EU's fiscal capacity (Fabbrini, F., 2022d), thus pushing for a more coordinated approach in financing European responses to external threats. This emphasises the idea of greater fiscal integration in the EU, in which own resources, common borrowing and the use of supranational instruments become essential to support the EU's articulated sovereignty. Moreover, these supranational changes could strengthen the operational capabilities of a potential Defence Union. These proposals could improve funding for pan-European defence initiatives through the European budget, thus avoiding duplication and optimising the use of resources. Such an approach would allow a more efficient distribution of funds, focusing on projects with a high strategic value and facilitating the standardisation of defence operations. As a consequence, this would enhance the EU's internal cohesion and actorness as a security agent on the international scene. Therefore, these financial proposals identified by the CoFoE could be important for the realisation of a truly common European defence.

In the field of foreign policy, the CoFoE proposed to reshape the CFSP decision-making system in order to increase the cohesion and capacity for action of the Union and help the achievement of strategic autonomy. In essence, "the CoFoE strongly pushed for a more prominent role of the EU in foreign affairs, security and defence" (Fabbrini, F., p.19, 2022a). Furthermore, a whole series of proposals (for instance proposals 3, 17 and 18) urged the EU to reduce economic and energy dependence on foreign actors, thereby pushing the EU to achieve greater autonomy in these strategic areas. In the proposal 21, the European citizens suggested that the Union should improve "its capacity to take speedy and effective decisions, notably in Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP),

speaking with one voice and acting as a truly global player, projecting a positive role in the world and making a difference in response to any crisis" (Conference on the Future of Europe, p.64, 2022). The initial four recommendations of proposal 21 mapped out the pathway for realising this goal. Recommendation 1 suggested a shift from unanimity to qualified majority voting for decisions within the CFSP. This kind of change in the decision-making process could render European governance in foreign affairs more flexible and less dependent on the intergovernmental logic of reaching unanimous consensus, thus mitigating the effectiveness of member states' arbitrary vetoes and strengthening the EU's institutional autonomy. By removing the pressing need for unanimity, the EU would be able to act more quickly and coherently on the international stage. In this regard, "the extension of qualified majority voting on CFSP issues, including the deployment of CSDP civilian missions in response to crises, would be part of the move towards strategic autonomy, and could also contribute to readiness and effectiveness in this area…In a strategically autonomous EU, effective decision-making regarding global peace must also be backed by consequential and proportionate operational capabilities (Anghel et al., p.39, 2020). That being said, the shift from unanimity to qualified majority is constitutionally provided in the current treaties and can be implemented through the passerelle clauses, introduced with the Lisbon Treaty. The latter are flexibility mechanisms that can reorient the decision-making system of certain policies, including the CFSP, without amending the treaties. In this respect, Article 48(7) TEU states that "where the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union or Title V of this Treaty provides for the Council to act by unanimity in a given area or case, the European Council may adopt a decision authorising the Council to act by a qualified majority". Furthermore, Article 31 TEU specifically addresses the issue in the field of CFSP, stating that the "European Council may unanimously adopt a decision stipulating that the Council shall act by a qualified majority". Despite the presence of these passerelle clauses, which if applied could free foreign policy from the restrictions of unanimity and increase efficiency in crisis responses, they have never been used. Further complexity arises from the paradoxical situation where the decision to adopt qualified majority voting, conceived to circumvent the delays associated with requiring unanimity, necessitates the unanimous agreement of the Council itself. Moreover, article 31 has two limitations that greatly affect the scope of a potential qualified majority: the first is that qualified majority cannot be used for decisions with military or defence implications; the second is that any member state for "vital and stated reasons of national policy" can object decisions taken by qualified majority (Koenig, 2022). That said, the CoFoE ambitiously wanted to extend qualified majority voting in all policy areas dominated by unanimity. By implementing a foreign policy that more closely reflected an approach of collective sovereignty and shared responsibility, the EU would be able to overcome the national divisions and vetoes that had repeatedly led to the silencing of EU action. With a responsive

governance system and greater internal coherence in decision-making, the EU would strengthen its institutional autonomy, moving in the direction of greater strategic autonomy. In this way, collective decisions would prevail over isolated national prerogatives that, as seen in the context of the war in Ukraine, have undermined the EU's ability to act. Moving on, recommendation 2 pushed for security cooperation based on the directives of the Strategic Compass and the use of the EPF. Recommendation 3 proposed strengthening the figure of the High Representative to ensure that the EU speaks with a single, unified voice internationally. Indeed, the problem of the fragmentation of the European voice due not only to the diverging geopolitical interests of member states but also to the multiple power centres in Brussels has always undermined the EU's verbal and strategic coherence in responding to crises. Finally, recommendation 4 reiterated the need for "a strong vision and a common strategy to consolidate the unity and decision taking capacity of the EU in order to prepare the EU for further enlargement" (Conference on the Future of Europe, p.64, 2022a). Thus, the CoFoE proposals "explicitly tackled the governance shortcomings of the EU, calling for reforms of its decision-making processes to enhance Europe's democracy and its capacity to act with one voice, especially in the field of common foreign and security policy" (Fabbrini, F., p.20, 2022a).

In the direction of strengthening the external dimension of the EU, proposals 23 and 24 aimed at making the EU a powerful actor not only in relationship-building and peacekeeping but also in the realm of security.

Proposal 23 postulated a whole series of recommendations to improve common security, for example through "a joint armed forces that shall be used for self-defence purposes and preclude aggressive military action of any kind, with a capacity to provide support in times of crises including natural catastrophes" (recommendation 1) (Conference on the Future of Europe, p.65, 2022a). What emerges, therefore, is the need for a European armed force for the defence of European territory, which the treaties entrust either to the member states or to NATO. As examined above, the emphasis on territorial defence, stimulated by the outbreak of the conflict in Ukraine, manifests a federal character that is essential for the establishment of a Defence Union. Indeed, an EU dedicated to territorial defence, with member states pooling resources and supported by a collective budget and a European army, would tend to gradually evolve towards a federal union-type structure (Britz, 2023). In the longer term, the evolution of a federal-type defence structure could further enhance the strategic autonomy of the EU, contributing to the creation of a more robust and coordinated European security environment. Recommendation 2 went on to emphasise the importance of a leading role for the EU in shaping the international security order, especially in light of the conflict in Ukraine, basing its capacity for action on the recalibration of the Strategic Compass. Recommendation 3 then urged the EU to strengthen and protect research in sensitive fields, such as cybersecurity and space. In addition,

recommendation 4 aimed at "strengthening the operational capabilities necessary to ensure the effectiveness of the mutual assistance clause of Art. 42.7 of the Treaty on European Union, providing adequate EU protection to any member state under attack by a third country" (Conference on the Future of Europe, p.66, 2022a).

In proposal 24, the CoFoE suggested that the EU should "make greater use of its collective political and economic weight, speaking with one voice and acting in a unified way, without individual Member States dividing the Union through inappropriate bilateral responses" (recommendation 1) (Conference on the Future of Europe, p.66, 2022a). As seen in chapter two, the EU has indeed struggled to speak with a single voice, struggling to develop a cohesive and unified capacity to act. The divergent geo-strategic interests of the member states, the different perceptions of the Russian threat and the consequent different perceptions on the development of security countermeasures have indeed influenced the European response during the conflict in Ukraine. In this direction, recommendation 2 stated that the EU should reinforce "its ability to sanction states, governments, entities, groups or organisations as well as individuals that do not comply with its fundamental principles, agreements and laws and ensuring that sanctions that already exist are quickly implemented and enforced" (Conference on the Future of Europe, p.66, 2022a). In the Ukrainian conflict, the unilateral actions of one member state, Hungary, repeatedly jeopardised EU foreign policy through the use or threat of the veto. By exploiting and abusing this intergovernmental "weapon", Hungary slowed down the European response, both in the case of sanctions and defence initiatives. Parallel to the conflict in Ukraine, at the time of writing, Orbán holds the six-month presidency of the Council, and as analysed in chapter one, the Hungarian president's unilateral and uncoordinated actions have negatively affected the EU's external dimension. Therefore, this recommendation reflected the EU's need to sanction states that deviate from the classic European direction based on democratic and liberal principles. Finally, recommendation 8 urged the EU to "develop a more effective and unified policy towards autocratic and hybrid regimes and develop partnerships with civil society organisations in such countries"(Conference on the Future of Europe, p.66, 2022a).

Regarding the proposals aimed at reforming the EU constitutional architecture, most of them postulated a reconfiguration of the Union's institutional design in order to strengthen the effectiveness of European governance and the common European identity (proposal 37). These reforms aimed at greatly increasing the power of supranational institutions, especially the European Parliament, in order to increase transparency and accountability in European governance. In this respect, the proposals intended to strengthen European democracy through a whole series of innovations, seeking to reinforce the link between citizens and the European institutions. These include: the creation of

transnational lists for the election of the European Parliament, thus harmonising electoral conditions among the 27 member states (proposal 38, recommendation 3); the direct election of the president of the Commission (proposal 38, recommendation 4); the right of legislative initiative and decision-making power over the EU budget by the European Parliament (proposal 38, recommendation 4).

Moving on, the CoFoE's proposal 39 reiterated the need to reshape the EU's institutional architecture, starting precisely with a change in the decision-making system. Indeed, recommendation 1 aimed to extend qualified majority voting to all European policies dominated by monolithic unanimity, not just the CFSP, so as to ensure the EU's capacity to act and strengthen transparency. Recommendation 1 therefore asserted the need to re-evaluate the "decision-making and voting rules in the EU institutions, focusing on the issue of unanimous voting, which makes it very difficult to reach agreement, while ensuring a fair calculation of voting "weights" so that small countries' interests are protected; All issues decided by way of unanimity should be decided by way of a qualified majority. The only exceptions should be the admission of new membership to the EU and changes to the fundamental principles of the EU as stated in Art. 2 TEU and the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union" (proposal 39, recommendation 1) (Conference on the Future of Europe, p.83, 2022a). Furthermore, recommendation 3 also advocated changing the names of some European institutions in order to facilitate and fluidify civil society's understanding of the complex functioning of the European ecosystem. For example, recommendation 3 proposed renaming the EU Council, also called the Council of European Ministers but better known only as the "Council", to Senate of the EU in order to avoid terminological confusion with the European Council. In addition, the recommendation proposed renaming the European Commission as the Executive Commission of the EU, thus emphasising its executive nature. Next, recommendation 4 called for an increase in the EU's capabilities in key areas, so as to ensure a more coordinated European response. Through the strengthening and expansion of common capabilities, the EU would move towards a gradually more federal structure, in which decisions and resources would be managed in a more centralised manner. Theoretically, this federal evolution or, rather, metamorphosis could improve the coherence of European responses on the international stage and strengthened the EU's internal and external cohesion. Finally, recommendation 7 of proposal 39 advocated "reopening the discussion about the constitution, where applicable, to help us align better on our values. A constitution may help to be more precise as well as involve citizens and agree on the rules of the decision-making process" (Conference on the Future of Europe, pp.83-84, 2022a). The idea of reformulating the European constitutional project one more time reflected Spinelli's federal spirit of developing a more solid institutional grammar for the European project.

In the light of what has been examined so far, "the proposals of the CoFoE identified the sources

of weaknesses of the current EU – including its limited substantive powers and fiscal means, and its byzantine governance structures – and advanced clear recommendations on how to address these. Undoubtedly, the application of these recommendations requires changes to the EU treaties, as neither the expansion of EU competences nor the revision of the EU decision making processes can occur *à traité constant* (Fabbrini, F., pp.20-21, 2022a). While the war in Ukraine highlighted the EU's dynamism, it also showed a number of structural vulnerabilities due to the Union's current treaties. In this regard, as analysed, the CoFoE emphasised the need for greater European integration through an institutional metamorphosis, giving more powers and competences to European institutions and removing the veto. These ideas ontologically reflect a federal nature, highlighting civil society's desire for a stronger Europe (Fabbrini, F., 2022d). In a certain way, what emerges from the adopted CoFoE proposals, although not manifestly stated, is the call for an institutional revolution with federal characteristics aimed at empowering the EU to become more autonomous and capable of acting in a time of international uncertainty.

3.4 Call to federalism

The structural vulnerabilities of the EU exposed by the war in Ukraine revealed the need for a more integrated approach not only in foreign policy but also in European governance. The war has shaken the institutional and political foundations of the EU and shown how intergovernmentalism, based on the voluntary and consensual coordination of governments, has proved unable to face the consequences of the Russian invasion of Ukraine. (Fabbrini et al., 2023). Indeed, the call for federal-type solutions to mitigate the problems of intergovernmentalism, which has fragmented collective action, reduced the effectiveness of EU initiatives and damaged the unified image of the EU internationally during crisis management, has intensified.

Federalism refers to a theoretical, political and cognitive model that postulates greater integration and cohesion of European policies, especially those classically linked to the sovereignty of member states. Aiming to overcome the decision-making and operational shortcomings of intergovernmental logics, federalism aspires to promote deeper integration and uniform implementation by emphasising a more centralised decision-making process where supranational institutions have more room for manoeuvre on CSP-related policies. According to some scholars, a federal institutional architecture could ensure a faster and more effective response to crises, with a foreign and defence policy that is truly common and reflects an ideal of collective sovereignty. Such a structural framework could ensure more solid foundations for the consolidation of a Defence Union. The latter, financed by a European budget and guided by a common strategic vision and culture, would enhance the EU's

capacity for action and bring the EU closer to the federal objective of a common EU defence, an objective that has been present since the dawn of the European project. A potential federalisation of the EU "might help to promote a kaleidoscopic integration of interests and at the same time to meet the EU's democratic expectations... In view of the multiple challenges the European Union has been facing in recent years, from the COVID-19 pandemic to the rule of law crisis and the Russian aggression of Ukraine, time has come to reform its institutional structure for making the EU a federal union of states and citizens" (Fabbrini, S., p.21, 2022b). Therefore, "federalism should be understood as a means to address better challenges that transcend national borders while promoting democracy and the pluralism of sovereignties within the EU" (Sorbino, 2024). Theoretically, the federal paradigm would seek to overcome centrifugal dynamics among member states worried about losing their sovereign prerogatives through a governance based on a dual separation of powers and checks-and-balances (Fabbrini, S., 2021b). The latter could represent a viable option "for taking decisions in a union of asymmetrical states and differentiated citizens" (Fabbrini et al., p.5, 2023), thus consolidating a balance between the European Parliament and the Council. By means of a system of checks and balances, a truce would be formalised between intergovernmental and supranational institutions in the legislative and decision-making spheres: it should be remembered that the EU is first and foremost a union of citizens and states that can only function if there is institutional stability (Fabbrini et al., 2023).

According to some academics, this structure would limit the expansionist ambitions of the collective, thereby institutionalising a tension between the centre and the states (Fabbrini, S., 2021b). Hence, in order to deal with issues of sovereignty, this federal-matrix system would lead to an increase in the number of policy areas falling within the sphere of self-government (such as the allocation of centralised single market policies) (vertical separation of powers) and to a clear distinction between the institutional entities responsible for policies designated for joint management, (such as military security and fiscal policies) (horizontal separation of powers) (Fabbrini et al., 2023). Therefore, "a federal union can be defined as a sovereign union of sovereign states, in as much as the member states are sovereign on specific policies (self-rule) and the centre is sovereign on other policies (shared rule)" (Fabbrini, S., p. 41, 2021b). In light of this, federalism could constitute an answer "to the historic change induced by the Russian war" (Fabbrini et al., p.5, 2023).

As seen previously, the analysis of the European Parliament's recommendations and the adopted proposals of the CoFoE implicitly reveal federalist ideas, although not explicitly stated as such, postulating greater European integration and EU intervention in foreign, security and defence policy. The need for reform also stemmed from the prospect of EU enlargement, with the inclusion of Ukraine, Moldova and the Western Balkans into the European orbit. However, there are a whole

series of documents and declarations that openly call federalism for the strengthening of integration and the centralisation of competences at EU level. Theoretically, a federal metamorphosis could provide the necessary tools for the achievement of strategic autonomy, enhancing the effectiveness and coherence of the EU's external dimension, with a more cohesive decision-making system and a shared policy (Sorbino, 2024).

In this respect, the construction of a Defence Union would represent a fundamental step in the direction of greater strategic autonomy. However, the EU's current institutional structures have limited the Union's true potential, especially in response to the Russian invasion of Ukraine, where the pressing logic of compromise due to unanimity, paralysis due to vetoes, strategic cacophony and limited financial capacities have affected the coherence of European foreign policy.

In light of this, the federalist framework could offer the tools to overcome these limitations and establish a more effective and unified structure that could make the EU more proactive in global challenges, bringing it closer to the goal of strategic autonomy. A fully developed Defence Union unconstrained by intergovernmental logics could transform the Union into an autonomous and influential security actor. On the basis of the aforementioned, the following sections will examine the clearly federal proposals put forward by citizens and politicians during the conflict and illustrate how these ideas could contribute to the achievement of strategic autonomy. Common denominator is the willingness to reform the European system, including treaty reform, and to strengthen the European integration.

3.4.1 Citizen's federal expectations

Within the CoFoE framework, indeed, some of the citizens' proposals stemming from the Multilingual Digital Platform and national panels, although some were not present in the final proposals, openly called for a greater federalisation of the EU.

Through the Multilingual Digital Platform, a tool designed to facilitate citizen participation and strengthen the European democratic fabric, civil society invoked for a federalisation of the European institutional architecture. The latter was perceived "as the best way forward for the EU to reach its full potential ... but also as a means of giving the EU more credibility and influence in the global political arena and the power to deal with the transnational problems" (Conference on the Future of Europe, p.83, 2022b). This federalist aspiration was also evident in the context of the French national panel, where the desire to unify European political institutions was clearly manifested. Animated by a revolutionary spirit, the French citizens proposed the creation of a federation of states, intended to consolidate and strengthen the competences, both shared and exclusive, of the EU (Conference on

the Future of Europe, 2022b). Considering federalism also as a tool to counter the return of Eurosceptic, nationalist and populist narratives, a large part of the citizens who participated in the CoFoE through the Multilingual Digital Platform called for a constitution for the EU that would embody federal and democratic principles. Such a constitution would establish a common economic and fiscal policy, a European armed force and above all the federalisation of foreign, defence and security policy (Conference on the Future of Europe, 2022b). This institutional reconfiguration, achievable only through a revision of the treaties, could not only strengthen European integration and autonomy in defence and security in Europe, but also create a very solid basis for a European Defence Union and a common defence, as envisaged in Article 42(2) TEU. In the Multilingual Digital Platform and in multiple national panels, stronger reference was made to how the war in Ukraine generated a geopolitical and cognitive shock, stressing the need for a more integrated and united approach in foreign policy. Thus, what citizens demanded was for the EU to speak "with one voice against Russia's military threats, so not to repeat the mistakes of the past, when a divided EU left too much space to foreign powers, especially the US, in handling military crises" (Conference on the Future of Europe, pp.55-56, 2022b). Many of the ideas were aimed at strengthening the European hard power dimension and the need for a common foreign and defence policy, "by increasing the EU budget for defence and by strengthening the European defence industry in order to achieve strategic autonomy" (Conference on the Future of Europe, p.56, 2022b). According to this, greater EU fiscal and industrial integration could ensure resources and instruments to support defence initiatives without depending on external aid, strengthening the dimension of the EU's material autonomy and bringing it closer to the goal of strategic autonomy. On a practical level, this would translate into a common European army, with the "integration of the Member States' armed forces at the EU level" (Conference on the Future of Europe, p.56, 2022b) and more specialised European defence forces or institutions, such as an intelligence service.

For many of the citizens a European governance conceived more in terms of a "Union" could stimulate a more coordinated approach to the threats generated by international disorder, thus overcoming the intergovernmental fragmentations that have hampered the EU's ability to act. Nevertheless, the Multilingual Digital Platform also reported the fears and doubts of some citizens towards a potential federalisation of the EU. They felt that a centralised decision-making process could generate imbalances between the member states and reduce cultural and national identity. However, the federal model does not aspire to destroy the identities and powers of the member states, but to compose them into a larger mosaic while respecting the cultural and historical singularities of the different nations, thereby consolidating a common European identity. In short, federalism aspires to build a unity that maintains diversity, promoting cooperation and integration that enriches the

collective European identity without overwhelming the individual identities of the member states. Considering the different national contexts and the varying readiness and political will of member states, some participants put forward the idea of progressive federalism. They believed in the potential of a federal union, but considered its realisation as unrealistic and impractical with the current constitutional structures. Therefore, they advocated a reform of the treaties that would allow for closer integration at a gradual and considered pace towards a Union with more federal characteristics: in short, they advocated "a multi-speed Union which would improve the EU's strategic autonomy in the short term, and the prospect of federalism" (Conference on the Future of Europe, p.84, 2022b). Hence, a connection between federalism and the goal of strategic autonomy can be deduced. According to these citizens, federalism would promote the establishment of common structures, a European budget for financing projects to protect European security, a shared strategic culture and a truly common foreign policy. These changes would lead to a federal Defence Union reflecting a collective and shared sovereignty and allow the EU to act with greater autonomy, without being strategically dependent on other external actors.

The citizens through the Multilingual Digital Platform also called for institutional reforms, with the aim of making European governance more transparent and effective (Conference on the Future of Europe, 2022b). The main reforms revolve around the idea of reshaping the entire constitutional architecture, mainly through a revision of the treaties. These started from the strengthening of the European Parliament by granting it more fiscal and legislative powers and more competences in the field of foreign and defence policy. As for the two intergovernmental institutions, the Council and the European Council, civil society demanded a shift to qualified majority voting in decision-making, thus reducing arbitrary and isolated pressures generated by vetoes. Citizens aspired to the total removal of the veto in certain policies, particularly those defining the EU's international and strategic posture, as veto has often led to EU silence and a lack of coherence in EU actions on a global scale. Regarding the Commission, participants supported the idea of electing the Commission president and the various commissioners either through direct elections or through the principle of *Spitzenkandidaten*. More ambitiously, some promoted the idea of merging the roles of the president of the European Commission and the European Council, thus ending the leadership dilemma in Europe.

3.4.2 Politicians' federal expectations

Appeals for federal-type solutions to counter the return of war on the European continent can also be found in the speeches and documents of prominent political figures who have made the

contemporary history of the EU.

One of the most important can be found in the speech that former Italian Prime Minister Mario Draghi made on 3 May 2022 on the occasion of the European Parliament's "This is Europe" initiative. In this speech, Draghi stated how the war in Ukraine represented one of the most relevant historical crises for European peace: a humanitarian, security, energy and economic crisis (Draghi, 2022). Draghi reiterated the fact that European institutions had served European citizens well over time, but the war (along with the pandemic) had shown how inadequate they were for the current international reality. The former Italian prime minister pointed out that the geopolitical picture was changing rapidly and that the EU had to move towards a fairer economic and social model. In essence, Draghi called for a stronger, cohesive, sovereign Europe through a "pragmatic and ideal federalism" (Draghi, 2022). Draghi invoked for a federalism that encompasses all areas affected by current transformations (such as security, energy, and the economy), thus calling for greater integration. In his speech, Draghi stated that the time had come to defend the values of peace, solidarity and humanity. On a practical level, the former Italian prime minister spoke of the idea of revising the treaties to strengthen the EU's capacity to act and not just react. Draghi argued that if tragic events were used as catalysts for a strengthening of the effectiveness of European institutions, this could facilitate the swift resolution of citizens' problems. Moving on, Draghi suggested greater efficiency in military spending to avoid fragmentation and achieve strategic autonomy. He believed that defence investments should be made with a view to improving collective capabilities in both EU and NATO terms. He argued that the construction of a common defence, hence a Defence Union, should be accompanied by a unified foreign policy and effective decision-making mechanisms (Draghi, 2022). In his speech, Draghi reiterated the need to overcome the principle of unanimity, from which an intergovernmental logic of crossed vetoes originates, and to move towards decisions taken by qualified majority.

In light of this, Draghi advocated a reconfiguration of the European institutional architecture through a revision of the treaties, the abolition of the unanimity rule in the Council and greater integration to build a common defence. For Draghi, these goals could be achieved through a "pragmatic and ideal federalism": in perspective, through this federal metamorphosis, the EU could achieve greater strategic autonomy.

This federalist aspiration can also be found in a document signed by 34 high-level politicians, including both national and European policy makers such as Mario Monti, Romani Prodi and Jean-Claude Juncker, as well as numerous economists. This document, called "The European Union at the Time of the New Cold War: A Manifesto" proposed a series of federal proposals to strengthen the EU's capacity to act (Buti et al., 2023). The manifesto considered the war in Ukraine and the

antagonism between the US and China as crucial moments in European history and how the EU should aspire to become an important political actor to secure the peace of the international order. The signatories of the Manifesto believed that the EU's institutional, political and socio-economic limitations have slowed down the EU's response to international crises. Therefore, the Manifesto called for a new "political contract" that would promote an integrated approach to the European dimension. "The time has come to acknowledge that nationalism is contrary to the national interest, that member states' national sovereignty is ineffective unless it is redefined in terms of European sovereignty, and that the supply of European public goods is crucial to satisfy national demands for economic, social, and political security" (Buti et al., 2023). The supporters of the Manifesto stated that "reaching the technological frontier will require mobilising private and public resources that no member state can do alone. To effectively pursue the green, digital, and artificial intelligence transitions, we need to complete the Banking Union and to operationalise the Capital Markets Union to allocate public and private resources to projects that are 'long in ideas and short in collaterals'. Joining up forces and funds at the EU level will be needed to meet the immense task of reconstructing Ukraine. Ensuring Europe's safety in a world of increasing threats and isolationist temptations and moving towards strategic autonomy will require pooling sovereignty at EU level in defence and security" (Buti et al., 2023). Once again, it can be seen how the goal of strategic autonomy is linked to greater integration in the field of foreign policy. The signatories of the Manifesto called for a "gradual and pragmatic federalism" with dual coordination: horizontal between national policies and vertical between the national and European levels (Buti et al., 2023). They emphasised that "with the centralisation of the supply of vaccines, the setting up of the NextGenerationEU recovery plan, the coordination of national energy policies, the "Fit for 55" climate measures, and the joint programmes to support Ukraine, a new EU multilevel governance system has come to the fore" (Buti et al., 2023).

The Manifesto envisaged a series of reforms whose success would depend not only on a strong political will and a shared vision of Europe's future, but above all on political trust between the European institutions and the member states. Among the proposed reforms, the following were of particular interest: the creation of a central fiscal capacity; new fiscal rules to facilitate socio-economic convergence in the EU; the realisation of cohesive and integrated European financial markets (centred on the issuance of a secure European bond); an industrial policy with more programmes managed at supranational level; the reform of the decision-making system in the Council; and finally an "EU security and defence policy within NATO, but having sufficient autonomy and visibility, thereby robust to possible renewed isolationist tendencies in the US after the November 2024 elections" (Buti et al., 2023). In order to materialise this gradual and pragmatic federalism, the Manifesto argued for the need to reform the EU treaties to address internal and

external challenges and to strengthen the institutional structure of the EU.

Finally, calls for a federal vision of the EU can also be found in the positions expressed by the current German government. In Germany, the main political parties (SPD, FDP and the Greens) formed a government coalition in 2021, known as the 'Traffic Light Coalition", in office until 2025. This coalition drafted a document, the "Traffic Light Coalition Contract", which included the statements and objectives of the coalition government with respect to Germany and the EU. With respect to the latter, the government declared that it was in favour of a federalisation of the EU and also supported the idea of an institutional recalibration through the revision of the treaties (German Coalition Government, 2021). Moreover, in this coalition agreement, there is an emphasis on using the proposals of the CoFoE to reform the EU, and some of the proposals made by the coalition government reflect them. For instance, the Scholz-led government supported the creation of partially transnational lists during the European elections, the *Spitzenkandidat* system for the presidency of the European Commission, the abolition of unanimity and the extension of qualified majority voting, the creation of joint command structures and joint civil-military headquarters (German Coalition Government, 2021). With this declaration, the current German government stressed the importance of increasing the strategic autonomy of the EU in important areas (such as security, energy, health, etc.) through a federal development of the European institutional architecture.

3.5 The future of European competitiveness

Seeking to strengthen the EU's capacity to act, Draghi's report on the future of European competitiveness, published in September 2024, identifies policy proposals that could help achieve strategic autonomy. The document, called "The future of European competitiveness," is a call to strengthen EU competitiveness, stressing the need for greater integration and institutional reforms so that the EU can reassert itself as an autonomous power. In this regard, Draghi argues that "the more willing the EU is to reform itself to generate an increase in productivity, the easier it will be for the public sector to support the investment drive" (Draghi, p.14, 2024a).

In the report, Draghi highlights the key industrial and constitutional vulnerabilities that restrict the EU's dynamic action in the international landscape. A landscape constellated with numerous challenges, such as the return of geopolitical competition, the escalating Sino-US trade rivalry, and rising securitarian tensions following the conflict in Ukraine. According to Draghi, all this represents an "existential crisis" for the EU's democratic future (Draghi, 2024a). To match its rivals and avoid the "slow agony", the EU should therefore change: "the only way to meet this challenge is to grow and become more productive, preserving our values of equity and social inclusion. And the only way

to become more productive is for Europe to radically change" (Draghi, p.1, 2024a).

In this regard, Draghi's report represents a strategy to revitalize the future of European competitiveness and reduce foreign dependencies. Postulating profound changes, the report is divided into three macro areas for action that aim to reignite European growth, supporting the ambitious need for industrial, technological and institutional renewal. The first area aims to refocus collective efforts and boost European productivity, seeking to close the innovation gap with the US and China, especially in the field of technology. In this part, Draghi stresses the importance of reforming European R&D funding and focusing on breakthrough innovation, thereby fostering the commercialization of research and the growth of innovative companies (Draghi, 2024a). In the second area, the report stresses the urgency of a joint decarbonization and competitiveness plan, through reforming electricity markets and adopting a pragmatic approach to trade policy (Draghi, 2024a). The third area for action concerns security and the need to reduce dependencies by incentivizing European defence industries to cooperate. The report, therefore, suggests greater integration to consolidate EU defence capabilities and mitigate strategic vulnerabilities (Draghi, 2024a). The report, then, concludes with a series of policy proposals that invoke the need for institutional reforms to strengthen European governance. Looking forward, these efforts could foster the development of greater material and institutional autonomy by equipping the EU with capabilities useful for achieving strategic autonomy.

In the next sections, the third part of the report and the policy proposals put forward by Draghi will be analysed in more detail. The decision to delve exclusively into these aspects is motivated by the precise securitarian and constitutional focus that this research work intends to pursue, with the aim of highlighting the report's implications for strategic autonomy.

3.5.1 Strengthening defensive and industrial capabilities

In the third part of the report, Draghi begins by highlighting the main weaknesses of the European defence sector, which undermine the EU's ability to consolidate itself as an autonomous security actor. For Draghi, one of the solutions to increase European security starts from the assumption that public spending on the purchase of military equipment is not sufficient to deal with such an uncertain geopolitical environment, stating that there is a need for greater coordination in spending and more industrial defence capabilities (Draghi, 2024). Therefore, in order to reduce dependence on foreign actors in these areas, Draghi emphasises the need for large investments to catch up with other international powers. The former Italian prime minister acknowledges that "becoming more independent creates an "insurance cost" for Europe, but these costs can be mitigated by cooperation... By becoming less vulnerable to external leverage, the EU will also benefit from increased decision-

making autonomy. But to avoid a potential trade-off between independence and costs, European cooperation will be essential" (Draghi, p.51, 2024a). To further reduce the EU's strategic dependencies and vulnerabilities, Draghi proposes the creation of a "foreign economic policy" including the establishment of the "EU Critical Raw Material Platform" (Draghi, 2024a). These initiatives would have the task of consolidating the European position in the supply chain by aggregating demand for the joint procurement of critical materials. This would allow the coordination of joint purchasing negotiations with producer countries, aiming to reduce insurance costs for member states and strategically manage reserves at EU level. By implementing these measures, the Union could strengthen its strategic autonomy, guaranteeing access to essential defence and security resources: in this way, the EU could be less vulnerable to global political and economic pressures.

Besides a decrease in defence spending, the report notes that the European defence industry lacks a specific focus on technology development. In this regard, "the EU defence industry is suffering from a capacity gap on two fronts. First, overall demand is lower: aggregate defence spending in the EU is about one-third as high as in the US. Second, EU spending is less focused on innovation. Defence is a highly technological industry characterised by disruptive innovation, meaning that massive R&D investments are required to maintain strategic parity… Complex next-generation defence systems in all strategic domains will require massive R&D investment that exceeds the capacity of single EU Member States" (Draghi, p.55, 2024a).

These vulnerabilities are linked to one of the main problems for European security, namely the fragmentation of the defence industry. As analysed in the first chapter, this problem has resurfaced especially in the context of the war in Ukraine, highlighting how the duplication of efforts and resources among member states has fragmented the capacity for a unified and effective European response. In the report, it is stated that "the EU defence industrial landscape is populated mainly by national players operating in relatively small domestic markets. Fragmentation creates two major challenges. First, it means that the industry lacks scale, which is essential in a capital-intensive sector with long investment cycle… Second, fragmentation leads to serious issues related to a lack of standardisation and the interoperability of equipment, which have come to light during the EU's support for Ukraine. For 155 mm artillery alone, EU Member States have provided ten different types of howitzers to Ukraine from their stocks, and some have even been delivered in different variants, creating serious logistical difficulties for Ukraine's armed forces" (Draghi, p.55, 2024a).

To address these issues, Draghi states that, in the absence of a common European expenditure policy, defence and security initiatives should focus on aggregating demand, thus increasing the share of joint defence procurement, and integrating defence industrial assets. In this regard, Draghi

reiterates the rapid implementation of EDIS and EDIP and recommends the development of a "medium-term EU Defence Industrial Policy which can support the structural cross-border integration of defence assets and the selective integration and consolidation of EU industrial capacity, with the explicit aim of increasing scale, standardisation and interoperability" (Draghi, p.57, 2024a). Alongside the need to enhance defence investment, Draghi advocates for the significant strengthening of collaboration and the pooling of resources for defence research and development at the Union level (Draghi, 2024a).

For Draghi, the path to strengthening the defence and security dimension of the EU is through integration. An integration of industrial supply chains at cross-border and interregional level to plan and coordinate European industrial strategies (Guidesi, 2024). According to the report, the creation of a unified security and defence framework that has the resources and technologies to guarantee the security of the European order is perceived as an essential priority for the future of the EU. Mario Draghi recalled that the ability to defend itself is a key component in achieving strategic autonomy. It is therefore essential for the EU to strengthen its defence capabilities and material autonomy by promoting more industrial cooperation between member states and more joint procurement programmes. To achieve this, Draghi emphasises the need for a common political vision that supports efforts with targeted investments and a favourable regulatory framework, proposing the idea of common debt. Hence, the report stresses the need for joint financing in investments in key European public goods in order to maximise productivity. To achieve the goals set in the report, Draghi states that "a minimum annual additional investment of EUR 750 to 800 billion' would be needed" (Draghi, p.59, 2024a). The former banker proposes that the Union should adopt a strategy of periodic issuance of common debt instruments in order to facilitate collaborative investment projects between the Member States and foster the integration of capital markets, referring to the NGEU model. In perspective, such an approach could be very useful in reinforcing European defence by providing the necessary financial resources to develop shared capabilities and improve security collaboration between member states. In this framework, European industries have a great social and political responsibility as they can turn various forms of synergies into constructive pressure elements towards states and politics. Industries are therefore called upon to lead the development of a truly European industrial perspective, thus adopting a synergetic and constructive approach (Cingolani, 2024).

3.5.2 Restructuring the governance

For Draghi, the success of such an industrial strategy and the realisation of a common European defence depends on institutional reforms. The report suggests that the strengthening of material and

political autonomy should therefore be balanced by a reinforcement of institutional autonomy. Draghi proposes to readjust the rules of the EU's constitutional grammar in order to ensure a faster functioning of governance, seeking to increase the EU's capacity to act. Combined, these efforts could equip the Union with more tools and capabilities that would help it achieve greater strategic autonomy and respond with decisiveness in the critical areas of defence and foreign policy. For Draghi, therefore, the EU must act to reform itself, claiming to "abandon the illusion that only procrastination can preserve consensus. In fact, procrastination has only produced slower growth, and it has certainly achieved no more consensus. We have reached the point where, without action, we will have to either compromise our welfare, our environment or our freedom... We must ensure that our democratically elected institutions are at the centre of these debates. Reforms can only be truly ambitious and sustainable if they enjoy democratic backing" (Draghi, p.5, 2024a). Consequently, the former banker emphasises the need for intensified cooperation between member states and EU institutions, emphasising the need for a reform of the European institutional ecosystem in order to adopt the report's recommendations (Romano, 2024). As Draghi well recalls, "never in the past has the scale of our countries appeared so small and inadequate relative to the size of the challenges. And it is long since self-preservation has been such a common concern. The reasons for a unified response have never been so compelling - and in our unity we will find the strength to reform"(Draghi, p.5, 2024a).

For Draghi, strengthening the EU politically and institutionally would require amending the treaties (Draghi, 2024a). Although he conceptually agrees with this idea, in this report he affirms that there is still much that can be done before Treaty changes are achieved. "Until the consensus for Treaty changes is in place, a renewed European partnership should be built on three overarching goals: refocusing the work of the EU, accelerating EU action and integration, and simplifying rules" (Draghi, p.63, 2024a).

With regard to the objective of refocusing the work of the EU, the report recommends the establishment of a "Competitiveness Coordination Framework" in order to promote closer coordination with regard to common policy priorities, thereby removing other overlapping coordination instruments. This new framework would thus only focus on the "EU Competitiveness Priorities", which would be formulated and adopted by the European Council (Draghi, 2024a). In addition, the Competitiveness Coordination Framework would then in turn be divided into "Competitiveness Action Plans" for each of these priorities, with clearly defined objectives, governance and financing. Draghi therefore argues that "not only would this rationalisation help to organise and focus the EU's activities, it would also represent a major simplification exercise for both EU and national administrations" (Draghi, p.63, 2024a). At the same time, the goal of refocusing for Draghi requires the urgent need to apply the principle of subsidiarity more effectively. Not only is

the legislative process lengthy, but the Commission's own regulatory activity has grown "excessive". The former banker therefore argues that on the one hand national parliaments should scrutinise EU initiatives to ensure more subsidiarity and on the other hand the European institutions themselves should have "more self-control" (Romani, 2024).

Regarding the goal of accelerating EU action and integration, the report urges the extension of qualified majority voting instead of unanimity in all policy areas of the Council in order to overcome decision-making paralysis and ensure a faster and more effective European response. As discussed in the previous pages, the EU's decision-making system based on reaching unanimous consent has often slowed down the implementation of rapid decisions. This is compounded by the availability of each of the 27 member states to veto, delaying and diluting EU action. Consequently, Draghi points out that this results in a slow legislative process with an average time of 19 months to agree on new laws, which then fails to reproduce the expected results (Draghi, 2024a). This decision-making system, therefore, contributes to a widening of the expectations capability gap, especially in foreign policy and a demonstration of this can be found in the European response to the war in Ukraine. In order to neutralise the veto powers protected by unanimity voting, the report therefore promotes qualified majority voting through the use of passerelle clauses and where EU action remains blocked, Draghi argues that a differentiated approach to integration should be pursued, for example through enhanced cooperations.

Finally, concerning the goal of simplifying rules, the report suggests reducing the stock of regulations that influence business activity. Furthermore, "to start lowering the "stock" of regulation, the report recommends appointing a new Commission Vice President for Simplification to streamline the acquis, while adopting a single, clear methodology to quantify the cost of the new regulatory "flow" " (Draghi, p.65, 2024a).

In perspective, the institutional reforms envisaged by Draghi through the reduction of administrative burdens, a more flexible decision-making system and intensified coordination and integration, where possible also by delegating to the centre, could increase the EU's institutional autonomy. Greater institutional autonomy would facilitate the implementation of decisions on important strategic issues, thereby enhancing the EU's capacity to act. These institutional changes, therefore, could be helpful in achieving strategic autonomy, enabling the Union to pursue external and defence policy objectives more decisively and coherently.

In light of this, Draghi's report on the future of European competitiveness is a call for change. A change that requires deep integration to build a common European defence and institutional reforms. Draghi therefore reiterates that only through a solid will for change and cooperation the EU will be

able to find the strength to become a strategically autonomous player. Draghi's report emphasises the importance of joining forces on common European projects, highlighting the need to adopt precise political choices that do not aim for short-term consensus, but consider broader time horizons. This implies a profound metamorphosis of the EU where integration, for Draghi, remains the only solution to be pursued to ensure a strategically autonomous future and save the EU from slow continental agony. In this regard, in his speech to the European Parliament on 17 September 2024, where he presented the report, Draghi stated that "Europe faces a choice between paralysis, exit or integration. Exit has been tried and has not delivered what its proponents hoped for. Paralysis is becoming untenable as we slide towards greater anxiety and insecurity. So, integration is our only hope left. It is important that all of us understand that the size of the challenge we face far exceeds the size of our national economies. And we are facing a world where we risk losing not just peace, but also our freedom. In this world, it will be only through unity that we will be able to retain our strength and defend our values" (Draghi, pp.10-11, 2024b).

3.6 Conclusion

In the third chapter (Policy Stream), the main policy proposals developed during the conflict in Ukraine were examined. These proposals aimed at enhancing European governance and foreign policy, both of which have substantial implications for the EU's strategic autonomy.

In general, the majority of institutional reforms deemed necessary for the EU to respond more effectively contain a federal nature. Many of the ideas put forward called for a reconfiguration of the EU's institutional grammar with federal characteristics, such as a more active involvement of supranational institutions in foreign policy, the use of common debt to finance the European common initiatives, the modification of the EU's decision-making system, a European constitution and the revision of the treaties. Regarding the foreign, defence and security policy, most of the ideas analysed assumed, either manifestly or latently, a federal concept, with a common European defence, a common foreign policy, the use of qualified majority, the use of the European budget to finance initiatives for the defence of European territory, the establishment of common military structures and, above all, a common strategic culture. Theoretically, these ideas, through greater fiscal and industrial integration, could help build a more solid Defence Union, overcoming the intergovernmental limitations of the current treaties. As examined, these advances, according to the proposed solutions, could enhance the material, political and institutional autonomy of the EU, bringing it closer to the coveted goal of strategic autonomy.

The policy proposals reviewed in this chapter suggest that greater European integration and

institutional reforms, even in areas sensitive to national sovereignty, could help achieve greater strategic autonomy. Strategic autonomy requires integration (Biscop, 2022a). Greater integration would allow member states to coordinate their resources and strategies more effectively, thus reducing internal dissonances that hinder unified EU responses to complex global challenges. In this way, the EU would also be able to speak with a single, unified voice in the international arena. Such unity in capabilities and decision-making necessitates institutional reforms, which could increase the EU's resilience in the face of external crises by improving its ability to act autonomously and take timely decisions at critical moments.

Therefore, all the policy proposals examined invoke the need for a change towards greater integration and cohesion by means of significant reforms aimed at optimising the operational and decision-making structure of the Union. A more united and reform Europe could thus be key to a more strategically autonomous Europe, especially in times of international uncertainty. "Strategic autonomy at a meaningful level of ambition – that is, a corps – can only be achieved at the European level, either by the EU as such or, as an intermediate step, by a subset of EU member states. European strategic autonomy is not, however, achieved at the expense of national autonomy – you cannot lose what you no longer have. Rather, after a long lapse, autonomy can be recreated by pooling European efforts" (Biscop, p.6, 2022a).

Although the attractiveness of these ideas on paper, what is needed to realise them is a strong political will, both among the European institutions and especially the member states. The challenge, therefore, is to converge the different national visions towards a common goal that inherently has a federal nature. The diversity of national policies and priorities continues to be a significant obstacle to the realisation of a truly integrated foreign and defence policy. Moreover, issues such as national sovereignty and democratic control over foreign policy decisions remain strong points of tension between member states. Despite this, the proposals of the European Parliament, the CoFoE, the various calls for federal solutions and the Draghi's report constitute the main responses developed to deal with the crisis arising from the war in Ukraine. From the proposals examined, what emerges is thus the need to address the historical change brought about by the war with policy proposals advocating greater integration and an increase in EU competencies: in the long run, this institutional metamorphosis could be useful for achieving strategic autonomy.

The aim of the final chapter will be to examine how the convergence of the three streams discussed (Problem, Political and Policy) has generated a window of opportunity on the rethinking practically the European governance, where the need for reforms returned on the political agenda. It will therefore evaluate the practical commitments made by European institutions that are directed towards

reforming the EU. These dynamics underline how the will to reform the EU has returned to the political agenda following the return of war and the logic of power on the European continent.

4. The return of reforms on the political agenda

4.1 Introduction

In the course of this thesis, three streams were examined in depth on the basis of the Multiple Stream Approach (MSA). In the Problem Stream, the inherent structural vulnerabilities of European foreign policy that also undermine the achievement of strategic autonomy were analysed; in the Political Stream, it was examined how the war in Ukraine led to a political change, revitalising the defence issue and laying the foundations for a Defence Union; in the Policy Stream, the main policy proposals considered necessary to improve European governance were analysed, highlighting a desirability for greater integration and reforms to achieve strategic autonomy.

The convergence of these three streams has opened a window of opportunity in which the idea of reforming the EU has returned to the centre of political debate, no longer just as a theoretical concept, but as a practical and immediate necessity. The external shock generated by the return of the war created pressures for integration, pushing for the strengthening of the EU's international actorness and its foreign policy. This push has thus highlighted the urgency of overcoming the problems that emerged during the conflict, bringing back to the forefront the idea of reforming the EU as a prerequisite for ensuring a more cohesive Union capable of acting autonomously. Indeed, following the institutional problems of foreign policy and the EU's desire to become a major geopolitical player also in the field of defence, after so many years, the desire for institutional change has returned to the political agenda of the main European institutions as a response to these needs. It was since the Lisbon Treaty of 2009 that the European institutions had not thought concretely about reform. Indeed, just as German Chancellor Scholz said, the war in Ukraine represented a *Zeitenwende* for the history of European integration.

The return of the logic of power led not only to a "securitarian awakening" with, for example, developments towards the creation of a Defence Union, but also to a "constitutional awakening" with commitments to change the institutional grammar of the EU. From the need to improve the EU's capacity to act on the international stage, seeking to give greater coherence and unity to its external action, a desire for reform has emerged, prompting the European institutions to consider crucial adjustments in order to respond more effectively to current emergencies and geopolitical challenges.

In light of this, this chapter will analyse the reaction of the main European institutions to the "reform momentum" triggered by the return of war on the European continent. It will observe how the institutional introspection stimulated by this external event varies significantly between supranational and intergovernmental institutions. The former tend to be more receptive to the

ambitious proposal to amend the treaties, the latter tend to be open to reform, but less inclined to substantive treaty changes. In this context, the European Parliament played a pivotal role, being the first institution to put the issue of reforms concretely on the political agenda. In the following years, this reformist impulse was then amplified and echoed by other European institutions, mainly the Commission, and the member states, which recognised the need for internal reforms to make the EU stronger and strengthen European sovereignty. These developments highlight how supranational bodies have acted as "policy entrepreneurs", proactively pushing for major policy revisions to address evolving challenges and opportunities across the Union. What can be inferred is that the institutions are willing to embark on a path towards change. This vanguardist push in the direction of EU reform and greater integration offers new opportunities for achieving greater institutional, material and political autonomy: in short, greater strategic autonomy.

In this context, section 4.2 will analyse the reformist developments that occurred in 2022 following the outbreak of war in Ukraine and the end of the CoFoE. Then, section 4.3 will examine the reformist developments that occurred in 2023 where the idea of treaty reform returned with greater intensity. Lastly, section 4.4 will focus on the reformist developments in 2024 up to the time of writing.

4.2 Reformist developments in 2022

Seventeen years have passed since the introduction of the Lisbon Treaty in 2009. Since then, the EU has been overwhelmed by major geopolitical developments, such as the financial crisis, the migratory crisis, the pandemic crisis and, above all, the securitarian crisis, and by equally major institutional developments, such as the entry of three member states into the EU and the departure of the United Kingdom. The EU has thus been forged by these crises, evolving in an increasingly complex and uncertain context. However, some of the European institutions have felt the need to initiate institutional change so that the EU does not react but acts dynamically to the crisis. This reformist willingness can be found especially in the European Parliament, which, in the wake of the Russian threat to European security, intensively promoted the need to reform the treaties in order to strengthen the EU's foreign policy and institutional governance.

One month after the end of the CoFoE, on 9 June 2022, for the first time in the history of Europe, the European Parliament exercised its power to call for a Convention for a comprehensive revision of the Treaties through an ordinary revision procedure under Article 48 TEU (Duff, 2023a). According to the latter, the Parliament or the Commission or any member state may propose a revision of the treaties. Generally, these proposals can either "increase or to reduce the competences conferred on the Union in the Treaties. These proposals shall be submitted to the European Council by the

Council and the national Parliaments shall be notified". Subsequently, if the European Council decides to address the issue and votes on the proposal by simple majority, the president of the European Council should prepare an intergovernmental conference and then launch a convention. Through this historic vote, the Parliament sought to free the EU from the rigid and monolithic intergovernmental logic of unanimity. In this regard, the Parliament managed to exploit this concession offered by the Lisbon Treaty, creating a "reform momentum" and challenging "the traditional claim of the member states to be "masters of the treaties" "(Duff, p.4, 2023a). This call for the revision of the treaties, approved by 355 MEPs, was simply Parliament's follow-up to the CoFoE conclusions. It welcomed the Conference's proposals and sought to extend the Union's competences so that it could take more effective action in the event of future crises (European Parliament, 2022c). This federalist aspiration, therefore, openly called for the reform of the current European constitutional architecture through a revision of the treaties. In the text submitted to the Council, the Parliament's main objectives were geared towards: "(i) enhancing the Union's capacity to act by reforming voting procedures, including allowing decisions in the Council by qualified majority voting instead of unanimity for EU responses in the event of an emergency; (ii) strengthening EU competences, especially in the areas of health and cross-border health threats, in the completion of the energy union, in defence, and in social and economic policies; (iii) providing Parliament with full co-decision rights on the EU budget, and with the right to initiate, amend or repeal legislation; (iv) strengthening the procedure for the protection of the values on which the EU is founded and clarifying the determination and consequences of breaches of fundamental values" (Muir, p. 545, 2023). In short, these proposals called for the extension of qualified majority voting, the abolition of the veto and the granting of more powers to the Union in certain areas, for example defence. These proposals would have helped structure the EU's capacity to act more efficiently as they would have improved the EU's institutional autonomy and promoted greater integration. As examined in the previous chapters, these are key elements in achieving a more strategically autonomous Europe. Increased decision-making power through qualified majority voting and the abolition of the veto and unanimity would enable the EU to act swiftly and effectively, reducing the chances that important decisions for the strategic future of the EU would be blocked by conflicting national interests. The expansion of the Union's competences in traditionally intergovernmental areas, such as defence, would allow the EU to develop a more cohesive and coherent foreign and security policy. These reform proposals invoked by the European Parliament could have brought fundamental structural changes in order to achieve greater institutional autonomy.

Despite the Parliament's reformist and federalist aspiration, the European Council, having the choice of whether to address the issue or not, decided at its summit of 23-24 June 2022 not to go

ahead with the request. Indeed, "faced with opposition from a number of EU governments, in spite of Macron's rhetorical commitment to treaty change, the then French Presidency of the Council failed to act" (Duff, p.5, 2023a). Therefore, the Council referred the matter back to Parliament, asking for the formulation of a more detailed proposal. In the conclusions of the summit, the Council merely superficially endorsed the CoFoE conclusions and stated that it would elaborate a follow-up on the CoFoE report, setting out its views (European Council, 2022b). In its follow-up, the Council stated that about 95 % of the CoFoE proposals would not require treaty changes, showing little inclination to go down this reformist path (Council of the European Union, 2023d).

Opinions among member states regarding the CoFoE's treaty revision proposal varied widely (Lehne, 2022). In this regard, a group of thirteen member states (Croatia, Romania, Sweden, Latvia, Estonia, Denmark, Finland, Slovenia, Bulgaria, Lithuania, Malta, Czech Republic, and Poland) drafted a non-paper on 9 May 2022 in which they opposed institutional changes such as treaty change, perceiving it as unconsidered and premature. However, a few days later, on 13 June, a group of six member states (Belgium, Germany, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands and Spain) (theoretically there would also be France, but since it controlled the Council presidency, it could not express itself and had to maintain a neutral position) also drafted a non-paper in which they expressed their support for the treaty amendments. What can be seen is thus the obvious discrepancy of vision among the member states: on the one hand, there were states in support of the amendment representing the majority of the EU's population; on the other hand, together with Hungary, there was a group of states against the amendment representing the majority of the EU member states (Ondarza et al., 2022). Thus, the CoFoE failed to reach a compromise among the member states regarding the reform, highlighting the challenges in building a strong and shared political will for such initiatives (Ondarza et al., 2022).

Unlike the Council, the Commission was more open to the reformist ambitions of the CoFoE and the Parliament. In its follow-up document to the CoFoE entitled "Putting Vision into Concrete Action", the Commission stated that "new reforms and policies should not be mutually exclusive to discussions on Treaty change. Treaty change should not be an end in itself and for the vast majority of measures, there is much that can and will need to be done under the existing treaties. Just like constitutional texts of the Member States, the EU treaties are living instruments" (European Commission, p.4, 2022f). In this text, the Commission emphasised the importance of using the maximum potential of the existing treaties, even if never expressed, to change the decision-making system within the intergovernmental Council from unanimity to qualified majority. However, in the follow-up document, the Commission stated that it would always stand by those who wish to reform the EU, including through treaty change procedures if necessary. In this respect, the Commission

explicitly supported the institutional desire presented by the Parliament to change the treaties. Going further, the Commission President Ursula Von der Leyen in her "State of the Union" of 2022 reiterated her support for the Parliament's call for a "European Convention" through Article 48 TEU (European Commission, 2022b).

4.3 Reformist developments in 2023

In the "State of the Union" of September 2023, the president of the European Commission once again placed the importance of institutional reforms in the EU at the centre of the political debate. In particular, the president reinforced the call for a change of the treaties in order to strengthen the EU's capacity to act against internal and external threats (European Commission, 2023). This appeal again reflected the growing awareness of the need to adapt the EU's institutional architecture to a rapidly changing environment. In this regard, Von der Leyen announced that the Commission would be working on a series of pre-enlargement policy reviews, not only to prepare the Union for future enlargements but also to understand which areas need to be changed in order to adapt to a larger Union (European Commission, 2023). Furthermore, one of the most relevant aspects mentioned in the speech was the emphasis on building a Defence Union. The proposal to enhance defense cooperation among member states, including joint procurement, and to more closely engage the Union in this field underscored the necessity for Europe to achieve greater strategic autonomy in an increasingly polarized and uncertain world. Thus, the call for treaty change and the construction of a Defence Union implied an acknowledgement of the current limitations of existing structures and a willingness to overcome them to ensure that the EU can act in a more geopolitically effective and cohesive manner.

The continuation of the conflict in Ukraine and the unstable international developments also influenced the member states on the need for a change of decision-making system and greater internal reforms.

Regarding the former, in May 2023 some of the member states drafted a joint declaration in which they formalised the formation of the "Group of Friends on Qualified Majority Voting in EU Common Foreign and Security Policy". In this declaration, nine EU member states (France, Germany, Italy, Spain, Netherlands, Belgium, Luxembourg, Finland and Slovenia) expressly called for more progress in the field of CFSP. Aware of the problems made evident by the war in Ukraine, these states called for greater coordination, not only between member states but also with the European institutions (Group of Friends, 2023). For the members of the Group, changes were essential to strengthen the Union as a foreign policy actor: one of these changes was the improvement of the decision-making

process. A flexible and rapid decision-making process could have better prepared the EU for future challenges. For this reason, the Group called for the pragmatic and not merely theoretical use of qualified majority voting in the CFSP (Group of Friends, 2023), using the current provisions of the treaties.

Regarding the second (on reforms), in October 2023, an informal meeting of heads of state was held in Granada to discuss the policy directions and priorities of the Council's Strategic Agenda 2024-2029 and the future enlargement of the Union. In Granada, the member states reaffirmed their commitment to strengthen their defence readiness and to invest more in capability, with the aim of developing a more solid European technological and industrial base. In particular, the heads of state and government recognised that "enlargement is a geo-political investment in peace, security and prosperity...the Union needs to lay the necessary internal groundwork and reforms...This will make the EU stronger and will enhance European sovereignty" (European Council, 2023a). This underlines the member states' awareness of the need for internal reforms to strengthen the EU's capacity to act and achieve strategic autonomy. Furthermore, the mention of European sovereignty and the emphasis on the reforms needed to improve the EU could be interpreted as a signal of openness towards further integration. This language could indicate that, although member states remain cautious, there is a growing awareness of the need for more integration.

On 22 November 2023, the European Parliament approved by a majority an ambitious resolution to amend the treaties through an ordinary revision procedure, thus initiating the official and formal request for the heads of state to cast their votes on the commencement of the EU reform convention (Muir, 2023). This resolution, a product of the meticulous and extensive efforts of the European Parliament's Committee on Constitutional Affairs (AFCO), marked another significant "reform momentum" and presented a more robust and structured attempt than the one in 2022. Essentially, the resolution pointed out "that Treaty change is not an end in itself, but a bid to improve the Union, enhancing its capacity to act and shoring up its democratic legitimacy and accountability. The reform should help the EU tackle geopolitical challenges and equip it for enlargement" (Kotanidis, p.1, 2023). The proposal aimed to restructure the EU's institutional architecture and balance of powers by strengthening the roles of the supranational bodies (Parliament and Commission) and reducing the impact of the intergovernmental Council, e.g. by removing vetoes and annulling unanimity (Lionello, 2023). Furthermore, it proposed to expand the Union's jurisdiction in key policy areas and to intensify the EU's control over national policies. Co-led by five co-rapporteurs (Guy Verhofstadt, Sven Simon, Gabriele Bischoff, Daniel Freund and Helmut Scholz), the core of the resolution was aimed at overcoming the operational and constitutional limitations of the current treaties, especially as they emerged during the management of significant crises such as the conflict in Ukraine, thus highlighting

the need for institutional change. According to the co-rapporteurs, the decision-making paralysis generated by unanimity, the divergent interests of member states that emerged with the sanctions, the inability to refinance the EPF, and the use of the veto as an instrument of blackmail were among the most serious problems that emerged during the conflict in Ukraine. In particular, the veto game made the EU less democratic and less accountable: the principle of unanimity, even with the prospect of enlargement, risks degenerating the EU into a vetocracy (Tito, 2024). Therefore, this resolution was a call for more and new competences for the EU: for example, with exclusive competences for the Union in the areas of biodiversity and the environment and shared competences for the Union in the areas of foreign affairs, external security and defence, energy and many others.

In total, the resolution included 245 amendments to the current treaties, proposing ideas similar to those seen in Policy Stream.

With regard to the common foreign and security policy, the main amendments proposed the adoption of a qualified majority voting system for decisions on sanctions, intermediate steps in the enlargement process and other foreign policy issues. The proposal also included the creation of a Defence Union with military units and rapid reaction capabilities under the leadership and operational command of the EU. Funding for the acquisition and development of armaments would come from a specific Union budget, with the Parliament having a co-legislative and controlling role. Decisions on security and defence policy would have been taken by qualified majority voting, with parliamentary approval required, and any military mission with an executive mandate would have required parliamentary consent (European Parliament, 2023b). By virtue of these proposals having a federal nature, the EU would have come closer to shaping a common Union defence policy and in the long run to gradually achieving the goal of strategic autonomy. Indeed, the abolition of the veto and the creation of a Defence Union with unified command could improve the EU's ability to act promptly and cohesively in the face of international challenges, without having to depend entirely on the support of foreign actors. These developments, therefore, would aim to strengthen the EU's institutional, material and political autonomy and thus bring the EU closer to achieving strategic autonomy. Furthermore, a specific European defence budget could ensure greater EU independence in the global context, for instance by providing the necessary resources to develop and maintain autonomous defence capabilities. Such funding would allow the EU to design and implement defence strategies that directly reflect its priorities and needs, reducing dependence on external entities for security and defence. Overall, these amendments could help to position the Union as a more sovereign and decisive actor on the international chessboard in the future.

From an institutional point of view, the resolution drafted by AFCO and approved by the

parliamentary plenary proposed numerous amendments to make the EU more democratic and accountable. The resolution proposed a reform of the decision-making process within the EU to better reflect a bicameral system, while expanding the powers of the European Parliament. The various amendments emphasised the need to intensify the Union's capacity to act by increasing the areas of decision-making governed by qualified majority voting and ordinary legislative procedures. The resolution proposed to give Parliament the right of legislative initiative, so that it could introduce, amend or abolish Union laws, and to make it co-legislator in the definition of the multiannual financial framework. Furthermore, the resolution called for a review of the roles of the Council and Parliament in the selection and confirmation of the President of the Commission, aiming at a more faithful representation of electoral results. Finally, the amendments also suggested renaming the European Commission into the European Executive and improving the transparency of the Council of the European Union (European Parliament, 2023b).

In short, these amendments aimed at a "recalibration of the EU's institutional balance with a strengthening of the Parliament and the Commission and the marginalisation of the European Council, a widening of the Union's competences to core policy areas, and stronger EU supervision of national policies" (Lionello, 2023).

This proposal for the revision of the treaties conceptually followed many of the CoFoE proposals and essentially proposed a progressive federalisation of the EU (Lionello, 2023). In this respect, the reformist and federalist aspirations of the Parliament were quite evident in the resolution. In fact, at the beginning of the resolution there was a clear reference to the Ventotene Manifesto and the Schuman Declaration, two important milestones for European integration and European federalism. The reference to these two crucial texts for European history ideally underlined the intention to pursue their political goals (Lionello, 2023). In particular, pushing the EU in a federal direction was Amendment 239 "to switch from unanimity to QMV the decision-making procedure in Article 352 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU). This 'flexibility' clause implies powers for the Union not explicitly conferred by member states, allowing the EU to attain the objectives of the treaties by adopting new powers beyond those already laid down. It has been used extensively to deal with new challenges, such as enlargement and the establishment of agencies, but its use under the shadow of the national veto has more recently been limited. Its deployment by QMV would be of major constitutional significance, elevating the doctrine of implied federal powers" (Duff, p.6, 2023b).

Despite the reformist and federalist ambition of the Parliament, the proposal for treaty reform was not incorporated into the agenda of the European Council, thus leaving the matter pending and

unresolved up to the present moment. However, in the conclusions of the December summit there was a small section called "Reform", in which, in view of future enlargements, the Council acknowledged the need for internal reforms, stating that it would adopt a roadmap for future work on this by the summer of 2024 (European Council, 2023b). Although the Council reiterated that it was not ready for a change of the treaties, the intergovernmental institution considered appropriate to keep the discussion on possible structural reforms open. The decision to outline a roadmap for future changes reflected a certain strategic prudence, emphasising the importance of careful planning before embarking on significant treaty changes. This showed that, while cautious, the Council was aware of the challenges that future enlargement could bring and the need to adapt existing structures to accommodate new members. This section, although brief, indicated a commitment to the continued evolution and adaptation of the EU.

4.4 Reformist developments in 2024

On 20 March 2024, the Commission adopted its communication on pre-enlargement reforms and policy reviews, where it analysed key internal reforms needed for a larger and more functional Union. In this communication, reforms were seen as a prerequisite for enlargement and the Commission identified four key areas to work on: values, policies, budget and governance. Of particular interest is the last section, in which the Commission reflected on the institutional future of the EU in light of the geopolitical change brought about by the return of war and future enlargements. In this document, the Commission declared itself in favour of "treaty change, "if and where it is needed"" (European Commission, p.19, 2024g), but nevertheless believed that it was still possible to use the potential of the current treaties, mentioning for instance the use of passerelle clauses to switch from unanimity to qualified majority in many important policy areas. Furthermore, in its policy review, the Commission advocated the strengthening of the EU's security dimension, stating that the enlargement countries should not only contribute to the integration into European defence initiatives but also reinforce the Union's industrial base by following the EDIS priorities (European Commission, 2024g). In prospective, these commitments to reform the EU and the emphasis on the securitarian dimension underscore efforts to enhance strategic autonomy by improving decision-making efficiency and fortifying security and defence capabilities.

Sharing reformist aspirations with a view to enlargement was also the Belgian Presidency of the Council, which included in its six-month programme the objective to reflect on potential internal reforms. In this regard, at the European Council summit on 21 March 2024, under the section "Enlargement and reforms", "recalling the Granada Declaration, the European Council took stock of

preparations for enlargement and internal reforms recalling that work on both tracks needs to advance in parallel to ensure that both future Member States and the EU are ready at the time of accession. The European Council will address internal reforms at an upcoming meeting with a view to adopting by summer 2024 conclusions on a roadmap for future work" (European Council, p.10, 2024b). In addition, the Belgian Presidency also published a report on the future of Europe, in which it essentially reiterated the ideas set out by the Commission in its communication (Council of the European Union, 2024c).

At the summit of 27-28 June 2024, where the Council agreed on the nominations for the EU's top posts after the European elections and adopted the Strategic Agenda 2024-2029, the Council also proposed its roadmap for internal reforms. The conclusions stated that "in order to make the EU stronger and enhance European sovereignty, the European Council underlines the need to lay the necessary internal groundwork and reforms to fulfil the Union's long-term ambitions and address key questions related to its priorities and policies as well as its capacity to act in the face of a new geopolitical reality and increasingly complex challenges. This work should advance in parallel with the enlargement process, as both the Union and future Member States must be ready at the time of accession" (European Council, p.12, 2024c). To this end, for the roadmap on internal reforms, the European Council welcomed the Commission's communication on pre-enlargement reforms and policy reviews and invited it to present by spring 2025 in-depth policy reviews containing operational elements on the following four strands (values, policies, budget and governance) (European Council, 2024c). In addition, the Council also took note of the Belgian Presidency's report on the Future of Europe, inviting the Council to take the work forward and to present a follow-up report by June 2025, reflecting on the previous four strands.

In light of this, it can be seen that intergovernmental institutions, while remaining prudent, tend to be relatively open to institutional change, albeit not with the same level of ambition as supranational institutions. This attitude reflects a balance between the desire to adapt to new political and geopolitical challenges and the need to preserve institutional stability. Moreover, even the Strategic Agenda 2024-2029 itself emphasised the importance of undertaking the necessary internal policy reforms to enhance the EU's capacity to act (European Council, 2024a). In this regard, the Council argued that "the European Union will undertake the necessary internal reforms to ensure that our policies are fit for the future and financed in a sustainable manner and that the EU institutions continue to function and act effectively" (European Council, p.5, 2024a).

At time of writing, a further significant development in the reformist context was Ursula von der Leyen's speech, delivered on 18 July during the first plenary session of the new Parliament, on the

occasion of her reappointment as President of the Commission. In this speech, the re-elected president stated that "our Union and our democracy are constant work in progress. And there is more that we can do. We need an ambitious reform agenda to ensure the functioning of a larger Union and to increase democratic legitimacy. While reforms were necessary before, with enlargement they become indispensable. We must use this as a catalyst for change in terms of our capacity to act, our policies and our budget. We will of course focus on what we can already do, of which there is a lot. But we should be more ambitious. I believe we need Treaty change where it can improve our Union. And I want to work on that with this House" (European Commission, 2024h). Thus, while in its communication on pre-enlargement policy reforms and reviews, the Commission cautiously expressed an openness towards treaty change, with this subsequent declaration it decisively affirmed the ambitious need to reform the treaties in order to enhance the EU's capacity to act. This statement reveals an important message, that treaty change has become part of the new European Commission's agenda. "It should be noted that Von der Leyen's proposal does not merely refer to Treaty reform in general but also characterizes it both in terms of content and method. On the one hand, Von der Leyen states that the Union's reform, and thus the prospect of Treaty amendments, should focus on some priorities: strengthening the Union's capacity to act (therefore addressing the issue of the veto right), improving European policies (likely reviewing the distribution of competences between the EU and member states), and consolidating the budget (hopefully creating true fiscal capacity for the Union). At the same time, Von der Leyen has committed to working on this front side by side with the European Parliament" (Union of European Federalists, 2024).

The presence of this institutional willingness from the new Commission could be preparatory to achieving greater institutional, material and political autonomy: in short, strengthening the integration process to achieve greater strategic autonomy. Therefore, this trajectory towards treaty change and reforms aligns with the broader goal of achieving strategic autonomy. By revising the competences between the European Union and its member states, and by potentially redefining the budgetary and securitarian frameworks, the Union could strength its ability to act decisively on the international chessboard. This move towards greater autonomy would not only reinforce the EU internally but also enable it to project a more unified and potent stance externally.

Nevertheless, the new Commission's ambitious reform agenda will have to deal with a new European Parliament in which far-right forces have grown considerably. This presence could complicate potential reform attempts, as right-wing coalitions could oppose transfers of competences to the European level, especially in classic areas sensitive to national sovereignty (such as foreign policy and defence).

Despite the increased presence of right-wing, anti-European and anti-system forces at the European level, the votes by which Von der Leyen was elected (401 votes in favour, 284 against and 15 abstentions, 41 more than the necessary quorum) demonstrate that the pro-European bloc continues to hold out and that in this legislature there is still room to achieve decisive advances in the integration process, in continuity with CoFoE priorities.

In light of this, it can be asserted that "the window of opportunity for reforming the Union remains open, even though it is difficult to pursue. Meanwhile, history continues to knock on Europe's doors for it to finally mature and take on its responsibilities. The ongoing war in Ukraine, the growing destabilization of the Middle East, the possible return of Trump to the White House, and China's moves in Asia make it essential for the Union to transform and become a capable European power, free from national vetoes, in the interest of its citizens and the protection of its values (Union of European Federalists, 2024).

4.5 Conclusion

This chapter examined the reformist willingness of the main European institutions following the return of war to the European continent. As seen, the supranational institutions were the main promoters of these changes to ensure a stronger and more cohesive Union at the international level; the intergovernmental institutions, on the other hand, were less receptive to this willingness in the beginning, but over time became progressively more open to considering changes and adaptations. The former, over time, strongly supported the idea of reforming the treaties, while the latter did not.

The convergence of the three streams (Problem, Political, Policy) generated a window of opportunity which led to the constitutional awakening of the EU, where after yeas reforms returned in the European political agenda. In itself, this window did not guarantee the immediate adoption of changes, but it created a favourable context for reopening the debate on long neglected issues. The renewed focus on reform reflects a growing awareness of the need to adapt the Union's institutional structures to the new geopolitical realities and risks that have emerged with the conflict in Ukraine, so as to enhance the EU's international actors and its foreign policy. However, the translation of this opportunity into concrete action will depend on the ability of the European institutions and member states to overcome internal divisions and find sufficient consensus to push forward meaningful reforms, balancing the urgent need for change with concerns about national sovereignty and political balance within the Union.

In light of this, the quest towards greater strategic autonomy is intrinsically linked to the future constitutional evolution of the European architecture. The resurgence of logic of power on the

continent has underscored the urgent need for reforms in order bolster the EU's capacity for decisive and autonomous action. As Europe stands at this historic juncture, it is essential that the Union seizes this moment to craft a robust framework that not only addresses current exigencies but also fortifies its stance for future challenges, thus ensuring a resilient and sovereign Europe.

Conclusion

This research thesis aimed to investigate the consequences of the war in Ukraine on the European institutional architecture, especially in foreign and defence policy, analysing what changes it induced for the achievement of strategic autonomy.

From the analyses conducted, it appears that the return of the logic of power on the European continent catalysed not only the geopolitical, but also the securitarian and constitutional awakening of the EU. The war helped to trigger a process of identitarian rethinking of the EU, which began to take its first steps towards becoming a security actor. The Ukrainian conflict accelerated European integration in the field of defence and security, prompting the EU institutions to reconsider and strengthen common instruments such as joint planning and defence procurement. In this regard, there have been many European initiatives (such as EDIRPA, ASAP, EDIS and EDIP) in this area sensitive to national sovereignty. These efforts have also intensified the EU's industrial integration, increasingly stimulating the need for a more integrated approach to defence and security. Indeed, the war in Ukraine revitalised defence and foreign policy issues, laying the foundations for a Defence Union, an integrated defence framework between member states and European institutions. This initiative aims to enhance collaborative efforts and operational capabilities, thereby strengthening the EU as a security actor and advancing the achievement of strategic autonomy. All these advances have contributed to reinforcing the material and political dimensions of strategic autonomy. In particular, the use of joint defence procurement and the development of a common strategic culture through the Strategic Compass represent attempts towards the creation of a common European defence, bringing the EU closer to the goal of strategic autonomy.

The research thesis showed that, in building a Defence Union, the European Commission gained more manoeuvrability in an area traditionally controlled by the silo mentalities of the Council. The Commission used the opportunity to promote a communitarian policy, for instance in the area of defence procurement and also within the institutional perimeter (such as the establishment of the Defence Commissioner). The Commission has thus sought to insert its supranational logic into intergovernmental domains, for instance with defence projects financed by a European budget or with the intention of creating a Single Market for Defence. This approach aligns with the vision of establishing a Defence Union, which would not only represent a development in terms of military and defence cooperation, but also a strong signal of political and strategic integration at the European level, useful for achieving strategic autonomy.

Although these securitarian changes represent a significant step towards the integration of a European collective defence capability, the research thesis revealed that the EU, in responding to the

return of war, has been able to react but has struggled to act, as the monolithic intergovernmental logics have limited the coherence and effectiveness of foreign and defence policy. As examined throughout this thesis, intergovernmentalism has been one of the main hindrances to foreign policy and, consequently, to the achievement of strategic autonomy. Vetoes and unanimity have limited the development of the EU's institutional autonomy, making the constitutional grammar more rigid and less flexible, thus undermining the EU's ability to adapt to the evolving and rapidly changing demands of the geopolitical environment. The EU's strategic profile continues to be subordinated by the dogma of national competence that appears more a legacy of the past than an effective tool of the present. The war in Ukraine has shown that Europe still struggles to express a common line in foreign policy, but not because it is incapable: on the contrary, the Union would have all the potential to act more quickly and efficiently, but the various member states, perceiving themselves as the main masters of the treaties, act to prevent this from happening. This dynamic underlines a profound discrepancy between the historical need for unified action and the reality of a foreign policy fragmented by national interests, which continue to delay decision-making and weaken EU coherence internationally.

The research thesis emphasised that although the war amplified the echo of the EU's constitutional weaknesses, the Russian aggression against Ukraine also catalysed the urgency to reconsider and reform European governance, seeking to strengthen the capacity for action and no longer merely reaction. In this context, the CoFoE represented a transnational agora where European civil society had the opportunity to express its demands and aspirations, significantly influencing the political discourse on the future of the Union. This democratic forum allowed the different perspectives of European citizens to be channelled, fuelling a profound dialogue that transcended national and cultural borders. In this way, the CoFoE sought to build a collective and shared vision of the EU, advancing a range of structural reforms that could strengthen Europe's unity and cohesion.

The return of war has also rekindled interest in federalism as a potential remedy for the EU's institutional vulnerabilities. The conflict has shaken the institutional and political foundations of the EU and exposed how intergovernmentalism, based on the voluntary and consensual coordination of governments, proved to be incapable of dealing with the consequences of the Russian invasion of Ukraine. The call for federal-type solutions to mitigate the problems of the intergovernmental paradigm, which has fragmented collective action, reduced the effectiveness of EU initiatives and damaged the unified image of the EU, has intensified. Many eminent political figures in the EU's contemporary history called for a gradual, pragmatic and ideal federal metamorphosis of the EU so that it could achieve an institutional, material and political autonomy, in short strategic autonomy. Their governance ideas aimed to give the EU an autonomous capacity for decision-making and action

in key areas, decoupling it from external dependencies and strengthening internal cohesion. In this regard, the report on the future of the EU's competitiveness prepared by Draghi represents a call to strengthen the industrial and structural dimension of the EU, emphasizing that only through greater integration and reforms could the EU reassert itself as an autonomous power.

Overall, most of the major policy proposals examined postulated the need to address the historical change brought about by the return of war with greater integration to achieve strategic autonomy and with institutional reforms to revitalise the European governance.

Moving on, the research thesis showed that the war contributed to the constitutional awakening of the EU in which reforms returned to the political agenda of European institutions, no longer just as a theoretical concept, but as a practical and immediate necessity. The idea of reshaping the EU's institutional grammar, including through a revision of the treaties, acquired a concrete and urgent dimension, especially in relation to the goal of achieving full strategic autonomy. This institutional willingness, expressed mainly by the Parliament and the Commission, towards reform constitutes an important step towards equipping the EU with the capacity to take autonomous decisions and to act effectively, especially in an increasingly uncertain and competitive international context. The main reform proposals aim at strengthening internal cohesion, increasing the capacity and flexibility of decision-making by qualified majority and promoting greater integration in key areas such as defence. At the time of writing, the revision of the treaties is perceived by the supranational institutions as a necessary development to overcome the current constitutional constraints that limit the EU's material, political and institutional autonomy with the aim of building a more cohesive and autonomous Union. Therefore, the return of reform and the idea of treaty change to the political debate offers an opportunity to enhance the EU's capacity to act autonomously and pragmatically, rather than merely reacting to external events.

In light of this, the war in Ukraine represented a *Zeitenwende* for the history of European integration, leading not only to a securitarian awakening with, developments towards the creation of a Defence Union, but also to a constitutional awakening with commitments to change the institutional grammar of the EU.

The contribution of this research thesis lies in having adopted the theoretical framework of the Multiple Stream Approach (MSA) to analyse what has been presented so far, where strategic autonomy has been the architrave on which the entire analysis is built. In the first chapter, following an institutional overview, the main problems in foreign policy governance that limit the achievement of strategic autonomy (Problem Stream) were analysed. In the second chapter, it was observed how the war in Ukraine led to a political change, revitalising the focus on common defence and laying the

foundations for a Defence Union (Political Stream). In the third chapter, the main policy proposals considered necessary to improve European governance were analysed, highlighting the desirability for further integration and reforms to achieve strategic autonomy (Policy Stream).

The synergy between the recognition of problems, political context and feasible solutions has generated a window of opportunity, examined in chapter four, in which institutional reforms are no longer seen as mere theoretical abstractions, but as practical needs. In this context, the research thesis advances the idea that the possibility of amending the treaties and implementing structural reforms to improve the EU's capacity to act would constitute important steps towards achieving greater institutional autonomy (qualified majority decision-making and redistribution of competences between the EU and the member states), greater material autonomy (fiscal capacity and common debt) and greater political autonomy (intensified integration and a common strategic culture). In short, with the resurgence of the reformist spirit in Europe, the opportunities to achieve strategic autonomy have increased.

Despite these developments, significant challenges still persist. The strengthening of right-wing sovereignism in several member states and in the European Parliament raises questions about the political cohesion needed to implement the proposed reforms. Furthermore, the enlargement process represents an important area of attention for the future, as the integration of new member states offers the opportunity to strengthen the Union through institutional adjustments that can enrich and dynamize existing structures. Future studies could focus on analysing the impact of growing right-wing sovereignism and enlargement on the achievement of strategic autonomy. Furthermore, another factor to be considered for future research could be the outcome of the 2024 US elections, which could significantly influence European defence and security policies. Depending on the political direction taken by the US, new pressures or opportunities may emerge to reshape the European security architecture and promote greater autonomous development of European military capabilities.

In light of this, the European odyssey towards a more strategically autonomous future is fraught with numerous opportunities and challenges. However, as Monnet said, these are the challenges that shape and temper the European *Weltgeist*, pushing the Union to evolve and mature. In this epoch, marked by the return of international disorder, the European Union should strive to actively forge its own history, turning adversity into catalysts for greater cohesion and integration.

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