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European Strategic Autonomy

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Chances and Challenges for Europe

Master's Thesis

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Year of the defense: 2020

Declaration

1. I hereby declare that I have compiled this thesis using the listed literature and resources only.
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In Prague on 31 July 2020

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Abstract

The thesis explores the use of the term European Strategic Autonomy in the Common Security and Defence Policy (CFSP) of the European Union. The security environment around Europe has become increasingly unstable in the last 15 years. The EU Commission has tried to take account of the deteriorating geopolitical landscape by publishing an EU Global Strategy document in 2016 to share its vision for a stronger Europe. The document calls for strategic autonomy without properly defining it. Since then, many policy papers have captured the term and used it as a popular buzzword. Because it has not been properly defined on the political level, European Strategy Autonomy (ESA) was subject to speculations and national interpretations which did not help to advance the debate. Based on an extensive literature review the paper provides a comprehensive understanding by giving an historic overview and presenting different configurations of ESA in the contemporary context. A comparative case study, including France, Germany, and the Czech Republic has been conducted to assess their interpretation of the notion. The result of the case studies showed inherently different perceptions underlaid by different motivations and identifies the political layer to be the biggest challenge for moving forward with the topic. Politicians need to concretize the concept of ESA in the strategic, capability, and institutional dimensions to yield fruitful debates in the future.

Keywords

European Strategic Autonomy, Common Foreign and Security Policy, Permanent Structured Cooperation, European Security Council, Transatlantic Alliance, EU Global Strategy

Název práce (In Czech): Evropská Strategická Autonomie – šance a výzvy pro Evropu

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Master Thesis Proposal

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Proposed Topic:

The expected title of your thesis: *European Strategic Autonomy – chances and challenges for Europe*

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Topic characteristics / Research Question(s):

My thesis will focus on the following **general research question**: Is **European Strategic Autonomy** (ESA) a suitable and complementary concept to restructure the security architecture of the EU? In this context, does **PESCO** have the potential to contribute to real strategic autonomy in the framework of the **Common Foreign and Security Policy** (CFSP)?

The European Union faced numerous challenges in the past that revealed its limited ability to respond appropriately to foreign policy threats. Particularly the Crimea crisis (2014), and the refugee crisis (2015) have disclosed the institutional weaknesses and the different interests within the EU member states that paralyzed the EU's capacity to act efficiently: Additionally, the Brexit and the Euroscepticism of the Trump Administration who has questioned the usefulness of NATO have brought new life to considerations and discussions of how EU's prospective security architecture should look like. In this context, the term "**European Strategic Autonomy**" has been revived in scientific papers and political debates without being clearly defined. In fact, it seems that Strategic Autonomy and its (deliberate) vague interpretation causes confusion and irritation not only among the EU member states but also outside the EU, particularly in the US.

However, several steps towards "European Strategic Autonomy" have been already undertaken" in the framework of the CFSP. Scholars and political experts agree that more cohesion and flexibility is indispensable to avoid the European Union being paralyzed in future global affairs. With PESCO, established in late 2017, the EU has already initiated several projects where participation is voluntary. But at the same time, it may foster a Europe consisting of different blocks (multi-speed Europe), which raises the peril of a Europe being torn away. In this context, the dynamic of differentiated integration and the level of ambition in the area of security and defense policy (PESCO) will be analyzed based on the EU Global Strategy (EUGS) published in 2016. Three case studies will focus on German, French and Czech approaches to European Strategic Autonomy. The foundation of sources will be EU and government documents and policy papers from institutions specialized on European affairs as well as

academic literature, expert interviews and analysis, political magazines (*such as Spiegel*) and media outlets (such as www.tagesschau.de).

Working hypotheses:

1. **European Strategic Autonomy** does not stand in contradiction to NATO, but can be shaped as a complementary pillar in the security architecture of the EU
2. The definition of Strategic Autonomy **is willfully kept vague** (by member states) to not loose support and inside and beyond Europe
3. The current initiated PESCO projects do **reflect a rather low level of ambition** of “European Strategic Autonomy”

Methodology:

For the notion “(European) Strategic Autonomy” the term’s past will be illuminated. Then recent policy papers from different EU member states will be analyzed to carve out a broad but clear definition. This will enable to carve out features and implications for the prerequisites of real Strategic Autonomy.

Additionally, the methodology of the thesis will also entail a (comparative) case study analysis, where the political discourse, developments and implementation measures will be subject to critical scrutiny. The method will be based on examination of government perspectives (analysis of governmental documents and speech acts) and Semi-structured interviews will be conducted with German, French and Czech experts and - as far as available - also politicians (proponents and opponents of a multi-speed Europe). The thesis will draw on academic literature, expert policy papers and media contributions (articles from journals and political magazines). Based on that, a set of possible challenges and chances as well as policy recommendations will be presented.

Outline:

1. Introduction
2. Theoretical background
 - a. Atlanticism
 - b. Europeanism
 - c. St. Malo
3. The CFSP after St. Malo
 - a. The European Security Strategy
 - b. The EU Global Strategy
 - c. PESCO
4. European Strategic Autonomy – contemporary different perspectives
 - a. American perspectives in academia
 - b. Different perceptions within Europe

5. European Strategic autonomy – level of ambition
 - a. Operational capabilities
 - b. Political willingness
6. Case studies
7. Conclusions
8. References / Bibliography

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Content

- Abbreviations: XII
- Introduction:..... 1
- Methodology 3
- 1. Theoretical Background 5
 - 1.1 Balancing..... 6
 - 1.2 Bandwagoning 7
 - 1.3 Conclusion and criticism of structural realism 9
- 2. The notion (European) Strategic Autonomy 11
 - 2.1 First usage of the term Strategic Autonomy 11
 - 2.2 Definitions of Strategic Autonomy 14
 - 2.3 Strategic Autonomy as responsibility, hedging and emancipation 18
- 3. The Aftermath of Saint-Malo: The European Security Strategy (ESS) and the EU Global Strategy (EUGS) 22
 - 3.1 The European Security Strategy (ESS) 22
 - 3.2 The EU Global Strategy (EUGS)..... 25
 - 3.3 Contemporary initiatives 27
- 4. EUGS – level of ambition..... 31
 - 4.1 Level of ambition – the military dimension..... 32
 - 4.2 Level of ambition – the Political dimension: 38
 - 4.2.1 The qualified majority voting 40
 - 4.2.2 EU Security Council 43
 - 4.3 Conclusion: 47
- 5. Comparative analysis: 48
 - 5.1 Methodological approach..... 48
 - 5.2 Case study France: 50

5.3 Case study Germany:	54
5.4 Case study Czech Republic:	58
5.5 Summary of case studies and findings	62
6. Conclusion:.....	64
Bibliography.....	xiii
List of Appendices:	xxi
Appendix.....	xxii

Abbreviations:

CARD	=	Coordinated Annual Review on Defence
CDP	=	Capability Development Plan
CFSP	=	Common Foreign and Security Policy
DGAP	=	German Council on Foreign Relations (Deutsche Gesellschaft für Auswärtige Politik)
EDA	=	European Defence Agency
EDF	=	European Defence Fund
ESDP	=	European Security and Defence Policy
EI2/E2I	=	European Intervention Initiative
ESA	=	European Strategic Autonomy
ESC	=	European Security Council
ESS	=	European Security Strategy
EU	=	European Union
EUGS	=	European Global Strategy
IISS	=	International Institute for Strategic Studies
LoA	=	Level of Ambition
PESCO	=	Permanent Structured Cooperation
QMV	=	Qualified Majority Voting
SWP	=	German Institute for International and Security Affairs (Stiftung Wissenschaft and Politik)
UK	=	United Kingdom
WEU	=	Western European Union

Introduction

In May 2017, German Chancellor Angela Merkel admitted: **“The times in which we could completely depend on others are, to a certain extent, over. [...] We Europeans truly have to take our fate into our own hands.”**¹ Several media immediately considered her speech to be "historic" as her words had initiated a fundamental change in the political rhetorics in the transatlantic relationship.²

Consequently, the sentence was anything but beer tent talk. On the contrary, since Merkel's speech at the latest, the debate about Europe's status quo in security and defence policy issues has revived again. With Russia's Crimea annexation, Trump's unpredictability, and China's empowerment Europe is facing actors and states that are undermining or openly questioning the rules-based international order. Additionally, the migration crisis as well as the ongoing civil war in Syria have revealed the different interests within the European Union (EU) and the inability to properly address crisis management issues. In June 2016, almost at the same time as the Brexit vote, the EU Global Strategy (EUGS) paper was published reviving the political discussions on how EU's prospective security architecture should look like.³

In this context, the term **“European Strategic Autonomy”** (ESA) has been coined, interpreted, and extensively discussed in numerous think-tank papers. In fact, since the publication of the EUGS, several initiatives have been launched to support what has been announced in the EUGS: The Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO), the European Defence Fund (EDF) the Coordinated Annual Review on Defence (CARD), and the European Intervention Initiative (EI2). Thus, this paper views the EUGS as a reference point from which on the discussion about ESA

¹ Henley, 2017. Angela Merkel: EU cannot completely rely on US and Britain anymore; The Guardian, online article from 28th May 2017, available at <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/may/28/merkel-says-eu-cannot-completely-rely-on-us-and-britain-any-more-g7-talks>, last visited on 13.07.2020

² Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung: Enormer Wandel in der politischen Rhetorik, online article from 29th May 2017, available at <https://www.faz.net/aktuell/politik/bundestagswahl/rede-von-angela-merkel-so-reagieren-die-medien-15037304.html>, last visited on 13.07.2020

³ Official website of the European External Action Service: Shared Vision, Common Action: A stronger Europe; A Global Strategy for the Union's Foreign and Security Policy, June 2016

will be explored. Since then being used as a popular buzzword, ESA has been causing confusion and irritation due to its vague and blurred conceptualization not only among EU member states but also outside the EU, particularly in the US. This paper aims at providing a comprehensive contribution to the multi-layered concept of strategic autonomy by laying out the following research questions:

1. What does the broad concept of ESA encompass and what perspectives on European Strategic Autonomy do exist?
2. Which level of ambition for pursuing ESA is realistic?
3. Which subfields of ESA need to be narrowed down to advance the concept?

The thesis introduces the topic by providing a theoretical background of states' behavior to understand the motivations and attitudes of EU member states. Chapter 3 gives an overview of the historical usage of the term ESA before laying out a current definition. Further, an extensive conceptualization of strategic autonomy is proposed to give an idea of what kinds of different levels of ambition are conceivable. Chapter 4 illustrates the development and change of approaches in security and defence issues since St. Malo (1998) where the term of strategic autonomy was officially captured for the first time. This will explain why initiatives such as PESCO have been launched. Chapter 5 consists of a comparative analysis of three countries (France, Germany, Czech Republic) which have been conducted through expert interviews. Chapter 6 summarizes the main points of the previous chapters and concludes with policy recommendations.

Methodology

The Methodology starts with a theoretical background to provide a fundamental understanding of states' conceivable reactions towards external threats. Neorealism, also referred to as structural realism has shaped major theoretical paradigms in International Relations and made significant contributions to the European integration process in the field of foreign and security policy. In fact, the neorealist streams present one of the prime theories and thus predominantly have influenced the academic debate.⁴ Thus, the different approaches of Neorealism are presented to outline different perspectives on European cooperation in the CFSP.

Chapter 2 aims at giving a profound insight of the notion by elaborating on the ESA in three steps: A flashback will display when the term was used first and by what it was triggered. The second part gives a literature review of definitions and determines the definition relevant for the thesis followed by a conceptualization that will illustrate the spectrum of interpretation.

Chapter 3 turns to the last two published European security strategy documents and carves out the paradigm change. This is essential to answer the question of why and how the EU security strategy shifted in the last 20 years resulting in the current tools of PESCO, EDF, CARD, and E2I. The last subchapter will go into detail about these initiatives to explain their differences.

Chapter 4 deals with the ill-defined notion of the "appropriate level of ambition" (LoA). The EU Global Strategy paper (EUGS) mentions this notion several times but fails to give a meaningful answer to how high the LoA should be. The chapter tries to give a realistic assessment of the LoA in the foreseeable future by examining the operational and political dimensions. The latter grapples with the question, what options are available to make the decision process more efficient and how they are prioritized on the political agenda. The operational dimension is explored by referring and combining two conducted extensive studies:

⁴ Larivé 2014: Debating European Security and Defense Policy: Understanding the Complexity, p. 12

1. A joint study from the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS) and the German Council on Foreign Relations released in 2018. It compares the EUGS level of ambition with the contemporary military capability shortfalls through the creation of scenarios.
2. A study from the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS) released in 2019. It compares the consistency of the CDP objectives with current military capability shortfalls (results are taken from the first study) considering the first two rounds of PESCO projects

In Chapter 5, a comparative analysis is conducted. It represents a methodology within political science that is often used in the study of political systems, institutions, or processes.⁵ Apart from the analysis of official government documents and statements, semi-structured expert interviews from each country have been conducted. This method allows to get in-depth insights into current developments on the policy level and facilitates to acquire qualitative data that can be compared. The attitudes of France, Germany, and the Czech Republic on issues concerning the European Strategic Autonomy are examined and then put in relation to each other in order to clarify to what extent the positions are diverging or overlapping. This allows to identify key obstacles and necessary changes to advance ESA.

⁵ Stafford, 2013. Comparative Analysis Within Political Science, 14.11.2013, available at <https://www.e-ir.info/pdf/44275>,

1. Theoretical Background

As Neorealism, also referred to as structural realism, has undoubtedly shaped major theoretical paradigms in International Relations, the dominating contributions to European Security from a theoretical perspective stem from this stream. Theories of structural realism assume an anarchic system in which states are characterized as rational actors seeking to influence other states to minimize these threats.⁶ Kenneth Waltz's **balance of power** and Stephen M. Walt's **balance of threat**⁷ theory have laid the theoretical foundations how states are acting being exposed to internal and external security threats. Structural realism has emerged through the development of these two theories.

For Realists, a popular subject of academic scrutiny is the question what motivation has led the EU to create a framework for a common security and defence policy (CSDP) as the concept of institutionalized collective security challenges the realist perspectives on inter-state competition for security.⁸ Thus, when analysing defence and security issues based on theoretical concepts, it's the neorealist streams that present one of the prime theories and thus predominantly have shaped the academic debate.⁹

Within the stream, two dominant approaches were established to explain and theorize the integration process of EU in defence and security matters: Balancing and bandwagoning

⁶ Larivé, 2014. *Debating European Security and Defense Policy: Understanding the Complexity*, p. 11

⁷ The proposition that states will join alliances in order to avoid domination by stronger powers lies at the heart of traditional balance of power theory. Balance of threat theory modified the neorealism of Kenneth Waltz by separating power from threat. Walt argues that states do rather balance against threats than states.

⁸ Pohl, 2013. *Neither Bandwagoning nor Balancing: Explaining Europe's Security Policy*, p. 356

⁹ Larivé, 2014. *Debating European Security and Defense Policy: Understanding the Complexity*, p. 12

1.1 Balancing

The idea that states will join alliances in order to avoid domination by stronger powers lies at the heart of traditional balance of power theory. According to Schweller, balancing is the “creation or aggregation of military power through either internal mobilization or the forging of alliances to prevent or deter the occupation and domination of the state by a foreign power or coalition.”¹⁰ He argues the objective of balancing to be rooted in “self-preservation and the protection of values already possessed. Simply put, in the presence of a significant external threat balancing is driven by the desire to avoid losses.”¹¹

The change of the international order from bipolar (Cold War) to unipolar (post-Cold War) to the current multipolar environment is essential to explain the EU’s efforts to create more coherence in the foreign policy realm. Traditional or “hard-balancing” reached its peak in the Cold War when the Soviets and the United States competed with each other through formal alliances and military buildups aggravated by the threat to deploy nuclear weapons.¹² The shift of power distribution consequently encouraged European states to collaborate for two reasons: to increase Europe’s ability to project power abroad, and to decrease reliance on the United States. Thus, the narrative to explain the integration efforts is that CSDP was first to balance German power after its reunification and nowadays is used rather as a means to balance US withdrawal from the European continent.¹³

But applying the traditional balance hypothesis to CSDP seems to be flawed as the security policy of the EU is surely not designed to balance in the domain of security and military capabilities. CSDP is not replacing NATO as the primary security provider for Europe. In Posen’s view the EU is still balancing US power, but admittedly not very intensively as Europeans have “simply supported the construction of a parallel structure” but also “support improved cooperation between NATO and ESDP.”¹⁴

¹⁰ Schweller, 2016. The Balance of power in World Politics, Oxford Research Encyclopedias; May 2016; available under <https://oxfordre.com/politics/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780190228637.001.0001/acrefore-9780190228637-e-119>,

¹¹ Schweller, 1994. Bandwagoning for Profit: Bringing the Revisionist State back in; p. 74

¹² Paul, 2018. Restraining Great Powers: Soft balancing from Empires to the global era; p. 110-115

¹³ Jones, 2007. The Rise of European Security Cooperation, Chapter 7 (The Tragedy of US-European relations), p. 222

¹⁴ Posen, 2006. European Union Security and Defense Policy: Response to Unipolarity?, p. 184

Pape has therefore introduced the term soft-balancing to divide it from hard-balancing. Traditional hard balancing includes the objective to change the military balance to constrain or eliminate the threat. In contrast, soft balancing relies on nonmilitary tools. It implies the use of economic and diplomatic instruments, informal alignments, international institutions, and economic sanctions to restrain the hegemonial power. Concretely, Pape enumerates territorial denial, entangling diplomacy, economic strengthening, and signaling of resolve to participate as soft-balancing mechanisms.¹⁵ Paul points out that the first two decades of the post-Cold War era featured rather soft-balancing policies because globalization and deep economic interdependencies made active military balancing too costly and dangerous. He instances the invasion of Iraq in 2003 as a classic example of soft balancing. By using tactics of coordinating diplomatic positions at the UN and other forums, France, Germany, and Russia weakened the legitimacy of the US intervention.¹⁶

1.2 Bandwagoning

The second approach argues that the EU security strategy is rather characterized by a bandwagoning than a balancing strategy: Bandwagoning describes the idea of strategically weaker states aligning with “stronger states, adversarial powers, or superior alliances for the purpose of offsetting a balance of power and thus obtaining an overall strategic advantage, even if, by doing so, the stronger state or dominant members receive widely disproportionate gains.”¹⁷ This overall strategic advantage can result from various incentives the dominant power is able to offer such as economic gains through trade or most importantly security.¹⁸ In contrast to balancing which is driven by the desire to avoid losses, bandwagoning stands for the opportunity to obtain values coveted. Unlike balancing, bandwagoning does not necessarily require the existence of an external threat.¹⁹

¹⁵ Pape, 2005. Soft balancing against the United States, p.36

¹⁶ Paul, 2018. Restraining Great Powers: Soft balancing from Empires to the global era; p. 1-3 and p. 110-115

¹⁷ Brown; McLean and McMillian, 2018. A Concise Oxford Dictionary of Politics and International Relations

¹⁸ Larivé, 2014. Debating European Security and Defense Policy: Understanding the Complexity, p. 13

¹⁹ Schweller 1994. Bandwagoning for Profit: Bringing the Revisionist State back in; p. 74

In relation to the US, Wivel argues the EU's security behavior since the end of the Cold War is oriented towards bandwagoning rather than balancing. He puts forward three reasons for this: First, the costs of balancing in a unipolar world is financially and politically too high; second, the power gap between the US and EU is too wide; and third, the European security stability continues to be dependent on the military strength of the US for the foreseeable future.²⁰ With the US strategic priorities shifting gradually away towards the Middle East and the Asia Pacific region, Europe had to change its bandwagoning strategy, grappling with two issues: The possible threat of abandonment of the US leaving Europe alone with security problems in its geopolitical vicinity. Additionally, the European were exposed to the imminent danger of being entrapped in US strategic interests. Certainly, Europe and the US do share common security concerns such as fighting terrorism and prevention of proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. On the other hand, there are different perceptions between the US and Europe with regards to the nature of key security issues and the approach to deal with these challenges.²¹ Iran and the energy security of Europe which evokes even disagreement even within the European Union are illustrating examples.

Dyson considers the CSDP to be a central element of 'reformed bandwagoning' on the US. It mainly serves two objectives: First, to act autonomously (even though in a limited scope) when the US is not interested to take action but where vital EU interests are at stake. Second, to employ CSDP as an institutional forum that fosters the establishment of military capabilities being useful for NATO missions, too. The first point pictures CSDP as a competitor to NATO, the latter as a tool, the so-called European pillar of the Atlantic Alliance bearing a great share of the security burden. According to Dyson, the ambiguous relationship between NATO and CSDP does not refute the bandwagoning thesis. Given Europe's security problem, it has no choice but to stay close to the US. Simultaneously, by presenting yourself as useful (through burden-sharing) you avoid being abandoned by the US. Additionally, Europe benefits from CSDP with some degree of autonomy, which represents an attractive gain of bandwagoning.²²

²⁰ Wivel, 2008. Balancing against threats or bandwagoning with power? Europe and the transatlantic relationship after the Cold War; p. 295-296

²¹ Dyson, 2013. Balancing Threat, not Capabilities: European Defence Cooperation as Reformed Bandwagoning, p. 388; <https://doi.org/10.1080/13523260.2013.808073>

²² Dyson, 2013. Balancing Threat, not Capabilities: European Defence Cooperation as Reformed Bandwagoning, p. 388; <https://doi.org/10.1080/13523260.2013.808073>

1.3 Conclusion and criticism of structural realism

To conclude the arguments of structural neorealism circle around the changing distribution of power as the main variable. From the different strategic approach how states deal with perceived threats ([soft-]balancing and bandwagoning) two competing versions with opposed assumptions and policy prescriptions are identified: offensive and defensive realism: Defensive realists (e.g. Walt; Posen) argue that major powers pursue a strategy to maximize their security by preserving the existing balance of power through mostly defensive strategies. This corresponds to the idea that states are inclined to balance rather than to bandwagon with each other. Offensive realists (e.g. Mearsheimer, Schweller), in contrast, consider states not to be security but power maximizers which will encourage states to aggressively look for opportunities to exert power and influence.²³

For the neorealist debate about the EU integration process in security and defense policies, these two approaches have opposing implications: While offensive neorealists think that defence cooperation among European powers will not succeed considering the post-Cold War international system, proponents of the defensive realist camp believe that the pressure of the international system will bring European powers closer together.²⁴

However, translating and employing the theories of structural realism into today's CSDP processes is not uncontested. First, applying neorealism as a state-centric theory that has been developed in the 20th century to the EU, which evidently is an organization sui generis - not a state - provokes inconsistencies. Pohl considers neither balancing nor bandwagoning as a suitable explanation for European security efforts. He opines that the most important EU governments are driven by domestic expectations of regional security and preferred foreign policy roles, not relative power. Hence, Pohl identifies the domestic stage to be the relevant arena for the struggle for power. For him, European security policy is characterized "partly by a shared liberal consensus, and partly by diverging national preferences and

²³ Lobell, 2010. Structural Realism/Offensive and Defensive Realism, available under <https://oxfordre.com/internationalstudies/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780190846626.001.0001/acrefore-9780190846626-e-304>,

²⁴ Larivé, 2014. Debating European Security and Defense Policy: Understanding the Complexity, p. 17

priorities rooted in idiosyncratic political cultures.”²⁵ Similarly argues Hyde-Park: A full-fledged theoretical base that claims to explain contemporary CSDP/CFSP must include both the analysis of domestic level variables and the consideration of external, systemic influences. He also criticizes the undervaluing of the power of institutionalized multilateral cooperation as neorealism believes that cooperation under anarchy is not easily attainable. This has been proved wrong when looking at the integration process that has continued in the Post-world era.²⁶

Even though these critics are justified, structural realism has its merits when analyzing EU-US relations. It helps to identify certain behavioral patterns and to recognize systemic pressures that EU member states are exposed and thus, enable a “more informed and balanced debate on the EU as a foreign and security policy actor.”²⁷ For a more in-depth understanding of European Strategic Autonomy, however, the structured realism theories do not suffice.

²⁵ Pohl, 2013. Neither Bandwagoning nor Balancing: Explaining Europe’s Security Policy, abstract + p.368-369

²⁶ Hyde-Park, 2012. Neorealism: A structural approach to CSDP, p. 24-26

²⁷ Hyde-Park, 2012. Neorealism: A structural approach to CSDP, p. 25

2. The notion (European) Strategic Autonomy

2.1 First usage of the term Strategic Autonomy

The notion „strategic autonomy“ as a concept first appeared in the French White paper on Defense published in 1994.²⁸ The term “autonomie stratégique” affirmed the break with traditional Gaullism²⁹ which was originally shaped in particular by the idea of a centralized and strong role of the state, scepticism towards supranational cooperation and strong presence in global affairs all over the world to ensure autonomous political and military action. However, in this context autonomy was not considered as a concept or strategic end rather than as an instrument to overcome the bipolarity of the Cold War. With some minor adjustments, De Gaulle’s successors have essentially adopted this foreign policy thinking during the Cold War.³⁰

Insofar, the 1994 Defense White paper constitutes a turning point in the concept of French military independence as it points out that the own national security interests from now on need to be coordinated within a European Framework.³¹ In French eyes, the security conditions for the Western European Union (WEU) have significantly changed due to the dissolution of the Soviet Union. Thus, „strategic autonomy” will no longer be based solely on nuclear deterrence”. Instead, “the resources of the armies [...] will be [...] strongly solicited for external crisis prevention and resolution missions without direct risk of nuclear escalation or the prospect of total war.”³² In this context, the paper states three key areas for strategic autonomy:

- intelligence data which allows the forecasting and the autonomous assessment of events and thus, creating the capacity to make decisions quickly

²⁸ Livre Blanc sur la Defense 1994

²⁹ Oxford Analytica France: Defence Strategy French try to set European security agenda: The Globe and Mail, article from May 10th, 1994

³⁰ Schmitt, O., 2017. The Reluctant Atlanticist: France’s Security and Defence Policy in a Transatlantic Context, *Journal of Strategic Studies*, 40:4, 463-474, p.465

³¹ Rieker, P., 2006. From Common Defence to Comprehensive Security: Towards the Europeanization of French Foreign and Security Policy?; *Security Dialogue*; Vol. 37(4): 509–528

³² Livre Blanc sur la Defense 1994; p. 52

- the control of complex situations, which combines political, military and regional dimensions from a strategic point of view, the multinational and joint force dimensions in the military field
- strategic mobility, to be free of our movements, and to be able to project forces to the right place in a timely fashion.³³

The main idea behind these ambitions was to show France's willingness to break away from its long-standing policy of weapons self-sufficiency and to establish an autonomous European armaments industry.³⁴ The shifting from deterrence to crisis prevention is not only the result of the end of the Cold War but foremost shaped by the Balkan crisis, beginning in the early 1990s that led to the breakup of the Yugoslav state. These violent events revealed Europe's inability to solve security issues without U.S. military intervention even in its pure vicinity. They unveiled fundamental deficits: There were neither facilities to manage crisis management missions nor mechanisms to reach political consensus among the European member states for military action outside of NATO.³⁵ The Kosovo crisis (1998 – 1999) affirmed this dilemma when then British prime minister Tony Blair failed to assemble a credible threat of ground force intervention towards the Serbian government. Under US leadership, NATO intervened with airstrikes solely, when the conflict had already come to a head.³⁶

Thus, in the first half of 1998, the Blair administration sought the rapprochement with France in security matters by taking a more integrationist view and aligning the French emphasis on autonomous action with British support for NATO³⁷ ³⁸ However, the perceptions of coordinated European security and defence policy were inherently contradictory: Whereas the French preferred a European defence capability independent from NATO, reflecting their critical attitude towards American domination in the Alliance, the British side strongly

³³ Livre Blanc sur la Defense 1994; p. 52 – 53

³⁴ Oxford Analytica France: Defence Strategy French try to set European security agenda: The Globe and Mail, article from May 10th, 1994

³⁵ Kashmeri, S. A., 2011. The North Atlantic Treaty Organization and the European Union's Common Security and Defense Policy: Intersecting Trajectories; Strategic Studies Institute (SSI)

³⁶ Tony Blair was not able to convince the Clinton administration of a ground force intervention in Kosovo. In September 1998, the Clinton administration ruled out US ground forces, even in a peacekeeping role

³⁷ Mölder, H., 2018. British approach to the European Union: From Tony Blair to David Cameron, Tallinn University of Technology; p.160

³⁸ In his memoir "A Journey", Blair states that this event persuaded him "of the need for strong European leadership and for a proper European defence strategy."; Blair, T., 2010. A Journey; London: Random House, p. 227

emphasized the need to develop these tools within the NATO framework:³⁹ But both recognized the necessity of collaboration in order to be able to present a credible EU defence strategy. The British concession is reflected in the core sentence of the joint declaration of the Saint-Malo summit in December 1998:

“To this end, the Union must have **the capacity for autonomous action**, backed up by credible military forces, the means to decide to use them, and a readiness to do so, in order to respond to international crisis.”⁴⁰

Translating the Amsterdam Treaty (effective since May 1999) into a ‘capacity for autonomous action’ represented a huge concession from the British side moving away from its traditional position on NATO. But for the UK autonomous capacity only referred to the proper respond to international crisis. The Blair administration emphasized that the collective defence of NATO territory is an exclusive role reserved for NATO.⁴¹ The European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP) should not question or even replace NATO’s responsibilities in territorial issues. The declaration’s purpose was to take account of the fact that the new security challenges are crisis management in nature.⁴² Howorth argues that there were three levels of ambition linked to European defence autonomy at Saint-Malo:

- strategic/political level: The EU wants to be independent in defining, pursuing and operationalising its strategic interests
- capacity level: EU sets up military and civilian instruments with the thinking that it can free-ride within the NATO and stamping up the necessary resources within the EU framework.
- Operational level: The EU gradually acquires the skills to conduct missions in the interest of the strategy with the consciousness that the US might disengage from the EU step by step⁴³

³⁹ The United Kingdom was motivated by Atlanticist impulses and France by European ambition;

⁴⁰ Joint Declaration issued at the British-French summit in Saint-Malo, 4 December 1998

⁴¹ Ricketts, P., 2017. The EU and defence; The Legacy of Saint-Malo; *Rusi Journal*, p.33

⁴² Parry, E. J., 2008. The St Malo declaration 10 years on, *Financial Times*, article from December 1st 2008

⁴³ Howorth, J., 2017. European defence policy between dependence and autonomy: A challenge of Sisyphean dimensions; p.22-23

In hindsight, the Balkan conflicts were a wake-up call for activating the CSDP which was already codified in EU law under the Treaty of Maastricht in 1993.⁴⁴ They set up the foundations for coordinated military action initiatives. The St. Malo declaration can be considered as a political breakthrough, where each side had moved beyond its position to reach a compromise. The UK accepted that the EU should establish real military capabilities and develop the means to facilitate military operations. The French agreed that this would be done complementing, not competing with NATO.⁴⁵ Consequently, the St. Malo summit can be insofar considered as a caesura as it represented a paradigm shift in European security thinking, paving the way for the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP).⁴⁶

2.2 Definitions of Strategic Autonomy

Even though “strategic autonomy” was already used in the French White paper on Defence of 1994 and mentioned in a few speeches and works before⁴⁷, a first thorough analysis of the term can be found in a report on the “external security of France against the new strategic challenges”⁴⁸, drafted by the French think-tank “Institut Montaigne” in May 2002. The paper emphasizes the necessity to distinguish between (national) independence and strategic autonomy. In an uncertain, open and flexible world it is less about being fully independent than having the means to overcome frequent and violent shocks. Continuous and advanced interdependency in an increased globalized world thus requires a redefinition of independence – it is not so much by acting alone at any time and at any place as by being able to have the necessary information to define the strategic line and to be able to mobilise a vast

⁴⁴ The Treaty of Maastricht was signed in February 1992 and came into force in November 1993. Apart from the already existing internal market, the Treaty also created two new pillars: Security Policy and Cooperation in the Fields of Justice and Home Affairs and the EU on Common Foreign and Security Policy: For the latter, Article J.1 constitutes: “The Union and its Member States shall define and implement a common foreign and security policy, [...] covering all areas of foreign and security policy.” p. 125 available under https://europa.eu/european-union/sites/europaeu/files/docs/body/treaty_on_european_union_en.pdf,

⁴⁵ Ricketts, P., 2017 The EU and defence; The Legacy of Saint-Malo; Rusi Journal, p.34

⁴⁶ Fiott, D., 2018. Strategic autonomy towards ‘European sovereignty’ in defence?; p.1

⁴⁷ Charles de Gaulle used the term once in a speech in demarcating its outlines. It is also named in a few doctrinal works in the 1970s that cannot claim to draw an concise conceptualization of strategic autonomy, see Mauro, F., 2018. Strategic autonomy under the spotlight; The New Holy Grail of European Defence, Grip Report 2018, p.4 & 17 (Footnotes 2,3,60);

⁴⁸ Institut Montaigne : Report on “La sécurité extérieure de la France face aux nouveaux risques stratégiques”

range of means of action. The document determines strategic autonomy be featured by two principles:

1. **First principle:** there can be no legitimate and effective action that is not based on precise and rapid information. Maintaining one's own means of acquiring sensitive data must remain a priority, whether this concerns military, political, diplomatic or commercial information. In a world in which mastery of information is crucial, any dependence in this area serves to reduce power and influence;
2. **Second principle:** the ability to act alone as a last resort, if the higher interests of the nation so require, whilst mobilising the entire range of possible integration options under normal circumstances. Hence the many questions: which operational competencies should be kept on a national level? Which fields of competence and which operators should be prioritised? The concept of strategic autonomy inevitably leads there to questioning a few fundamental elements. (...) ⁴⁹

The paper concludes that strategic autonomy and European commitment are inseparable, as were nuclear deterrence and Atlantic reinsurance during the Cold War. ⁵⁰

A research paper, published in March 2019 by Lippert, von Ondarza and Perthes from the German Institute for International and Security Affairs takes a comparable approach, demarcating autonomy from autarky. Interdependencies in our world suggest that autonomy can neither imply autarchy nor isolation nor the rejection of alliances. Autonomy is rather a relational term – it must be assessed in relation to others. The authors of this study define strategic autonomy “as the ability to set one's own priorities and make one's own decision in matter of foreign policy and security, political and material wherewithal to carry these through – in cooperation with third parties, or if need to be alone.” Hence, strategic autonomy is a gradual process and not an absolute condition: Strong strategic autonomy means to be a rule-maker, the opposite would amount to a rule-taker subject to strategic decisions made by others. The basic prerequisite for a credible European strategic autonomy is therefore strong

⁴⁹ Insitutit Montaigne : Report on “La sécurité extérieure de la France face aux nouveaux risques stratégiques” p. 36-37

⁵⁰ Insitutit Montaigne: Report on “La sécurité extérieure de la France face aux nouveaux risques stratégiques” p. 41

partnerships within the EU.⁵¹ Grevi argues in the same vein. For him, the concept of strategic autonomy rests on cooperation and partnership, not isolation. It does not illustrate a binary concept but rather a matter of degree. He opines full autonomy may not be achievable, but progress and the pursuit of strategic autonomy should strengthen the basis for European sovereignty, making Europe more self-reliant. According to Grevi, strategic autonomy is about “setting objectives, making decisions and mobilising resources in ways that do not primarily depend on the decisions and assets of others.”⁵²

There are also definitions that are primarily shaped by military and defence industrial considerations. Varga points out that although becoming a key catchphrase in many recent debates and official EU documents, strategic autonomy has not been defined specifically. Thus, from a theoretical perspective, it could also encompass the objective of the EU to be in full control of its territorial defence. However, there are several EU documents clearly hinting at the fact that this role is reserved solely for NATO. Some experts connect strategic autonomy with a strengthened European defence industry. Another camp – and this is also the opinion shared by Varga – assesses strategic autonomy by the ability to conduct expeditionary military operations at least in Europe’s vicinity. However, Varga considers the European Union to be in a position far away from strategic autonomy in both military and political perspective.⁵³

Dandee seizes on the definition of Indian scholar Bajpai who refers strategic autonomy to “a foreign policy posture, whereby a nation maintains independent outlook and orientation in foreign affairs with respect to the issues defining their core interests.” Identifying “independent” and “core interests” as the key terms of Bajpai’s statement, he rejects his definition due to problematic determination of the latter notion. What’s EU interest? The argument here is that the sum of national interests of all EU members does not reflect core European interests as national interests show a wide variety. Hence, European strategic autonomy cannot be defined at the basis of national interests in the first place. Such an approach would only result in finding the lowest common denominator not fulfilling the requirements for true strategic autonomy. Consequently, Dandee points to the inherent problem that ESA is only as strong as its weakest link. These circumstances consequently lead

⁵¹ Lippert, B. et al., 2019. European Strategic Autonomy, Actors Issues, Conflicts of Interests, p. 5

⁵² Grevi, G., 2019. Strategic autonomy for European choices: The key to Europe’s shaping power

⁵³ Varga, G., 2017. Towards European Strategic Autonomy? Evaluating the New CSDP Initiatives, p. 5

him to the conclusion that military power, supported by credible political, diplomatic and economic action is the key to strengthening European strategic autonomy.⁵⁴

Arteaga formulates a first clear delineation of the concept of strategic autonomy: He argues that the term is composed of three different dimensions: **political** (strategy), **operational** (capabilities) and **industrial** (equipment) autonomy. Depending on the relative mix and emphasis of these three elements, the concept of strategic gets a different meaning.⁵⁵ Aside from a clear division into these three dimensions, Arteaga outlines a planning process to avoid the concept of strategic autonomy being reduced to its operational dimension: First, a delineation of strategic needs (level of ambition) is necessary to identify the operational needs (capabilities). These operational needs are later translated into industrial decisions (capacities). Yet, for the definition of European strategic autonomy, a re-definition of the concept of each Member State’s national sovereignty is indispensable.⁵⁶

An extended elaboration of Arteaga’s definition is drafted in a joint note by Kunz and Kempin.

The three dimensions of strategic autonomy	Political autonomy	The capacity to take security policy decisions and act upon them.
	Operational autonomy	The capacity, based on the necessary institutional framework and the required capabilities, to independently plan for and conduct civilian and/or military operations.
	Industrial autonomy	The capacity to develop and build the capabilities required to attain operational autonomy.

Figure 1: The three dimensions of strategic autonomy⁵⁷

⁵⁴ Dandee, Z., 2017. European Preference, Strategic Autonomy and the European Defence Fund, ARES REPORT; #22, p. 12

⁵⁵ According to Arteaga this is exactly what happened over the course of the history of European defence construction

⁵⁶Arteaga, F., 2017. Strategic Autonomy and European Defence – Analysis

⁵⁷ Kempin, R., Kunz, B., 2017. France, Germany and the Quest for European strategic Autonomy, Franco-German Defence Cooperation in a new Era, p.10

Similar to Arteaga, Kunz and Kempin define strategic autonomy consisting of a political, operational and industrial dimension. Operational autonomy is defined by the ability to plan and conduct civilian and military missions without major contributions of others implying the actor has the necessary means at its disposal. The industrial autonomy, by contrast, features access to defence technology and materiel. With providing the basis of the operational level and being its precursor/pre-stage, it occupies a crucial role at attaining strategic autonomy in the latter. Both elements are complemented by the political sphere. It defines the security goals and decides over the tools and measures being used. To sum up, all three dimensions are mutually dependent, and with regards to attaining strategic autonomy, a thorough analysis must take the strategic environment, prioritisations and the compatibility of all stakeholders into account.⁵⁸

Since the division of strategic autonomy into these three broad subfields is the definition that has also been used by other recognized experts who have published recent extensive policy papers referring to strategic autonomy⁵⁹, this definition seems to be acknowledged in the recent academic debate. Thus, this work will refer to this definition when talking about (European) strategic autonomy in the following chapters.

2.3 Strategic Autonomy as responsibility, hedging and emancipation

The release of the EUGS in June 2016, has invigorated the debate about strategic autonomy from a conceptual perspective. Since then, several studies and think-tank policy papers have grappled with its implications and relevance, illustrating the intricacy of the term, even among researches and practitioners. The reason why strategic autonomy remains to be a contested buzzword can be traced back to the EUGS paper itself. Being mentioned only five times, the 60-page document does not conceptualize it clearly, describing strategic autonomy merely as “important for Europe’s ability to promote peace and security within and beyond its borders.”⁶⁰ Additionally, it emphasizes the essential role of a “sustainable, innovative and

⁵⁸Kempin, R., Kunz, B., 2017. France, Germany and the Quest for European strategic Autonomy, Franco-German Defence Cooperation in a new Era, p.10ff.

⁵⁹ For instance, see Major, C., Järvenpää, P., Sakkov, S., 2019. European Strategic Autonomy: Operationalising a Buzzword

⁶⁰ European Commission, 2016. Shared Vision, Common Action: A stronger Europe: A Global Strategy for the European Union’s Foreign and Security Policy, p. 9

competitive European defence industry [...] for Europe's strategic autonomy and for a credible CSDP."⁶¹ Such vague depiction has opened the door for interpretation, allowing researcher and theorists to contribute to the debate with their own versions of the notion and addressing urgent questions such as Europe's overall strategic aims, implications and consequences of pursuing greater autonomy.⁶² Therefore it is necessary to understand the motives behind strategic autonomy in order to conceptualize it. Fiott distinguishes between three basic considerations regarding the considerations of EU member states for European strategic autonomy: autonomy as responsibility, autonomy as hedging and autonomy as emancipation.⁶³

In the case of **autonomy as responsibility**, autonomy is defined as the freedom to conduct missions and operations autonomously rather than the freedom from dependencies on the hegemon. This vision points directly to the well-known criticism from the Trump administration headed to the European member states to financially contribute more to NATO. Proponents of this perspective see responsibility as a mean to take a more proactive role in NATO, pleasing the US side and thus strengthening the Alliance by showing the appreciation of the transatlantic partnership through fairer burden-sharing within NATO. However, this vision of autonomy is evidently accompanied by some disadvantages. It implies a continued European subservience to the US, as autonomy as a form of responsibility does not necessarily reflect a desire for defence-industrial autonomy. In this definition, operational and industrial autonomy do not have to be linked. Instead, the performance of defence capabilities is more important than their origin.⁶⁴

Such a scenario is attractive for governments who consider buying American defence equipment as a mean to strengthen national defence, promoting their bilateral relationship with Washington, increasing interoperability within NATO and gaining access to cutting-edge military technologies. However, governments who choose this path of a transatlantic

⁶¹ European Commission, 2016. Shared Vision, Common Action: A stronger Europe: A Global Strategy for the European Union's Foreign and Security Policy, p. 46

⁶² Major, C., Järvenpää, P., Sakkov, S., 2019. European Strategic Autonomy: Operationalising a Buzzword; p. 1

⁶³ Fiott, D., 2018. Strategic autonomy: Towards "European sovereignty" in defence?, p. 2

⁶⁴ Fiott, D., 2018. Strategic autonomy: Towards "European sovereignty" in defence?, p. 2ff.

relationship must be aware that it comes along with the expense of Europe's defence-industrial competitiveness.⁶⁵

The second option is **strategic autonomy as hedging**. Hedging represents a strategy used by states to handle the risks associated with the uncertainty of future developments. According to Tunsjø hedging is the development and implementation of specific policies designed to provide insurance against a deterioration in relations between two actors.⁶⁶ Given Europe's uncertainty embodied in the prospective willingness of the US to stay engaged in NATO and in Europe respectively, hedging may therefore represent a deft strategy. What implications would hedging have with regards to EU's defence and security policy? Faced with the threat of gradual US withdrawal, the EU stays aligned with the US but at the same time, it seeks to develop defence structures and capabilities that are effective enough for independent action.

However, it must be clarified that hedging would not entail the development of high-end capabilities such as a nuclear deterrent. Apart from the fact that there is no common shared willingness to establish a European nuclear deterrent, it would result in the end of the transatlantic relationship we know today – a disaster for all those countries whose security understanding is inherently connected with the US nuclear security umbrella. This is especially true for EU member states that consider their territorial integrity to be threatened by Russia, namely the Baltics states and Poland. As a result, evidence of hedging is realistically to be found in initiatives that are located on the lower capability spectrum created to enhance the EU's operational and industrial autonomy in specific areas, such as PESCO and the EDF. Especially the PESCO projects are designed to allow the EU to hedge against its dependencies and the uncertainties it faces. In contrast to the vision for autonomy which calls for more responsibility, hedging clearly stresses an industrial dimension that takes the importance of Europe's defence-industrial competitiveness and autonomy into account.⁶⁷

The criticism of autonomy as responsibility and hedging are faced with is that both do not represent a sufficient level of strategic autonomy required to deal with the multiple security challenges Europe is exposed to. Hence, there is a third vision which portrays the politically

⁶⁵ Fiott, D., 2018. Strategic autonomy: Towards "European sovereignty" in defence?, p. 2ff.

⁶⁶ Tunsjø, Ø., 2017. 'U.S.-China Relations. From Unipolar Hedging toward Bipolar Balancing', in RS Ross & Ø Tunsjø (ed.), Strategic Adjustment and the Rise of China. Power and Politics in East Asia, Cornell University Press, London, p. 46

⁶⁷ Fiott, D., 2018. Strategic autonomy: Towards "European sovereignty" in defence?, p. 4ff.

most sensitive and radical vision of strategic autonomy: **Autonomy as emancipation**. In contrast to responsibility and hedging, emancipation perceives strategic autonomy as an indivisible concept. The EU can either protect its territory and global interests or it cannot. The former can only be realized by relying on the full range of capabilities being at the disposal of the European Union or the European governments. Anything else, that does not meet these requirements, should neither be labelled “strategic” nor “autonomy”.⁶⁸ The proponents of this argument point to the logical inconsistency connected to responsibility and hedging. In their opinion, it makes little sense to allow the go for operational and/or industrial emancipation while neglecting other components of autonomy. The argument is that operational, political autonomy and industrial autonomy go hand in hand, being inextricably linked.⁶⁹

Yet, this point of view seems far away from the current political reality, as it goes far beyond of what EU can commonly agree upon. Among most EU member states strategic autonomy is perceived as a concept not to gain autonomy from the US, but to develop capacities for action.⁷⁰ Fiott opines that EU autonomy in security and defence at this stage is located somewhere between responsibility and hedging. Whether the EU will be able to reach autonomy of emancipation remains to be seen.⁷¹ Apart from the critics that the latter scenario seems unrealistic one could also question the desirability of a Europe being fully autonomous in security and defence. It might be even not a smart strategic choice, considering the military power the United States and the risk of losing the benevolence of your mightiest ally.⁷²

To conclude, the illustrated ambiguity of the concept might be a comfortable status quo in order to keep all (or most) on board, sparing the Member States to address the differences of opinion on the matter. But at the same time, ambiguity does not help to eliminate scepticism and raise acceptance for European strategic autonomy on both sides, domestically and overseas. What concerns the relationship to the US, the EU should establish the narrative that a stronger CSDP also benefits NATO, regardless of the level of ambition.⁷³

⁶⁸ Mauro, F., 2018. Strategic Autonomy under the spotlight, p. 27

⁶⁹ Fiott, D., 2018. Strategic autonomy: Towards “European sovereignty” in defence?, p. 6-7

⁷⁰ Franke, U., Varma, T., 2019. Independence Play: Europe’s pursuit of Strategic Autonomy, https://www.ecfr.eu/specials/scorecard/independence_play_europes_pursuit_of_strategic_autonomy,

⁷¹ Fiott, D., 2018. Strategic autonomy: Towards “European sovereignty” in defence?, p. 7

⁷² Dent, M., 2018. European strategic Autonomy: Going it alone? p. 8

⁷³ Dent, M., 2018. European strategic Autonomy: Going it alone? p. 8

3. The Aftermath of Saint-Malo: The European Security Strategy (ESS) and the EU Global Strategy (EUGS)

3.1 The European Security Strategy (ESS)

The joint letter of intent from Saint-Malo mentioned above can be found almost in the same wording in the European Council Declaration of Cologne in June 1999. At another meeting in the same year in December in Helsinki, the Council stressed its determination to establish an autonomous capacity to conduct EU-led military operations, assuring that the process won't imply duplication of NATO structures nor the creation of a European army. For this purpose, the Council formulated a Headline goal, entailing a military target to build up a European Rapid Reaction Force. By the year 2003, it required member states voluntarily participating in EU-led operations to deploy within 60 days and sustain for at least 1 year-military forces of up to 50,000-60,000 persons capable of the full range of "Petersberg tasks".⁷⁴ The ambitious goal setting up autonomous action through this EU rapid reaction force shows the strong EU focusing on the operational part of strategic autonomy.⁷⁵

The promising political breakthrough that has been achieved with the St. Malo declaration, could not meet the high expectations. The summit set up the foundations to evolve a genuine EU military capability contributing to NATO. The ambitious goals established at the time aimed at reaching a level of autonomy where the EU will be able to take on significant peacekeeping tasks. But for several reasons, these objectives could not be fulfilled. The idea of St.-Malo could only work with functioning links between the EU and NATO. In practice, however, the aspirations were very difficult to implement for several reasons. The deep mutual mistrust between Greece, Turkey and the linked issue of Cyprus manifested itself is an insurmountable obstacle. As a NATO member, Turkey showed his interest to participate in EU crisis management. Understandably, the Greeks were determined that Turkey should not enjoy a

⁷⁴ Helsinki European Council, 1999. Presidency Conclusions, 10 and 11 December 1999, document available at https://www.europarl.europa.eu/summits/hel1_en.htm

⁷⁵ Arteaga, F., 2017. Strategic Autonomy and European Defence – Analysis

privileged relationship with the EU in a highly sensitive area of EU policy at a time when - from Greek's perspective - Turkey continued to occupy Northern Cyprus.⁷⁶

But external events made the concept of strategic autonomy fade away from the spotlight, too. With the attacks of 9/11 and the beginning of the Afghanistan war, the priorities had changed drastically. The focus was put on fighting terrorism. Moreover, Europe was deeply divided by the year 2003 when some member states such as the UK, Spain and Poland decided to support the Iraq invasion militarily while others like France and Germany refused to participate.⁷⁷ Europe's lack of unity became once more apparent and the ambitious goals agreed on at St. Malo seemed obsolete.

The European Security Strategy (ESS) published in 2003 aimed at creating a shared political basis on which all member states could agree upon with an emphasis on three strategic objectives:

1. addressing threats (in particular terrorism, proliferation and regional conflicts and failed states),
2. building security and well-governed states in the EU's neighbourhood and
3. supporting an international order based on effective multilateralism⁷⁸

The term of strategic autonomy is not mentioned once in this paper. Instead, it reflected the vision of a "ring of friends" to establish closer ties between the EU and its neighbours by highlighting the significance of multilateral frameworks.⁷⁹ It defined shared values for external relations on the pillars of democratic and humanist values within the framework of "effective multilateralism". By applying such a comprehensible approach, Europe should contribute to

⁷⁶ Ricketts, P., 2017. The EU and defence; The Legacy of Saint-Malo, p.36

⁷⁷ Washington Post: "Coalition of the Willing", available under <https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/2003/03/27/coalition-of-the-willing/cdb82022-5b70-4650-9b8b-2f6f544e4cdd/>,

⁷⁸ Cottey, A., 2019. A strategic Europe, p. 6

⁷⁹ According to Prodi, who was the president of the EU commission at that time, that ring would include Ukraine, Russia, Moldova, and the states of North Africa and the eastern Mediterranean. See press release of Brussels 5-6.12.2002. https://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_SPEECH-02-619_en.htm, "I want to see a "ring of friends" surrounding the Union and its closest European neighbours, from Morocco to Russia and the Black Sea."

crisis prevention, conflict resolution, global peace and economic order. The strategy established the EU as a soft power at the international stage.⁸⁰

The document limits the global action of the EU to support multilateral frameworks. The goals of 2003 were replaced with other more realistic objectives (Headline Goal 2010). With the establishment of the European Defence Agency (EDA) in 2004 and the European Defence Technological and Industrial Base (EDTIB) in 2007, the focus of strategic autonomy finally shifted away from its rather operational dimension into a more industrial and technological domain.⁸¹ In a communication document from 2012, the Commission highlights the importance of the technology sector:

“[...] the importance of this industry cannot be measured only in jobs and turnover. The European Defence Technological and Industrial Base (EDTIB) constitutes a key element for Europe's capacity to ensure the security of its citizens and to protect its values and interests. Europe must be able to assume its responsibilities for its own security and for international peace and stability in general. This necessitates a certain degree of strategic autonomy: to be a credible and reliable partner, Europe must be able to decide and to act without depending on the capabilities of third parties. Security of supply, access to critical technologies and operational sovereignty are therefore crucial.”⁸²

The focus of the Commission's concept of autonomy also entailed access to essential technologies and security of supply (technological sovereignty). Driven by real concerns of losing technological and industrial know-how the balance between the three dimensions of the concept changed, as industrial interests, the market and equipment became more central than strategy.⁸³ Yet, a 'capabilities-driven' strategic autonomy would be accompanied by the problem that the procurement of equipment would be provided before knowing for what it would be used, resulting in huge inefficiencies. Strategic autonomy was further developed on

⁸⁰Bartels, H.-P., Kellner A. M., Optenhögel, U., 2017. Strategic Autonomy and the Defence of Europe; On the road to an European Army?, p.14

⁸¹ Dent, M., 2018. European strategic Autonomy: Going it alone? p. 4

⁸² European Commission, 2013. Towards a more competitive and efficient defence and security sector

⁸³ European Commission, 2013. Towards a more competitive and efficient defence and security sector

its industrial pillar until the European Council tasked the High Representative with the development of a new EU Global Strategy.⁸⁴

3.2 The EU Global Strategy (EUGS)

While the European Security Strategy of 2003 tried to establish the EU as a “soft power” on the international stage, the publication of EUGS in 2016 represents a caesura as it finally breaks with this one-sided perspective stating. First, it uses a much more dramatic language by talking of existential crisis, within and beyond the European Union, threatening and questioning the European project of peace, prosperity and democracy. The paper does not refute Europe’s role as a soft power, but it clarifies that “the idea that Europe is an exclusively “civilian power” does not do justice to an evolving reality.”⁸⁵

In the State of the Union speech in 2016, then Commission President Juncker declared that with regards to EU’s increasingly dangerous neighbourhood, soft power is not enough for the EU.⁸⁶ In a similar vein, the former High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy of the EU made an expressive statement about the development of Europe’s future course and foreign affairs: “The EU has unparalleled “soft” power – in economic, diplomatic, and cultural terms – and we are increasingly active as a global security provider, building our “hard” power as never before.”⁸⁷ Hence, the characterization of the EU as a pure “normative power” thus seems to be outdated.

The EUGS defines four shared interests to be pursued:

1. promoting peace and security, which has internal and external dimensions as security outside and inside Europe are closely interwoven;
2. prosperity, requiring an open and fair international economic system and sustained access to the global commons, taking into account Europe’s economic dependency on trade and the need for undisturbed delivery of natural resources;

⁸⁴ Arteaga, F., 2017. Strategic Autonomy and European Defence – Analysis

⁸⁵ European Commission, 2016. Shared Vision, Common Action: A stronger Europe: A Global Strategy for the European Union’s Foreign and Security Policy, p. 4 ff.

⁸⁶ Georgi Gotev, G., 2016. Juncker: soft power is not enough for the EU

⁸⁷ Leonard, M., 2019. Shaping Europe’s present and future, An interview with Federica Mogherini, European Council on Foreign Relations

3. fostering resilience of the Union's democracies and respecting and promoting its norms and values;
4. promoting a rule-based global order with multilateralism as its key principle.⁸⁸

The strategy paper stands for a recalibration of the long-lasting dichotomy between interests and values in EU foreign policy, arguing that these must go "hand in hand", by applying "principled pragmatism".⁸⁹ Thereby it abandons the outwards looking idealism of the early 2000s, without turning towards the opposite end of *realpolitik*. In addition, EUGS also creates a quite different narrative compared to its predecessor. The ESS was portraying the EU as a force for good. The EUGS uses a more modest vision by stressing the need to "promote peace and guarantee the security of its citizens and territory"⁹⁰ establishing an interdependence between internal and external security.⁹¹

These changes in the narrative can be traced back to the development in three central policy fields: Security, EU internal and Geopolitics: The latter primarily comprises the already mentioned shifted centre of gravity away from Europe to the emerging Asian markets which will result in a rising competition that will bring more insecurity. Internally, the financial crisis and the subsequent debt crisis have demanded means that have limited the military capabilities and resources of the EU and its members. In the absence of an external specific military threat, rising costs for military weapons systems and public scepticism about military interventions, high defence spending was politically difficult to communicate. Furthermore, the refugee crisis and the still ongoing corona crisis disclosed that crisis management takes place on a national level, not a European level. As a result, defence spending has drastically decreased in most EU member states.⁹²

⁸⁸ Dandee, Z., 2017. European Preference, Strategic Autonomy and the European Defence Fund, ARES REPORT; #22, p. 12

⁸⁹ European Commission, 2016. Shared Vision, Common Action: A stronger Europe: A Global Strategy for the European Union's Foreign and Security Policy, p. 13 and 16

⁹⁰ European Commission, 2016. Shared Vision, Common Action: A stronger Europe: A Global Strategy for the European Union's Foreign and Security Policy, p. 14

⁹¹ Barbé, E., Morillas, P., 2019. The EU global strategy: the dynamics of amore politicized and politically integrated foreign policy, p. 760

⁹² Bartels, H.-P., Kellner A. M.; Optenhögel, U., 2017. Strategic Autonomy and the Defence of Europe; On the road to an European Army?, p.15-16

And in the realm of security circumstances have significantly changed, too. With the collapse of the Arab Spring in almost all countries (except Tunisia), the self-democratization process failed to materialise bringing ultimately greater insecurity. Instead of being surrounded by a “ring of friends”, Europe is facing instability stretching from the Sahel through the Horn of Africa and the Middle East. Additionally, the annexation of the Crimea led to new fault lines in Eastern Europe that made an inconceivable scenario a reality again: the dispute over territory. It is the evolving intricacy of security issues that have significantly changed. First, the lines between external and internal threats are becoming increasingly blurred and second threats are not purely military in nature but also involve methods such as asymmetric warfare and disinformation. Because the world is as closely linked as never before, Europe is challenged by a multipolar security environment encompassing the political, social and economic spheres. Comparing it with other global players, no one is currently facing more security challenges in its strategic backyard than Europe.⁹³

3.3 Contemporary initiatives

With the publication of the EUGS, a process was initiated which laid the foundations for more intensive cooperation in the European defence community. It led to initiatives such as the Coordinated Annual Review on Defence (CARD), the establishment of a European Defence Fund (EDF), and the activation of PESCO. All these instruments were established after the release of the EUGS. PESCO was brought to life in December 2017 and forms the nucleus of the defence union. The establishment of the “sleeping beauty”⁹⁴ was already anchored in the Lisbon Treaty to intensify collaboration in a field that is still of protectionist nature, dominated by national interests. 25 EU member states are participating, excluding Denmark, Malta and the UK after their decision to leave the EU. The legal basis of PESCO can be found in Articles 42 and 46 of the Lisbon Treaty and its Protocol No. 10. The character of PESCO is clear: The PESCO projects are designed for missions outside the Union corresponding to the Petersberg

⁹³ Bartels, H.-P., Kellner A. M.; Optenhögel, U., 2017. Strategic Autonomy and the Defence of Europe; On the road to an European Army?, p.15

⁹⁴ European Commission, 2017. European Commission welcomes first operational steps towards a European Defense Union, official website of the European Commission; press release 11.12.2017

tasks.⁹⁵ Political decisions are taken by the Foreign Affairs Council in the format of the EU Member States participating in PESCO. The decisions are implemented by the EU institutions and on project level by the individual states. Thus, PESCO is member states driven as full sovereignty over their armed forces is kept by each country.

With PESCO EU member states have accepted binding commitments in the areas of defence investment, harmonizing defense systems, deployability of forces, capability shortfalls, and European equipment programs.⁹⁶ The objective behind PESCO is to encourage member states to collaborate in the military domain in order to avoid duplication and fragmentation in the defence industry. Furthermore, compatibility and interoperability of organization and equipment are essential, so member states can successfully act (together) in operations and missions.⁹⁷ So far, a total of 47 projects have been launched. The most recent ones represent the third wave of projects and include 13 that are primarily located in the field of research and development of high technologies and techniques used in the cyber domain and space. Their focus lies in “enhancing EU collaborative actions as well as on capability development on sea, air and space.”⁹⁸

The second pillar of the European Defence Union is the EDF. The fund was launched in 2017 and consists of two parts. First, it fully funds research projects and products from the EU budget that help to provide the military with cutting-edge technologies and second, it also supports financially collaborative capability development projects developed on the national level. The objective of the EDF is to coordinate and to supplement national efforts in defence research and development. By creating synergies, all participants will “achieve better value for money and stimulate the development of technologies and capabilities, which are too costly to be developed by the member states on their own.”⁹⁹ Even though the EDF plays undoubtedly an essential role for the level of ambition and thus, for the development for strategic autonomy, analysing it promises little results, simply because research and funding

⁹⁵ Official Journal of the European Union, 2012. Treaty on the European Union: Consolidated Version, (p.26)

⁹⁶ Official website the European Union. PESCO, Member states driven. Binding commitments

⁹⁷ German Federal Ministry of Defense, 2017. PESCO: Ständig Strukturierte Zusammenarbeit seit 2017

⁹⁸ Official website of the European Council and the Council of the European Union, 2019. Defence cooperation: Council launches 13 new PESCO projects; press release 12.11.2019

⁹⁹ Official website of the European Union, 2018. Opportunities for SMEs in the European Defence Fund; p. 4-6

are currently in a test period. The fully-fledged Defence Fund will be introduced with the next EU budgetary circle (2021-2027).¹⁰⁰

The third initiative is the CARD. It is run by the EDA and aims at identifying opportunities for cooperation by systematically monitoring national defence spending. It represents the interface where ideally all information from member states on defence plans should be collected. Managing and processing this huge influx of information the EDA functions as the 'CARD secretariat' following a fixed methodology.¹⁰¹ This includes also the EU capability development priorities resulting from the Capability Development Plan (CDP). It is a repeatedly updated documented, whose most recent version stems from 2018 and lists 11 priorities. Based on these priorities the future intentions and level of ambition can be analysed (see Chapter 4). The coherence between these initiatives is essential to make sure that the different tools reinforce each other. Or as an official statement from the EDA puts it:

“CDP tells us what to focus our common efforts on, the CARD gives us an overview of where we stand and identifies next steps, PESCO in turn gives us options on how to do it in a collaborative manner, while the EDF could provide the funds to support the implementation of cooperative defence projects in general, but with a bonus, if in PESCO.”¹⁰²

An additional instrument is the European intervention initiative (EI2) launched by France. It is not considered a pillar of the European defence Union because it was deliberately established outside of it, disclosing the French preference for flexible and non-institutionalized formats of cooperation to avoid EU bureaucracy.¹⁰³ The foundation was laid in 2017 at the Sorbonne University in Paris when French president Macron shared his vision of a prospective Defence Europe. He argues it is the lack of a common strategic culture that undermines the European role on the international stage.¹⁰⁴ France's priority aims at reaching a fast enhancement in the defence cooperation of European states. In French eyes, PESCO will improve European

¹⁰⁰ European Network against arms trade (ENAAT), 2019. All you want to know about the EU Defence Fund, and why this is not good for peace nor for jobs and growth

¹⁰¹ It involves the following elements and procedural steps: **Initial Information, Bilateral Dialogues, Card Analysis, CARD Report**, for more detailed description see official website of EDA, available at [https://www.eda.europa.eu/what-we-do/our-current-priorities/coordinated-annual-review-on-defence-\(card\)](https://www.eda.europa.eu/what-we-do/our-current-priorities/coordinated-annual-review-on-defence-(card))

¹⁰² European Defence Agency: Official website for Coordinated Annual Review on Defence (CARD)

¹⁰³ Billon-Galland, A., Quencez, M., 2018. A Military Workshop. Berlin Policy Journal

¹⁰⁴ Macron, E., 2017: Speech at the Sorbonne University; 26.09.2017; Paris

capabilities rather in the longer term, curbed by the philosophy of involving as many EU countries as possible. However, France wants to enable the EU and its states to respond militarily to crises in the near future.¹⁰⁵ One of the most problematic misperceptions is the belief that the EI2 implies the establishment of a new military unit. In fact, the Letter of Intent outlines that the initiative “does not entail the creation of a new rapid force.”¹⁰⁶ Instead, EI2 works as a platform where states should discuss and reconcile their assessments of defence policy issues. Through cooperation at the level of the armed forces common standards and patterns of behaviour in relation to security and defence policy should be developed in order to create a common strategic culture in the long term. The EI2 is therefore about a “coalition of the willing”¹⁰⁷, in which appropriate intervention scenarios are to be discussed and prepared in advance. Whereas Germany is considered as the driving force behind PESCO, France is the initiator and thus, the key supporter of EI2.¹⁰⁸

As EI2 is currently in the development phase, no analysis can be made here either with regards to an already made or expected contribution to strategic autonomy. Hence, in chapter 4.1 the thesis will make an analysis of the level of ambition (LoA) based on the CDP and the launched PESCO projects.

¹⁰⁵ Kahlert, M., Major, C. 2019. Frankreichs Europäische Interventionsinitiative (EI2): Fakten, Kritik und Perspektiven: Eine Zwischenbilanz; SWP (Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik); p.6

¹⁰⁶ Letter of Intent concerning the development of the European Intervention Initiative (EI2), p. 3

¹⁰⁷ The current participants of EI2 consist of: Belgium, Denmark, Estonia, France, Germany, Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, United Kingdom, Italy, Finland, Sweden, Norway

¹⁰⁸ Kahlert, M., Major, C. 2019. Frankreichs Europäische Interventionsinitiative (EI2): Fakten, Kritik und Perspektiven: Eine Zwischenbilanz; SWP (Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik); p. 6-7

4. The Level of Ambition

The EUGS mentions that an “appropriate level of ambition and strategic autonomy is important for Europe’s ability to promote peace and security within and beyond its borders.”¹⁰⁹ The level of ambition can be divided in a political and a military dimension.¹¹⁰ The military dimension comprises the types of military tasks EU member states want to take on in the framework of the EU’s CSDP. The political dimension encompasses the debate of the institutional design CSDP is envisioned to be embedded in.

It is striking that the strategy presented in the paper does not include a deep insight of the concept of strategic autonomy. This may be because the term is repeated almost mantra-like and its meaning therefore has been perceived as diluted, giving it an almost symbolic status. Even though EU member states have approved the EUGS, they never formally adopted it. Consequently, it’s not obvious if all member states accept the military implications it raises. This may be especially the case for the implications related to the rather blurred concept of European strategic autonomy and full-spectrum defence capabilities.¹¹¹ But at the same time ambiguity is not a new phenomenon for processes related to European integration, particularly if they are contested. Leaving a concept somehow vague aims at minimizing the potential conflict between the EU member states, relieving the obligation to address the differences of opinion on the matter.¹¹² As a result, the EUGS does not list or name concrete ambitions that could be simply read off the document.

Thus, because the EUGS provides a rather general blueprint of its grant strategy, it is little helpful to evaluate the level of ambition by simply contrasting the existing PESCO projects with what is written in the EUGS. Instead, for examining the capability and military dimension of strategic autonomy it is necessary to look at the relevant tools defining the ambitions.

¹⁰⁹ European Commission, 2016. Shared Vision, Common Action: A stronger Europe: A Global Strategy for the European Union’s Foreign and Security Policy, p. 9

¹¹⁰ Barrie, D. et al., 2018. Protecting Europe: meeting the EU’s military level of ambition in the context of Brexit, German Council on Foreign Relations, p. 6

¹¹¹ Barrie, D. et al., 2018. Protecting Europe: meeting the EU’s military level of ambition in the context of Brexit, German Council on Foreign Relations, p. 6

¹¹² Dent, M., 2018. European strategic Autonomy: Going it alone?, p. 5

For that purpose, two recent conducted studies are referred to:

1. A joint study from the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS) and the German Council on Foreign Relations released in 2018. It compares the EUGS level of ambition with the contemporary military capability shortfalls through the creation of scenarios.¹¹³
2. A study from the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS) released in 2019. It compares the consistency of the CDP objectives with current military capability shortfalls (results taken from the first study) considering the first two rounds of PESCO projects.

4.1 Level of ambition – the military dimension

The EUGS stresses the importance of an innovative, sustainable and competitive defence industry for Europe's strategic autonomy and for a credible CSDP.¹¹⁴ For the industrial/capability sector the relevant tool beside the EDF is the CDP because it names the capability development priorities and the capabilities required to reach EU's level of Ambition (LoA). It is a repeatedly updated document released by the European Defence Agency in close cooperation with its member states and with the active contributions of the EU Military Committee (EUMC) and the European Union Military Staff (EUMS). By illustrating existing capability shortfalls and plans for future technology trends, the CDP pictures both a document and a process that points out possibilities for cooperation between the member states and highlights lessons learned from the EU's military missions and operations.¹¹⁵ The most recent version stems from 2018 and lists 11 priorities addressing "main capability shortfalls for deployed operations (land, maritime and air capabilities as well as logistic and medical support)" while also focusing on areas, such as the "adaptation of military capabilities required for territorial defence and security or cyber defence."¹¹⁶

¹¹³ For description of scenarios see footnote 128

¹¹⁴ European Commission, 2016. Shared Vision, Common Action: A stronger Europe: A Global Strategy for the European Union's Foreign and Security Policy, p. 46

¹¹⁵ Fiott, D., 2018. EU defence capability development Plans, priorities, projects; p. 2

¹¹⁶ European Defence Agency, 2018. Capability Development Plan factsheet

With the PESCO treaty, member states have committed themselves to kick-start projects that “overcome capability shortcomings identified under the Capability Development Plan (CDP) [...]. These capability projects shall increase Europe’s strategic autonomy and strengthen the European Defence Technological and Industrial Base (EDTIB).”¹¹⁷

The study from the IISS released in 2019 has compared the capability development priorities with the first two rounds of the PESCO projects. According to the paper, the overall direction of PESCO projects is currently consistent with the CDP objectives, making them fit for purpose. However, the study emphasizes that the capability shortfalls have only been started to be tackled but not solved yet. Major fields that are essential to carry out military operations are still underdeveloped, such as the development capacity of Air mobility. Particularly, big-impact and mission-critical items such as heavy transport aircrafts and tanker aircrafts (for Air-to-Air Refuelling and Air Transport) are not covered by PESCO.¹¹⁸ Considering the 13 additional PESCO projects that were adopted by the Council in November 2019 does not change the overall picture: Compared to other fields, the air sector touching subfields such as Strategic and tactical air transport including air medical evacuation is underrepresented.¹¹⁹

The basis of the military LoA are the Petersberg tasks: These tasks were adopted by the Ministerial Council of the Western European Union (WEU) in 1992. The Defence Ministers met in Bonn to agree on the role of the WEU on European Security, to strengthen its operational capacity and to define the relations between the WEU and non-member states. The document exposes that the military units of WEU member states could be employed for humanitarian, rescue, and peacekeeping tasks and tasks of combat forces in crisis management, including peacemaking.¹²⁰

The Petersberg declaration represented the original military level of ambition before the CSDP first emerged in 1999 and 2000. Through the 1999 Treaty of Amsterdam, these were integrated into the EU. Moreover, the post of the “High Representative for Common Foreign and Security Policy” was established to give the Union ‘one face and one voice’ on foreign

¹¹⁷ See point 15. In the Annex of the Council decision establishing Permanent Structured Cooperation from December 8, 2017, available under <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/32000/st14866en17.pdf>:

¹¹⁸ Billon-Galland, B., Efstathiou, Y.-S., 2019. Are PESCO projects fit for purpose? International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS); February 2019, p. 7ff.

¹¹⁹ European Union, 2017. PESCO. Member States driven, <https://pesco.europa.eu/>

¹²⁰ Petersberg Declaration, 1992. Western European Union Council of Ministers Bonn, 19 June 1992

policy matters.¹²¹ The first of two military headline goals – the Helsinki headline goal - was built on the guidelines established at the Cologne European Council. It stresses its “determination to develop an autonomous capacity to take decisions and, where NATO as a whole is not engaged, to launch and conduct EU-led military operations in response to international crises. This process will avoid unnecessary duplication and does not imply the creation of a European army.” The Helsinki Headline Goal set out the plan to rapidly deploy forces (50.000 – 60.000 personnel) capable of the full range of “Petersberg tasks”. By the year 2003, Member states should be able to deploy in full and with high readiness within 60 days and sustainable for at least one year.¹²²

Reflecting the European Security Strategy from December 2003, the Headline Goal 2010 from 2004 set a new target for capability improvement for the next 5 years, focusing on qualitative aspects. It states that member states should “be able by 2010 to respond with rapid and decisive action applying a fully coherent approach to the whole spectrum of crisis management operations covered by the Treaty on the European Union.”¹²³ The process of developing EU military capabilities towards the Headline Goal of 2010 was accompanied by strategic planning assumptions. Five illustrative scenarios, entailing a wide range of military operations that basically present an extended list of the “Petersberg tasks”, were carved out:

- separation of parties by force
- stabilization, reconstruction and military advice to third countries
- conflict prevention
- evacuation operation
- assistance to humanitarian operations.¹²⁴

¹²¹ European External Action Service, 2016: Shaping of a common Security and Defence Policy

¹²² Helsinki European Council, 1999. Presidency Conclusions, https://www.europarl.europa.eu/summits/hel1_en.htm,

¹²³ General Affairs and External Relations Council, 2004. Approval of Headline Goal 2010, endorsed by the European Council

¹²⁴ EU Council Secretariat, 2006. Development of European military capabilities: The Force Catalogue 2006, November 2006, p. 2

The creation of the EU Battlegroups in 2007 has been the most prominent result of this headline goal.¹²⁵ A joint study by the IISS and the German Council on Foreign Relations (DGAP) from November 2018 used scenarios and operationalised them. Five plausible events were established (for each section one fictional, but realistic scenario)¹²⁶ to identify potential capability shortfalls the EU would face, should it attempt to conduct more than one of its LoA-related operations at a time. Of course, there are a lot of combinations possible, leading to a similar sized engagement but a different force requirement as far as capabilities are concerned. The following concurrency scenarios were selected as they exemplify two plausible benchmarks for what the EU wants to achieve:

Figure 2: Concurrency scenarios and assumptions

Scenario	Assumptions	Concurrency suite 1	Concurrency suite 2
Peace enforcement (PE)	Response time: 60 days Duration: One year	Yes	No
Conflict prevention (CP)	Response time: 60 days Duration: Two years	No	Yes (2x)
Stabilisation and support to capacity building (SSCB)	Response time: 60 days Duration: Two years	No	Yes (2x)
Support to humanitarian assistance (SHA)	Response time: Ten days Duration: Three months	No	Yes
Rescue and evacuation (RE)	Response time: Ten days Duration: Three months	Yes	Yes

Source: Protecting Europe

Concurrency suite one: one peace-enforcement (PE) operation plus one rescue and evacuation (RE) operation.

Concurrency suite two: two conflict-prevention (CP) operations; two operations for stabilization and support to capacity-building (SSCB); one operation for support to humanitarian assistance (SHA); and one rescue and evacuation (RE) operation.

The results of the study for Concurrency suite one, which represents a peace-enforcement (PE) plus one rescue and evacuation (RE) operation showcase that meeting the requirements of running PE and RE operations simultaneously poses already some difficulties. For this

¹²⁵ A battlegroup can deploy around 1,500 soldiers to crisis areas in 5 to 10 days and can remain in action for at least 30 days. The battlegroups, which have been fully operational since 2007, are intended to enable the EU to react quickly and flexibly at military level and to perform various crisis management tasks.

¹²⁶ The scenarios are as follows: EU peace-enforcement mission in the South Caucasus; EU stabilisation and support to capacity-building mission in the Horn of Africa; Conflict prevention and counterpiracy mission in the Red Sea and Indian Ocean; Support to humanitarian assistance mission in Bangladesh; Rescue and evacuation mission in South Africa

scenario, the paper already identifies notable capability shortfalls in the land, naval and air domains for all EU member states including the UK. In case, the UK is not considered (EU 27), additional shortfalls would occur in enabling capability areas such as amphibious capability, special-operations forces, signals and nuclear submarines (see table 2 in annex). Most shortfalls emerge in the land domain, especially when the UK is left out. This is because the UK would provide important enabling and high-end capabilities. Thus, not including the UK will make it quite challenging for the EU to meet the LoA.¹²⁷

The second concurrency suite illustrates a higher LoA as it combines a higher number of smaller operations of longer duration. Unsurprisingly, the requirements list is much longer than in Concurrency suite one. But it gives food for thought when we compare the shortfalls section with the other sections. It proves that this level of ambition is clearly beyond the reach, regardless of including the UK or not. The capability gaps are too extensive across all domains - often less than one-third of the force requirement would be met. According to the study such a shortfall would mean that the EU member states would not even be able to conduct this concurrency suite for a shorter duration without a demand for rotation (see table 3 in annex). Even tough, it is conceivable the EU could obtain assistance from non-EU countries at least in some of the operations considered in this scenario, the EU’s LoA starts from the premise to conduct these operations without third-party involvement. Proceeding from this requirement, the EU is nowhere near enough to master Concurrency suite two.¹²⁸

Figure 3: Maritime domain shortfalls addressed in PESCO

EU LoA Capability Shortfalls	PESCO Projects	
	Round 1	Round 2
Aircraft carriers	None	None
Principal amphibious ships	None	None
Mine countermeasures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Maritime (semi-) Autonomous Systems for Mine Countermeasures 	None
Surface combatants	None	None
Nuclear submarines	None	None
Replenishment vessels	None	None
Conventional submarines	None	None

Source: Alice Billon-Galland; Yvonne-Stefania Efstathiou: Are PESCO projects fit for purpose?; p.8

¹²⁷ Barrie, D. et al., 2018. Protecting Europe: meeting the EU’s military level of ambition in the context of Brexit, German Council on Foreign Relations, p. 32-34

¹²⁸ Barrie, D. et al., 2018. Protecting Europe: meeting the EU’s military level of ambition in the context of Brexit, German Council on Foreign Relations, p. 32-34

Figure 4: Air domain shortfalls addressed in PESCO

EU LoA Capability Shortfalls	PESCO Projects	
	Round 1	Round 2
Combat ISR (CISR) uninhabited aerial vehicle (UAV)	None	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> European Medium Altitude Long Endurance Remotely Piloted Aircraft Systems – MALE RPAS (Eurodrone)
ISR aircraft	None	None
Heavy transport aircraft	None	None
Electronic-warfare aircraft	None	None
Electronic-intelligence aircraft	None	None
Tanker aircraft	None	None
Maritime patrol aircraft	None	None
Signals intelligence aircraft	None	None

Source: Alice Billon-Galland; Yvonne-Stefania Efstathiou: Are PESCO projects fit for purpose?; p.8

The identified shortfalls in the air and maritime sections of both tables can be put in relation to existing PESCO projects to ascertain if PESCO addresses these shortfalls.¹²⁹ Considering the first two rounds of PESCO only one maritime domain (Mine countermeasures) and one Air domain shortfall (Combat ISR uninhabited aerial vehicle) are covered (see tables).

Thus, the concluding results are sobering. When PESCO projects are compared against the EU’s level of ambition rather than the CDP, much less convergence is to be found. But key mission-critical capabilities are indispensable if the EU wants to conduct one or more LoA operations at a time. Hence, contrasting the continent’s security requirements with what the projects have currently to offer, PESCO is rather unfit for purpose. Yet, it should be noticed, that PESCO is still in its infancy which explains why its impact in meeting the requirements is only marginal for now. Even though the existing projects are currently on the low-end of the capability spectrum, they can be considered as a success story when looking at them as a step in the right direction, but not as full solution-provider.¹³⁰ Now the question remains if there is a perspective to transition from the low-capability to the high-capability spectrum. The study by Billon-Galland and Efstathiou is rather pessimistic by concluding it may remain questionable if industrially advanced member states will believe in a new format such as PESCO with no track record. States may be not interested in opening projects to wider

¹²⁹ In the air and maritime domains, the IISS-DGAP study outlines requirements through an equipment lens whereas in the land domain, only in terms of formed units with specific roles. Accordingly, given the missing hardware component, our ability to draw direct links between the land shortfalls in the LoA and PESCO projects is limited.

¹³⁰ Billon-Galland, B., Efstathiou, Y.-S., 2019. Are PESCO projects fit for purpose?, p. 7-10

participation, sticking rather to “smaller clusters of trusted partners with whom they have established cross-border supply chains.”¹³¹

Franke from the "European Council on Foreign Relations" comes to a similar conclusion and warns against too high expectations. She strongly doubts that PESCO will provide military independence from the US any time soon and put Europe in a position to defend itself. But the projects can be considered as an enabler to develop common armaments projects, including helping to finance them through the Defence Fund.¹³² Thus, PESCO projects should not be considered as an end in themselves, but rather as a means to an end that have the potential to yield economies of scale, interoperability, deeper political integration and ultimately more strategic convergence.¹³³

4.2 Level of ambition – the political dimension:

The development of strategic autonomy through the constant deepening of technological and institutional interoperability between nationally structured arms markets and armed forces organizations is undoubtedly indispensable. This attempt at harmonization can initially be considered as a practical and technical problem that can be handled at inter-ministerial and industrial level. However, as the level of ambition rises, this process also takes on an increasingly political character.¹³⁴

In the CSFP, the principle of unanimity is applied. It guarantees formal equality between states of different (power-)political weight in the European Council. This inter-governmental and consensus-based approach has been exposed to well-known criticism since its beginning: It is slow, indecisive and susceptible to blockades and vetoes of single member states. The cumbersome path of consensus is often justified as the price to be paid in order to achieve cohesion. Notwithstanding, the unanimity principle undoubtedly consumes enormous political energy in Brussels and the national capitals. Even though ad-hoc coalitions may be a viable option for specific cases, it is only a united EU which is in the position to deliver a stable

¹³¹ Billon-Galland, B., Efstathiou, Y.-S., 2019. Are PESCO projects fit for purpose?, p. 10

¹³² Küstner, K., 2019. Zwei Jahre PESCO, Lücken in der EU Verteidigungsunion, NDR, tagesschau, <https://www.tagesschau.de/ausland/pesco-105.html>,

¹³³ Billon-Galland, B., Efstathiou, Y.-S., 2019. Are PESCO projects fit for purpose?, p. 2 & 11.

¹³⁴ Zogg, B. et al., 2019. PESCO-Rüstungskoopeation: Potenzial und Bruchlinien, p. 2

and permanent framework for action. For the development of long-term strategic autonomy, this is an indispensable precondition.¹³⁵

The central message of the European Security Strategy of 2003 as well as the EUGS was that Europe shall have a more significant voice on the global stage. In practice, however, the unanimity principle leads to conflicting goals. The trade-off the EU is facing is costly: Inclusivity and legitimacy on the one side versus efficiency and action on the other. The nature of the problem is that legitimacy of the EU's decision-making processes is strongly linked to national sovereignty meaning that national governments, accountable to their parliaments, are thus the key sources of legitimacy. This results in several CFSP deficits:

1. an ongoing lack of unity and consistency both between EU institutions and member states and between the member states' national foreign policies
2. the reluctance of member states to hand over sovereignty and powers to Brussels
3. a lack of loyalty and (therefore) a lack of willingness to compromise;
4. the member states' skepticism about the added value of the EU as a framework for foreign policy action;
5. a fragmentation of external competences¹³⁶

Even if the EU might speak with a single voice and the end of its onerous consultation process, it conveys a rather weak message from which the EU's "Weltpolitikfähigkeit" enormously suffers.¹³⁷ Hence, it raises the question how the institutional design of a European Union should be structured in order to achieve a more efficient decision-making process. In both academics and politics, two options are discussed to establish a more efficient decision-making process: An incremental approach and a true system transformation of the EU, which implies a directorate in charge of foreign and security policy.¹³⁸

¹³⁵ Lippert, B. et al., 2019. European Strategic Autonomy – Actors, Issues; Conflicts of Interests, p.9

¹³⁶ Puglierin, J., 2019. Priorities for the EU's new foreign policy agenda up to 2024: Unleashing the Potential of the Common Foreign and Security Policy, p. 6

¹³⁷ Koenig, N., 2018. From Meseberg to Sibiu: Four paths to European 'Weltpolitikfähigkeit', p.2

¹³⁸ Lippert, B. et al., 2019. European Strategic Autonomy – Actors, Issues; Conflicts of Interests, p.10 f.

4.2.1 The qualified majority voting

The incremental approach describes the gradual change from the current unanimity voting to selective (issue-specific) majority voting in CFSP. In fact, qualified majority voting (QMV) is already the method most widely applied in the Council. About **80% of all EU legislation** is adopted with this procedure. When the Council votes on a proposal by the Commission or the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, a **qualified majority** is reached if two conditions are met:

1. **55% of member states** vote in favour - in practice this means 15 out of 27 and
2. the proposal is supported by member states representing at least **65% of the total EU population**

This procedure is also known as the 'double majority' rule. The so-called blocking minority comes into play when at least 4 member states representing **more than 35% of the EU population** veto against a legislative proposal.¹³⁹ In CFSP, however, the decision-making process - apart from few exceptions - follows the intergovernmental method: Member states have to build consensus acting by unanimity.

The qualified majority option for CSDP was brought up for discussion by then Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker. In his efforts to make the EU a stronger and more effective global player, President Juncker, in his State of the Union 2017 speech, proposed that Member States should “look at which foreign policy decisions could be moved from unanimity to qualified majority voting.”¹⁴⁰ This claim was captured and reaffirmed at the joint Franco-German declaration of Meseberg one year later where both countries promised to “explore possibilities of using majority vote in the field of the Common Foreign and Security Policy” as means of closer coordination.¹⁴¹

In policy areas, where qualified majority is already applied such as in the EU trade policy, the experience has proven that the role of the EU as a global actor has not only been strengthened

¹³⁹ Official website of the Council of the European Union: Qualified majority; available under <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/council-eu/voting-system/qualified-majority/>,

¹⁴⁰ European Commission, 2017. President Jean-Claude Juncker's State of the Union Address, Brussels, 13 September 2017, p. 8

¹⁴¹ Press and Information Office of the Federal Government: Meseberg Declaration: Renewing Europe's promises of security and prosperity; press release 19.06.2018

but also that more effective decision-making had been accomplished. Proponents argue that extending QMV is vital because many policy fields are inseparably linked. The contested North Sea pipeline project for instance, is a project where trade, security, and geopolitical considerations clash. A more and more globalized environment may ramp up the risk that other countries combine defence with non-military issues like trade or other policy areas. States such as China and Russia are extensively using their economic leverage or power-political position to divide or pressure member-states.¹⁴² The prospect of qualified majority voting is a strong incentive for Member States to build consensus and unity increasing Europe's chance to obtain a stronger bargaining position in other fields than trade.

Legally, the use of QMV in additional policy fields is a viable and political feasible idea as there are already treaty provisions allowing greater flexibility in matters of common foreign and security policy that have not been exploited so far. This applies, inter alia, to Article 31(2) and (3) of the Treaty on European Union (TEU). Article 31(2) enumerates all cases where the Council shall act by a qualified majority. Article 31 (3) and (4) then continue:

31 (3): “The European Council may unanimously adopt a decision stipulating that the Council shall act by a qualified majority in cases other than those referred to in paragraph 2.”

31 (4): “Paragraphs 2 and 3 shall not apply to decisions having military or defence implications.¹⁴³

Article 31 (4) takes account of the very sensitive issue of military operations which remains a national affair. It acknowledges that in few EU countries any deployment of military forces is subject to legitimation by the national parliament (“Parlamentsheer”). However, every member state can still block a vote by qualified majority, when it puts forward “vital and stated reasons of national policy”.¹⁴⁴ In this case, the High Representative steps in and tries to find a compromise, in close consultation with the opposing Member State, attempting to achieve consensus. What promotes the current inefficiency in EU decision-making is that vetoing

¹⁴² Major, C., Järvenpää, P., Sakkov, S., 2019. European Strategic Autonomy: Operationalising a Buzzword, p. 1

¹⁴³ The Treaty on European Union: Consolidated Version; Article 31(3) and (4); available under https://eur-lex.europa.eu/resource.html?uri=cellar:2bf140bf-a3f8-4ab2-b506-fd71826e6da6.0023.02/DOC_1&format=PDF,

¹⁴⁴ The Treaty on European Union: Consolidated Version; Article 31(2)

common EU positions comes at a very low cost for individual member states. In some cases, the unanimity rule has been even used as a leverage tool between member states. If there was a risk of being outvoted, the costs for the state concerned would increase significantly. Installing QMV may encourage member states, which have objections, to be more constructive to defend their interests instead of simply blocking decisions.¹⁴⁵

Even though there is public support for this proposal many objections remain. Particularly for small and medium-sized member states the attraction of the EU lies precisely in its fundamentally non-hegemonic structure. They fear that the change to QMV will result in a dynamic that will favor populous member states, thus leading to a “majoritarian rule”.¹⁴⁶ And of course, by strengthening the decision-making capacity of the EU through QMV the democratic legitimacy is weakened. Furthermore, the migration crisis has shown that cleavages are not overcome when QMV is applied. In an interview, Merkel pointed out that the adoption of quotas for the distribution of 160,000 refugees by majority vote in 2015 did not lead to political pacification. A solution to issues that are very important to the member states must be therefore bargained through negotiations in the European Council.¹⁴⁷

The essence of the academic debate is that QMV is certainly not applicable to topics in all domains. Indeed, numerous policy papers have a skeptical take on extending QMV. The strongest objections are the weakening of legitimacy, the emergence of deepening cleavages within the EU member states that particularly smaller EU member states may lose control over decisions that directly impact their national interests.¹⁴⁸ It will be the responsibility of France and Germany to allay the concerns of the smaller states. Both countries should undertake greater efforts to consult and incorporate the views of smaller member states as they might perceive the Brexit as a lost possibility to balance against Paris and Berlin.¹⁴⁹ The uniqueness of the European Union lies in its capability to coordinate different interests, which are brought together in the unanimity principle. To sum up, QMV should be not viewed as a panacea, but

¹⁴⁵ Puglierin, J., 2019. Priorities for the EU’s new foreign policy agenda up to 2024: Unleashing the Potential of the Common Foreign and Security Policy, p. 13

¹⁴⁶ Lippert, B. et al., 2019. European Strategic Autonomy – Actors, Issues; Conflicts of Interests, p.10

¹⁴⁷ Gutschker, T., Lohse, E., 2018: Interview with Chancellor Angela Merkel: “Europa muss handlungsfähig sein – nach außen und nach innen ”; Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung

¹⁴⁸ Puglierin, J., 2019. Priorities for the EU’s new foreign policy agenda up to 2024: Unleashing the Potential of the Common Foreign and Security Policy, p. 13, see also Rieck, C. E., 2018. Brussel’s new telephone number? – How a European Security Council could strengthen EU foreign policy, p.2

¹⁴⁹ Schuette, L., 2019. Should the EU make foreign policy decisions by majority voting?, p. 12

rather as a useful, complementary tool that will “accelerate decision-making in some areas, but certainly only a small building block on the road to making CFSP more coherent and assertive.”¹⁵⁰

4.2.2 EU Security Council

Apart from the QMV there is another consideration of embedding a directorate option such as an EU Security Council (ESC). Compared to QMV, this more radical transformation has also come up on the agenda at the highest political level. The joint Franco-German declaration of Meseberg in 2018 also agreed upon looking at “new formats, such as an EU Security Council”.¹⁵¹ Despite the general endorsement of the introduction of an EU Security Council, France and Germany have delivered only ill-defined proposals so far. Macrons program for the European elections in May 2019 very generally suggested the creation of a European Security Council (ESC) bringing together the main military, diplomatic and intelligence officials of the Member States.¹⁵² Angela Merkel’s vision has been a little bit more concrete. In an interview with the Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung in June 2018, she proposed a European Security Council consisting of some of the EU states, whose membership would rotate and coordinate closely with the EU High Representative for Foreign Policy and with the European members in the UN Security Council.¹⁵³

Notwithstanding, the existing concepts presented by leading politicians have been very vague so far. Neither Germany nor France which kick-started the debate, have specified, what competences the ESC should obtain, how it would be structured and fit into the EU’s existing

¹⁵⁰ Puglierin, J., 2019: Priorities for the EU’s new foreign policy agenda up to 2024: Unleashing the Potential of the Common Foreign and Security Policy; p. 13

¹⁵¹ Press and Information Office of the Federal Government: Meseberg Declaration: Renewing Europe’s promises of security and prosperity; press release 19.06.2018

¹⁵² En Marche, 2019. Le programme d’ Emmanuel Macron pour l’Europe : Une Europe qui protège les Européens ; available at <https://en-marche.fr/emmanuel-macron/le-programme/europe>,

¹⁵³ Gutschker, T., Lohse, E., 2018: Interview with Chancellor Angela Merkel: “Europa muss handlungsfähig sein – nach außen und nach innen ”; Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung

See also official website of the Federal Chancellor: Speech by Federal Chancellor Angela Merkel to the European Parliament, Strasbourg, 13.11.2018; available at <https://www.bundeskanzlerin.de/bkin-en/news/speech-by-federal-chancellor-angela-merkel-to-the-european-parliament-strasbourg-13-november-2018-1550688>,

institutional framework. Consequently, most detailed blueprints so far have come from think tanks.

Ronja Kempin and Markus Kaim from the German Institute for International and Security Affairs (SWP) outline four conceivable draft designs, of how an ESC could be integrated into the EU's institutional structure:

a) The ESC along with the European Council:

As the Assembly of Heads of State and Government, the European Council is the main decision-making body in the EU. An ESC embedded in the European Council could serve to make the foreign and security policy conclusions of the European Council (ER) more visible. In this version, foreign and security policy issues would be an integral part of the meetings. Organised as an informal body, meetings could be held in the margins of European Council meetings. However, it would not be reasonable to compose the ESC of all EU member states. This would result in more institutional complexity, but little political added value because it would neither simplify nor fasten the decision-making or the EU's capacity to act.

b) The ESC as an ad hoc body with 27 foreign ministers

This option represents a modification of the abovementioned version. Like in the Foreign Affairs Council, the ESC meetings consist of the foreign ministers of EU member states. They are held on a case-by-case basis or at the invitation of the High Representative. In this case, the priority would not lie in the development of the CFSP, but the ESC would rather function as an emergency response mechanism. The main task should be to prioritize and implement EU policies in collaboration with the EEAS. With the help of this model, decisions could be accelerated. But it remains uncertain whether this would also make the EU more capable of acting.

c) The ESC as an intergovernmental leadership group

A third option would be to design the body as a Contact Group or Group of Friends. From the idea it would correspond to an informal contact group like the E12 – it would foster a European foreign policy through “coalitions of the willing” within and outside the EU. It is the respected practice of European foreign policy that the actions serve the goals of the Lisbon treaty and the Security Council could legitimize this policy approach. This option would be a response for

those who are calling for leadership in foreign and security policy. In contrast to the two aforementioned variants, such a design of the ESC would fulfill the requirement for more flexibility in the EU's external actions. It is questionable, however, whether it will facilitate closer coordination within the EU and in external forums.

d) The ESR as supranational governance body

Another possibility is to set up the ESC as a supranational governance body. It represents the most ambitious version because, in such a scenario, the ESC would function as the supreme decision-making and governing body within EU foreign policy. Such a proposal presupposes that the EU member states are willing to delegate their national competences in foreign and security policy to the ESC. Hence, the responsibility of ESC then would be to carve out a common position. Under these circumstances the ESC probably would be capable to act more effectively, assuming the interests and positions converge. The EEAS would then act as the General Secretariat with the High Representative (analogously to the United Nations) taking up the role of Secretary-General. However, such a paradigm change seems unrealistic for the foreseeable future, as it cannot be expected that EU member states will accept to transfer their power to a supranational body in this policy field.¹⁵⁴

Despite the lack of concretization of the political elite, there is a basic agreement with regards to the level of ambition, on what requirements an ESC should meet – they can be summed up in three objectives: Enhancing the speed and decisiveness of EU decision-making in security and defence, defining a strategic framework for more coherent EU external action and improving coordination between EU actors, as well as between EU actors and the member states.¹⁵⁵

Nováky defines four principle tasks an ESC should master, regardless of its exact configuration:

1. institutionalising a permanent strategic reflection process that leads to the production of a new and fully revised European Security Strategy every five years;
2. helping to set the EU's medium- to long-term security and defence policy agenda;
3. adopting resolutions on crises and international challenges affecting the EU; and

¹⁵⁴ Kaim, M., Kempin, R., 2019. A European Security Council: Added value for EU Foreign and Security Policy?; p. 2ff

¹⁵⁵ Nováky, N., 2019. EU it yourself – A Blueprint for a European Security Council, p.9 & p. 23

4. drafting proposals for actions to be undertaken by the Council and facilitating quicker and more decisive EU action.¹⁵⁶

As the principle of QMV, the establishment of an ESC is a sensitive and ambivalent topic. Certainly, as a smaller body compared to the EU's European Council and Foreign Affairs Council, the ESC promises to deliver faster European foreign policy positions and serves as a true alternative to QMV to overcome the lowest-common-denominator problem. This would encounter the strategy of other states such as China or Russia where smaller states are put under economic pressure in order to prevent CFSP positions that are directed against them. China, for instance, already applied this strategy successfully on EU positions on the South China Sea.

Moreover, a pan-European architecture opens the possibility of including the United Kingdom after Brexit and developing a more independent policy strategy from the US. However, such a directorate option raises skepticism as well. Even though the rotation principle gives smaller states the opportunity to have more influence than they would if E3 foreign policy¹⁵⁷ cooperation increased, there might be the objection an ESC will rather foster tougher European foreign policy positions that are more in line with Franco-German views. Especially some Central Europeans such as Poland may deny the exclusion of the United States and consider Franco-German domination not as the appropriate answer to European or their national security interests. And indeed, it remains the question of how the importance of the ESC would influence the role of the North Atlantic Council (NAC), NATO's principal decision-making body. Other countries may be skeptical about the general idea to address Europe's weakness in projecting hard power with an institutional response in the first place when EU member states are overall lacking in political will and military capability. They argue to first find a broad consensus on the threats and security priorities Europe is facing. Hence, like for QMV, the narratives of an ESC are multi-layered.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁶ Nováky, N., 2019. EU it yourself – A Blueprint for a European Security Council, p. 39

¹⁵⁷ E3, refers to France, Germany and Italy. It has also been used to refer to the grouping of France, Germany, and the United Kingdom, especially during the negotiations with Iran from 2003.

¹⁵⁸ Whineray, D., 2020. Judy Dempsey's strategic Europe: The Pros and Cons of a European Security Council

4.3 Conclusion:

The level of ambition of the EU consists of a military and a political sphere. The EUGS gives not clear formulations or standards for European strategic autonomy although the pragmatic shift from the European Security Strategy to the EU Global Strategy is evident: Not only relying on Europe's soft power but also developing hard power that is not on a drip-feed of Washington's goodwill. Hence, the key question really is the level of EU ambition.¹⁵⁹

The analysis has illustrated that the LoA is characterized by the Petersberg tasks showing an ambiguous constitution of PESCO projects. On one hand, promising progress is being made since PESCO has been launched. On the other hand, the current industrial and military capabilities are far away from what the EU should aspire in order to play a military role in conflicts of global interests. This applies also to structural or institutional changes on a political level. Although Juncker, Macron, and Merkel have initiated a fundamental debate in interviews and shown readiness to elaborate on true alternatives to the unanimity principle in CFSP on the agenda, the discussion on a concrete design is only taking place at the think-tank level so far. It seems that the topic is still too sensitive to address it beyond interviews, speeches, and official declarations of intent that are binding.

To conclude, the results of the analysis give reason to assume that only limited progress will be made in the foreseeable future, going beyond the current status quo but leaving the EU as a security entity subordinate to NATO. It may satisfy those who, under strategic autonomy, derive the ability to conduct military operations at least close to Europe's vicinity, such as in the southern neighborhood. This model, however, could not meet the ambitious goal of becoming a serious global player far beyond Europe. And it would be not clear what it would imply for the transatlantic relationship. Someone who believes in US deep engagement and liberal hegemony would no doubt find it satisfactory. Someone like Trump, who prefers to see allies to pay their fair share may find it still unsatisfactory.

¹⁵⁹ Howorth, J., 2017. Strategic autonomy and EU NATO-Cooperation: squaring the circle, p. 3

5. Comparative analysis

5.1 Methodological approach

The previous chapters have grappled with the theoretical background, the definitions and conceptualizations, initiatives, perspectives, and the level of ambition circling around the notion of European Strategic Autonomy. The findings of this theoretical part will be applied to individual countries in order to understand and to carve out their attitude towards European Strategic autonomy. Yet, an examination of all European or EU member states countries is by far beyond the conceivable scope of this work. Thus, three countries have been selected for conducting a comparative country analysis. France, Germany, and the Czech Republic. The selection of these countries is based on the following considerations:

- France is undoubtedly the leading proponent of ESA. The idea of strategic autonomy is firmly anchored in the Defence and National Security Strategic Review published in 2017. As a result, ESA is considered a further development of the national concept. Since its first appearance in 1994, the concept of strategic autonomy has established in the French doctrinal debate.¹⁶⁰
- Among German policy experts and policymakers, the discussion about ESA is omnipresent. Important think-thanks such as the German Council on Foreign Relations (DGAP) and the German Institute for International and Security Affairs (SWP) have produced numerous papers. Apart from the favorable data basis, the role in the EU and the close exchange between France and Germany on foreign and security policy issues make Germany an obvious choice.
- The Czech Republic has been selected because it has emerged as an advocate of closer EU defence integration, where the Czech government subscribed to German and French ideas.¹⁶¹ At the same time, the country shares the foreign and security

¹⁶⁰ Franke, U., Varma, T., 2019. Europe's pursuit of Strategic Autonomy, https://www.ecfr.eu/specials/scorecard/independence_play_europes_pursuit_of_strategic_autonomy,

¹⁶¹ Šimečka, M., 2016. European Strategic Autonomy: Distant but Irresistible, p. 8

policy concerns of other Visegrad states. This ambivalent relationship and the fact that the Czech Republic is a bridge state between West and East Europe in CSDP issues, makes it a suitable candidate for analysis.

The relevant data were collected through semi-structured interviews with security experts conducted in Berlin, Prague, and Brussels. A total of six expert interviews were conducted, two experts for each country. In the run-up to the planned interviews, a telephone contact with the interview partners took place for organizational reasons and to ensure interviewees are familiar with the term ESA through their work experience and thus, suitable for an in-depth discussion of all topics related to ESA. All experts agreed to the publication of their names and statements.

The experts are as follows:

For France:

- **Frédéric Mauro:** Lawyer at the Bars of Paris and Brussels, legal advisor for the European Parliament
- **Arnaud Migoux:** employed in the Security and Defence Directorate of the European External Actions Service

For Germany:

- **Torben Schütz:** Research fellow from DGAP with focus on armaments policy and defense industrial matters
- **Claudia Major:** Head of Research Division International Security at SWP, focus on German Defence and Security Policy and CFSP

For the Czech Republic:

- **Jakub Kufčák:** Research Fellow of AMO Research Center, his research focuses on the NATO and security policy.
- **Ondřej Šamonil:** employed in the Strategic Development and Defence Policy Section at the Czech Ministry of Defence with specialization in PESCO and NATO topics

The evaluation period begins with the publication of the EUGS, since it is assumed that this document has brought ESA to the political agenda of countries other than France and ends with the beginning of the German Council Presidency (July 2020). For the interview itself, a guideline was prepared which was not discussed beforehand in order to avoid prepared answers. The guideline essentially follows the theoretical part of this paper supplemented by a few additional topics where personal assessment by the interviewee is believed to be relevant to obtain a more profound picture. As the experts have answered the guideline questions with different emphasis and scope, the interviews deviate from each other.

For practical reasons, the interviews were recorded with a recording device with the consent of the interview partners. The evaluation of the interviews was managed with the support of a professional Audio Transcription Software.¹⁶² In order to be able to put the content of the interviews into context, it is necessary to add theoretical background information. Thus, the case study is also an extended context analysis.¹⁶³

5.2 Case study France:

The defence and security dimension of European strategic autonomy is discussed in very concrete terms. Until 2017, France was mostly concerned with French national strategic autonomy. In its Defence and National Security Strategy Review of 2017, the national vision is connected and extended to a European dimension.¹⁶⁴ In the Strategy Review, it is classified as a key objective of French defence policy because it's believed to have a significant impact on sovereignty and freedom of action.¹⁶⁵ Migoux points out that strategic autonomy is at the core of this document.¹⁶⁶ In contrast to other members, France considers ESA to be an important goal of its foreign and defence policy being the only country to formulate an aim of national independence without ruling out certain interdependencies. The French perspective does not pose the question of whether Europe should be strategically autonomous or not – it already is, in some limited respects – but what benefits can be drawn from reaching higher degrees of

¹⁶² The Transcription system used is called amberscript: <https://www.amberscript.com/en/>

¹⁶³ Schreier, M., 2014. Ways of Doing Qualitative Content Analysis: Disentangling Terms and Terminologies

¹⁶⁴ Dent, M., 2018. European strategic Autonomy: Going it alone?, p.5

¹⁶⁵ Official website of French Ministry of Defence, 2017. National Security Strategy Review of 2017, p.54

¹⁶⁶ Migoux interview

European autonomy in the political, operational, and industrial realms.¹⁶⁷ According to Mauro, French strategic culture is characterized by the aspiration to be independent as much as possible. He makes a precise semantic distinction. The French don't reject to be allied, but to be aligned to someone's policy.¹⁶⁸ During his New Year's speech on 19 January 2018, French President Macron said:

"I want a France that is faithful to its commitments in the Atlantic Alliance, but which is also the engine of European strategic autonomy. To achieve this, we must have a full-spectrum, strong, modern and powerful defence apparatus, implemented by forward-looking armed forces with the capacity to respond fast."¹⁶⁹

For Macron the common security in Europe has two pillars: NATO and Europe of defense of which the latter must be strengthened.¹⁷⁰ Seeking for Strategic Autonomy is not regarded as weakening NATO, but as a complementary tool that will benefit the alliance.¹⁷¹ The statement also emphasizes that the French version of strategic autonomy addresses several spheres. Like Macron, the Defence and National Security Strategy Review stresses the importance of the defence industry and the technological base to secure France's self-reliance. Pursuing a high level of ambition in the manufacturing and technology fields represents thus a pillar of strategic autonomy. Moreover, a complete and balanced military is crucial for France's national independence and freedom of action.¹⁷² Unsurprisingly, this conceptualization represents the most ambitious vision of strategic autonomy among all European states. It covers both concepts of autonomy from other powers and autonomy to conduct operations and is defined as "the ability to decide and to act freely in an interdependent world."¹⁷³

¹⁶⁷ Brustlein, C., 2018. European Strategic Autonomy: Balancing Ambition and Responsibility, p.3

¹⁶⁸ Mauro interview

¹⁶⁹ Knight, B., 2020. Munich Security Conference: France's Macron envisions new era of European strength; Deutsche Welle, <https://www.dw.com/en/munich-security-conference-frances-macron-envisions-new-era-of-european-strength/a-52389586>

¹⁷⁰ Élysée Palace, 2018. New Year's greetings by President Emmanuel Macron to the press, <https://www.elysee.fr/emmanuel-macron/2018/01/03/new-years-greetings-by-president-emmanuel-macron-to-the-press.en>

¹⁷¹ Migoux interview

¹⁷² French Defence and National Security Strategy Review of 2017; key points

¹⁷³ Franke, U., Varma, T., 2019. Europe's pursuit of Strategic Autonomy, https://www.ecfr.eu/specials/scorecard/independence_play_europes_pursuit_of_strategic_autonomy

With regards to the national security and defence policy, the political class primarily focuses on the fight against terrorism. It can be traced back to the growing number of attacks in France shaping the homeland security and international policy. The geopolitical priority lies in the stabilization of the Sahel region. When Macron was criticized for his “brain-dead NATO” remarks, he defended his statement as a necessary wake-up call demanding greater NATO involvement in the Sahel as Europe’s true common enemy is not Russia or China but terrorism.¹⁷⁴ The Brexit vote raises the question whether it is an opportunity or an obstacle for the advancement of ESA. Mauro takes a clear stand and speaks of an opportunity. Although he fears European defence may not be feasible without the Brits, he is even more convinced it will fail with the UK.¹⁷⁵ Migoux’s answer is more ambiguous, arguing that in terms of capabilities, the EU is losing an important partner who at the same time has been a tough opponent of ESA. He concludes that despite Brexit, it won’t be easier to go forward on the topic as some other member states like the Baltic states or Poland will keep the controversy unresolved.¹⁷⁶

A further topic gaining momentum around Europe is the idea of the Europeanisation of the French deterrent force. Macron has called for a coordinated EU nuclear defence strategy in which France and its nuclear arsenal would play a central role.¹⁷⁷ The idea is to establish nuclear sharing arrangements with France on the model of those now in place with the United States, or to institute a contribution from Germany, or from a group of several EU countries to help provide funding for the French deterrent force. Yet, Macron’s proposal is not subject of a serious discussion within the EU. Even among French policy experts, the discussion has been identified as premature since the voices that have been raised in this regard are not representative of any majority of political forces or public opinion in other European countries.¹⁷⁸

¹⁷⁴ Wintour P., McKernan, B., 2019. Macron defends ‘brain-dead NATO’ remarks as summit approaches, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/nov/28/macron-defends-brain-dead-nato-remarks-as-summit-approaches>,

¹⁷⁵ Mauro interview

¹⁷⁶ Migoux interview

¹⁷⁷ Gaubert, J., 2020. Macron calls for a coordinated EU nuclear defence strategy – with France at centre, <https://www.euronews.com/2020/02/08/macron-calls-for-coordinated-eu-nuclear-defence-strategy-with-france-at-centre>

¹⁷⁸ le Gleut, R., Conway-Mouret, H., 2019. Information report for French Senate, <http://www.senat.fr/rap/r18-626-2/r18-626-21.pdf>

The French focus in the military and defence policy domain lies on a small number of able and willing states, which can quickly intervene together in the event of a crisis in Europe's environment. France is favoring the cooperation of smaller groups, considering exclusivity and optimal capacity as a necessity for decisive progress. According to Mauro, PESCO was originally designed for the willing and the able ones, envisioned to begin with an "Avantgarde" like it was the case with Schengen and the Euro - starting with a few countries with the idea to keep it open for further states when they are ready and willing to fulfill the conditions.¹⁷⁹ The French are not concerned about the institutional embeddedness of formats, their emphasis lies in their capacity to act in order to satisfy defence policy and operational needs. This explains their pragmatic approach in CFSP: what counts is the format that works, not the institutional design.¹⁸⁰ The establishment of the E12 outside of PESCO can be thus interpreted as a reaction to the inclusivity of PESCO and the resulting scepticism towards it.

The European Intervention Initiative was created to develop a common strategic culture, which should emerge from the shared operational experience.¹⁸¹ The flexibility for different forms of collaboration corresponds to the strategic review which pragmatically calls to seek "an optimal combination of the various initiatives of European defence cooperation."¹⁸² Macron has also called for a "real European Army", a term that is an even more controversial than ESA.¹⁸³ The so-called deep state - represented by the people who are implementing the decisions in the states apparatus - is strongly opposing the concept of a European army.¹⁸⁴ French policy experts call this idea an utopian, even counterproductive project that is unrealistic even in the medium term because such an army would be a sign of highly advanced political unity, which is unlikely to emerge soon.¹⁸⁵

¹⁷⁹ Mauro interview

¹⁸⁰ Major interview

¹⁸¹ Élysée Palace, 2017. Initiative pour l'Europe - Discours d'Emmanuel Macron pour une Europe souveraine, unie, démocratique. <https://www.elysee.fr/emmanuel-macron/2017/09/26/initiative-pour-l-europe-discours-d-emmanuel-macron-pour-une-europe-souveraine-unie-democratique>,

¹⁸² French Defence and National Security Strategy Review of 2017; p.54

¹⁸³ Euractiv, 2018. Macron calls for 'true European army' to defend against Russia, US, China, <https://www.euractiv.com/section/defence-and-security/news/macron-calls-for-european-army-to-defend-against-russia-us-china/>

¹⁸⁴ Mauro interview

¹⁸⁵ le Gleut, R., Conway-Mouret, H., 2019. Information report for French Senate, <http://www.senat.fr/rap/r18-626-2/r18-626-21.pdf>

The implementation of foreign policy and security decisions requires strong internal and external political legitimacy. In this sense, QMV and an ESC have been thrown into the agenda on the highest political level. France is not in favor of switching to qualified majority¹⁸⁶ as France doesn't want to run the risk of being outvoted in security issues vital to its interests. Hence, it is likely to push to espouse the directorate option, where it can shape efforts to make Europe more "sovereign".¹⁸⁷ Yet, it is the political sphere that is the most important and the most controversial issue at the same time: Mauro describes it by posing the following question: "How do we manage to always agree even when we disagree?"¹⁸⁸ Migoux classifies this discussion as a very sensitive topic that is discussed in academia but is far away from being tackled in the day-to-day political life.¹⁸⁹

5.3 Case study Germany:

The German government is carefully avoiding the term "strategic autonomy" in its strategic documents so far. Neither the most recent White Paper nor the coalition agreement of 2018 addresses the concept of strategic autonomy. Notwithstanding, with the adoption of the EUGS, Germany has committed to the goal of ESA.¹⁹⁰ Germany is very aware of the objections and critics. It attempts to disperse the concerns of those who fear the loss of their sovereignty or are worried about isolating Europe from American security. The term strategic autonomy is not only problematic because of its appearance in the French White Paper but also because several EU officials used it. The track record of EU defence cooperation since St. Malo has always been rhetorically brilliant, but in fact not backed up with action. Thus, strategic autonomy lost its credibility wherefore Major advocates to use the term "European Sovereignty" instead.¹⁹¹ This seems to be a shared opinion amongst other German policy experts and politicians.¹⁹²

¹⁸⁶ Migoux interview

¹⁸⁷ Lippert, B. et al., 2019. European Strategic Autonomy, Actors Issues, Conflicts of Interests, p. 12

¹⁸⁸ Mauro interview

¹⁸⁹ Migoux interview

¹⁹⁰ Kempin, R., Kunz, B., 2017. France, Germany and the Quest for European strategic Autonomy, Franco-German Defence Cooperation in a new Era, p. 12

¹⁹¹ Major interview

¹⁹² Leonard, M., Shapiro, J., 2020. Strategic Sovereignty: How Europe can regain the capacity to act; European Council on Foreign Relations; available at https://www.ecfr.eu/page/-/ecfr_strategic_sovereignty.pdf, last

An insightful definition has been presented by German Foreign Minister Maas: His understanding of European Sovereignty is that “Europe can act independently and decide to pool its resources in areas where the individual states have long since lost their ability to shape the major powers.”¹⁹³ It illustrates that the German emphasis lies on multilateralism in the CFSP. ESA in German eyes should not be managed by an exclusive “coalition of able and willing ones”, but rather captured as a project of broad collaboration. The error analysis that the EU is too slow and cannot respond adequately to challenges has led to contradictory conclusions in France and Germany. While the French believe that an inflated institutional framework is responsible for EU’s incapability to act, Germany wants to create the conditions within EU structures in order to bring all member states on board. Any project that is embedded outside of EU or NATO structures, is inherently seen critically because it could undermine political unity.¹⁹⁴ Especially the German Ministry of Defence is traditionally very much pro-NATO and sceptical of any notions that undermine the transatlantic alliance.¹⁹⁵

The importance of multilateralism for Germany has become evident when Federal President Steinmeier openly attacked the US. He accused the Trump administration to reject the idea of an international community and criticized that institutions and authorities which help to overcome different traditions, interests, and priorities by translating them into viable compromises, have been deliberately weakened.¹⁹⁶ Thus Germany can be characterized as a balancing force between transatlantic and European extremes. ESA is inextricably connected to EU’s unity and strong political framework which represents the prerequisite for the development and application of any capability. Thus, Germany grasps ESA as a European integration project.¹⁹⁷ Particularly in the wake of the Brexit referendum, PESCO was interpreted as a foreign policy tool for deepening European cooperation. While France aimed at exclusivity and efficiency, Germany pushed for inclusivity and legitimacy. PESCO is certainly

visited on 27.07.2020; Kudnani, H., 2020. Europe’s Sovereignty conundrum, Berlin Policy Journal;

<https://berlinpolicyjournal.com/europes-sovereignty-conundrum/>

¹⁹³ Federal Foreign Office, 2020. Opening address by Foreign Minister Heiko Maas at the Virtual Annual Council Meeting of the European Council of foreign Relations; 29.06.2020; <https://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/en/newsroom/news/maas-ecfr/2358716>

¹⁹⁴ Major interview

¹⁹⁵ Schütz interview

¹⁹⁶ Steinmeier, F.-W., 2020. Opening speech of the Munich Security Conference, 14.02.2020, Munich Security Conference

¹⁹⁷ Libek, E., 2020. European Strategic Autonomy: A Cacophony of Political Visions, <https://icds.ee/european-strategic-autonomy-a-cacophony-of-political-visions/>

shaped by the German approach, but a price had to be paid for securing the participation of everyone in it: Germany reluctantly had to approve the E12 in return and did not achieve the goal to integrate it into the framework of European cooperation.¹⁹⁸ A compromise was reached at the Meseberg Franco-German declaration where both sides agreed upon “the need to further develop the emergence of a shared strategic culture through the European Intervention Initiative, which will be linked as closely as possible with PESCO.”¹⁹⁹ Yet, both countries share the assessment that developing CSDP does not contradict a strong transatlantic relationship.

The national security and defence policy debate in Germany encompasses three elements:

1. The moving target of a changing security landscape
2. The crisis of the European project
3. Domestic developments²⁰⁰

With regards to ESA, the transatlantic relationship dominates the German debate. German policy experts and policymakers discuss the topic mainly in response to US criticism.²⁰¹ Within this debate, there are two argumentation structures. The first one follows a reactive logic. Given the deteriorating transatlantic relationship, Europe must be ready in case the US shifts its interest step by step further from Europe to Asia. Thus, Europe should become more capable in order to represent a more attractive partner to the US and to be better prepared if the US decides to abandon Europe. The proactive approach, in contrast, argues that Europeans have built an impressive political construct and should have the inherent aspiration to protect themselves.²⁰² Despite these diverging views, it is undisputed that NATO will remain the cornerstone of German defence policy.

When it comes to the level of ambition, the Petersberg should serve as a reference point. Major stresses the scope of Petersberg tasks ranging from low-intensity observation to peace-making. In the case of Syria, peace-making would include the ability to establish a no-flight

¹⁹⁸ Schütz interview

¹⁹⁹ Press and Information Office of the Federal Government, 2018. Meseberg Declaration: Renewing Europe’s promises of security and prosperity

²⁰⁰ Mölling, C., Major, C., 2017 in: Bartels, H.-P., Kellner A. M.; Optenhögel, U., 2017. Strategic Autonomy and the Defence of Europe; On the road to an European Army?, p. 202

²⁰¹ Franke, U., Varma, T., 2019. Europe’s pursuit of Strategic Autonomy,

https://www.ecfr.eu/specials/scorecard/independence_play_europes_pursuit_of_strategic_autonomy

²⁰² Major interview

which is currently beyond Europe's capability.²⁰³ Schütz argues that German's level of ambition would probably include post-conflict stabilization and crisis management but not first entry missions and higher-end operations. These would be attributed to NATO.²⁰⁴

Macron's offer of a common European nuclear deterrent where France's nuclear arsenal would play a central role in Europe's collective security hasn't been answered yet in Berlin. So far, French and British nuclear weapons have always been a taboo in the discussion on European security policy.²⁰⁵ An independent German deterrent is inconceivable because the treaty commitments including the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and the Two Plus Four treaty ending the division of Germany prohibit the national control of nuclear, biological, and chemical weapons. In addition, the phase-out of nuclear power makes a restarting of a military program difficult and very costly.²⁰⁶ The idea of a European army is mentioned in the coalition agreement and has a positive connotation in the German narrative.²⁰⁷ Yet, the positive statements do not go beyond the character of a declaration of intent or welcoming the idea which indicates that a substantial debate is not existent.²⁰⁸

The withdrawal of the UK from the EU is assessed as a chance rather than a risk. Schütz argues that it drives the European perspective forward without the UK blocking every step. Especially the increase in the European Defence Agency's budgets was only possible because of Brexit. Of course, the capabilities lost in the EU framework cannot be compensated but the UK can still participate as a third country in CSDP missions and in the E2I.²⁰⁹ For Schütz, the greatest obstacle to further develop ESA is the lack of political unity. Different positions within the EU on the role of NATO, Russia, and Libya undermine European unity and hinder firm European integration.²¹⁰ Major criticizes the German focus on institutional design. Instead, the reference point should be the determination of "Who is this Europe?" And this Europe can consist of

²⁰³ Major interview

²⁰⁴ Schütz interview

²⁰⁵ Wulf, H., 2019. Das goldene Kalb der AKK, Internationale Politik und Gesellschaft

²⁰⁶ Szabo, S. F., 2020. Should Germany Go Nuclear?; American Institute for Contemporary German Studies, Johns Hopkins University

²⁰⁷ Schütz interview

²⁰⁸ Federal Government, 2018. Coalition agreement between CDU,CSU, and SPD; Kramp-Karrenbauer: Europäische Armee kann Streitkräfte nicht ersetzen, die Welt; online article from 05.02.2019

<https://www.welt.de/newsticker/news2/article188328819/Wahlen-Kramp-Karrenbauer-Europaeische-Armee-kann-nationale-Streitkraefte-nicht-ersetzen.html>,

²⁰⁹ Schütz interview

²¹⁰ Schütz interview

different actors depending on the policy area. For instance, economic strategic autonomy will imply other countries leading the field than when defence sovereignty or autonomy is being discussed. Thus, Germany should break out of its institutional thinking as it is not helpful in the debate.²¹¹

What is striking to observe in the German academic discussion is the spectrum of opinions among defence policy experts about the possibility to realistically achieve strategic autonomy. These range from the assessment that strategic autonomy is necessary but impossible at the same time²¹² to opinions labeling this statement a wrong conventional wisdom and therefore postulating further research on how it might be indeed conceivable achieving it under certain circumstances.²¹³ It illustrates that ESA is interpreted in many ways and underpins the necessity that ESA has to be narrowed down on the political level at some point.²¹⁴

5.4 Case study Czech Republic:

In the Czech political arena, strategic autonomy is not subject of a debate and thus, has no Czech impetus. It is perceived as a very broad term that has come up with the publication of the EUGS. Kufčák defines it as the “the ability, the will and capabilities, to forge the security environment that surrounds you.”²¹⁵ Dyčka labels it as a long-term goal which in theory means to have “EU member states capable of autonomously developing, operating, modifying and maintaining the full spectrum of defence capabilities.”²¹⁶ In the same vein argues Šamonil, stating that strategic autonomy is about capabilities to strengthen the European pillar in NATO. As a result, ESA is understood as autonomy to conduct operations and not as autonomy from other states.²¹⁷ The French emphasis on independency is assessed critically. Yet, the Czech Republic does not belong to the group of countries which strongly accentuate the necessity to take US concerns more into account (such as Poland,

²¹¹ Major interview

²¹² Hans Kudnani: The Necessity and Impossibility of Strategic Autonomy; German Marshal Fund of the United States; January 2018

²¹³ Giegerich, B., 2019. NATO and the prospects of European strategic autonomy: IISS Podcast Episode 1 <https://www.iiss.org/blogs/podcast/2019/01/nato-european-strategic-autonomy>

²¹⁴ Schütz interview

²¹⁵ Kufčák interview

²¹⁶ Radio Prague International, 2020. Former Czech ambassador to NATO Jiří Šedivý elected European Defence Agency chief exec

²¹⁷ Šamonil interview

Baltic States, UK).²¹⁸ This may be explained with the strategic shift in Czech foreign policy that has been observed over the past five years which represents a withdrawal from the exclusive dependence on the Atlantic defence solution in favor of a (partial) transfer towards the European security and defence policy.²¹⁹ The Czech Republic has emerged as an advocate of closer EU defence integration by contributing to the EUGS and its Implementation Plan, where Prague subscribed to German and French ideas. It is aware of the multidimensionality of Europe's defence environment through its commitments in Mali and the Baltic States. EU member states should work together not only in Eastern Europe but also in the Mediterranean and sub-Saharan Africa. This perspective has placed the Czech position into the mainstream of European thinking.²²⁰

Yet, the strategic shift should not be overestimated. For the Czech Republic, NATO remains the undisputed anchor of stability. It considers it as the primary framework for defence cooperation with ESA being a complementary and compatible tool when Europe avoids delinking, duplicating, and discriminating against NATO activities.²²¹ Collective defence should be exclusively left for NATO, not questioning NATO's Article 5. A European nuclear deterrence is not part of a Czech vision. It goes beyond the level of strategic autonomy Europe should have on ESA.

On the policy expert level, Russia is perceived as the most significant security threat for Europe through its military aggression, hybrid campaigns, disinformation activities and cyber attacks. However, the overall assessment of the Ministry of Defence with regards to the likelihood of a direct military attack against the territory of the Czech Republic remains low in the 2035 horizon.²²² Being firmly embedded in European institutions and NATO and lacking an direct security threat, a substantial debate is missing in the Czech foreign and security policy. With the exemption of few think tanks and policy experts, no strategic discussion have emerged, neither on the political level nor in public.²²³ Weiss observes that with the accession to NATO and EU, a self-contained foreign policy debate in Czech public

²¹⁸ Franke, U., Varma, T., 2019. Europe's pursuit of Strategic Autonomy, https://www.ecfr.eu/specials/scorecard/independence_play_europes_pursuit_of_strategic_autonomyhttps://www.ecfr.eu/specials/scorecard/independence_play_europes_pursuit_of_strategic_autonomy

²¹⁹ Ditrych, O., 2019. Česká Republika a evropská spolupráce v oblasti obrany, p. 30

²²⁰ Šimečka, M., 2016. European Strategic Autonomy: Distant but Irresistible, p. 8

²²¹ Kufčák interview

²²² Ministry of Defence of the Czech Republic, 2019. The long-term perspective for defence 2035, 2019, p. 8

²²³ Šamonil interview

has ceased to exist. Even among politicians, there is insufficient understanding for external relations which is why Czech political parties lack expertise on foreign policy.²²⁴ According to Kufčák, there is a strategic culture that is geared at Transatlanticism, but when it comes to the question of how to sell defence policy to the public, it's about "translating defence policy into social policy."²²⁵ The superiority of domestic considerations over foreign policy creates an incoherent policy which weakens the Czech position in European negotiations. This benefits populist and anti-European movements at home and leads to a "wait-and-see" policy, which consists merely in welcoming initiatives from other countries.²²⁶ Šamonil calls it a "survival strategy" to not annoy the European and transatlantic partners for Czech Republic's modest contributions in NATO and PESCO.²²⁷

The Czech perspectives on the administrative level towards PESCO are diverging. On the policy level, support for PESCO is outweighing general scepticism. But when moving to the bottom where implementation takes place (soldiers, experts, general staff), a more indifferent attitude towards PESCO can be observed.²²⁸ According to Kufčák, the bureaucratic interplay between the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Defence and the general staff of the Army hinders more intense PESCO involvement. The military needs to be convinced that these projects are useful.²²⁹ The E2I does not play a role since the Czech Republic does not participate in it. Czech strategic culture remains to be anchored in NATO. Notwithstanding, the increase of diplomatic and financial resources in defense cooperation in the EU takes account of the multipolar environment and represents a shift from bandwagoning to a more inclined hedging strategy to protect against the decline of the transatlantic link.²³⁰

The Brexit consequences are interpreted differently. For Šamonil, it represents an obstacle. He argues that capabilities are the most important parameter and without UK capabilities,

²²⁴ Weiss, T., 2019. Foreign security and defence policy: Europeanized at the bottom, neglected at the top, Chapter 8 in: Astrid Lorenz, Hana Formánková (eds.): Czech political system, summary, p. 266

²²⁵ Kufčák interview

²²⁶ Weiss, T., 2019. Foreign security and defence policy: Europeanized at the bottom, neglected at the top, Chapter 8 in: Astrid Lorenz, Hana Formánková (eds.): Czech political system, summary, p. 266; Šamonil interview

²²⁷ Šamonil interview

²²⁸ Šamonil interview

²²⁹ Kufčák interview

²³⁰ Ditrych, O., 2019. Česká Republika a evropská spolupráce v oblasti obrany, p. 31

Europe won't be able to fulfil the Petersberg tasks.²³¹ Kufčák appreciates both perspectives finally concluding that Brexit is rather a chance than an obstacle.²³²

The Czech inherent positive attitude towards a European Army was influenced by the fact that there no specific conceptualization of what it would imply and because no common European strategic interests and key military capabilities have been formulated.²³³ The issue was first taken up by former Prime Minister Sobotka:

“Our experiences with the last migration wave have shown the importance of Europe’s internal borders. In the face of uncontrolled mass migration, even states in the centre of Europe have realized that internal borders must be better controlled... aside from better coordinated foreign and security policy, I also believe that in the long term, we will be unable to do without a joint European army.”²³⁴

The current government has not made such a clear commitment. Regardless of consent on that topic, the building of a European army was regarded as an end achievable only in the distant future. Šamonil considers the current political landscape to be divided on that topic and notes that when connected to federalism and integration, it is not a popular issue to talk about.²³⁵ To sum up, a clear strategic vision with regards to ESA is not visible. The Czech Republic seems to be stuck in the position of a follower. Both experts agree upon the fact that ESA needs to be tackled and specified more on the political level in order to make it not fail.²³⁶

²³¹ Šamonil interview

²³² Kufčák interview

²³³ Balabán, M. 2017. Czech Case Study in: Bartels, H.-P., Kellner A. M.; Optenhögel, U., 2017. Strategic Autonomy and the Defence of Europe; On the road to an European Army?, p.129

²³⁴ Radio Prague International, 2016. Prime Minister Sobotka calls for creation of EU army to complement NATO, Radio Prag International, 23.08.2016, available at <https://english.radio.cz/prime-minister-sobotka-calls-creation-eu-army-complement-nato-8216399>

²³⁵ Šamonil interview

²³⁶ Šamonil interview, Kufčák interview

5.5 Summary of case studies and findings

The case studies of France, Germany, and the Czech Republic have revealed fundamental differences in the interpretation of ESA. France formulates the highest level of ambition by interpreting ESA as the ability to decide and act freely, including autonomy to conduct operations and autonomy from other powers. France represents insofar an exceptional case as it is the only country that does not consider its security to be inextricably linked to US engagement in Europe. Being the only nuclear power in the EU now, France has shown the willingness to start a discussion on how to potentially use its nuclear weapons in a European security context, but this offer either has been ignored or declined. Referring to the theoretical concepts of chapter 1 (balancing vs. bandwagoning) and the conceptualizations of strategic autonomy in chapter 2.3 (autonomy as responsibility, hedging, and emancipation) and considering their definitions, France can be classified as a balancer who pursues autonomy of emancipation.

For Germany, ESA is seen as an integration project. It aims at creating an inclusive framework where it hopes to reconcile the opposing position of the “South” and the “East”. As a result, the German vision of strategic autonomy remains a term with a clearly political undertone and the emphasis on multilateralism. ESA is regarded as autonomy to and from, which should help to increase burden-sharing. Being one of the main drivers in PESCO who emphasizes the prevalence of NATO and bearing in mind the words of Angela Merkel that postulated the end of absolute reliability of the US (see introduction), Germany can be regarded as a balancer, that is pursuing autonomy as hedging.

For the Czech Republic, the focal point is the development of capabilities that should strengthen the European pillar of NATO. It does not have a “grand strategy” in security and defence policy since there is no substantial strategic debate in Prague. As already explored in the case study, Czech foreign policy has undergone a change by shifting from exclusive dependence on the US in favor of a (partial) transfer towards the European security and defence policy. Thus, it is argued that the Czech Republic has turned from an obvious bandwagoner to a bandwagoner with balancing tendencies, as it would be exaggerated to assess this policy shift as a paradigm change. When comparing the concepts of strategic autonomy, Czech Republic fits best into autonomy as responsibility.

The comparative analysis has shown that the idea of a European army is not subject of serious debates at all since the term is often associated with integration and federalism, from which especially is perceived as problematic. The question of whether Brexit is an obstacle or opportunity to further promote ESA has not been answered unequivocally. Depending on what factors the experts are stressing two kinds of replies have been given. From the capability perspective it is an obstacle, from the political point view of it is an opportunity. Where the experts do agree is that the biggest challenge for ESA is the political layer.

6. Conclusion:

The geopolitical landscape has become significantly more tensed in the last 15 years. With Russia's Crimea annexation, Trump's unpredictability, and China's empowerment the security architecture with its rules-based international order has increasingly been questioned. The civil wars in Syria and Libya have exposed Europe's incapability to properly address crisis management issues and revealed strong US dependency. The EU Global Strategy (EUGS) tries to take account of this new security environment and acknowledges that soft power is not enough to master prospective challenges. With the publication of the EUGS, European Strategic Autonomy became a popular buzzword in the domain of the EU's Common Security and Defence Policy. Yet, the notion has remained ill-defined and thus has been interpreted in different ways. The rationale behind this thesis was the perceived discrepancy in the use of the term even by those who are inherently welcoming ESA.

The foundations for the development of a European strategic autonomy were laid in the St. Malo when UK and France agreed upon building a capacity for autonomous action, backed up by credible military forces in order to respond to international crises. ESA can be divided into operational, industrial, and political autonomy. Operational autonomy describes the capability to conduct military or civilian operations, industrial autonomy is about the building of capabilities required to attain operational autonomy. Political autonomy enables to formulate policy decisions and to act upon them. ESA should be understood as a continuum that describes a matter of degree. All three dimensions are inextricably linked to each other and thus should not be assessed in isolation.

In the wake of the EUGS, several initiatives such as PESCO, EDF, CARD, and EI2 have been created to bring EU capabilities to an appropriate level of ambition (LoA). The LoA has an operational/capability and a political sphere. In the military dimension, the Petersberg tasks serve as a useful benchmark to what the EU should achieve. The results are rather sobering. Comparing the existing PESCO projects with the current industrial and military capabilities, the EU is far away from fulfilling the Petersberg tasks. This applies also to the political level where qualified majority voting (QMV) and a European Security Council (ESC) have been envisaged as possible alternatives to replace the highly ineffective unanimity principle which

hampers decision-making in the CFSP. Unfortunately, the discussions are immature and take place only on a think-tank level so far.

In the practical part of this thesis, three case studies were conducted to examine the different interpretations and perceptions of ESA. France, Germany, and the Czech Republic were selected since all three countries do welcome the idea of ESA but have diverging interests and motivations. For France, ESA is a continuation of its national strategic concept. It does not question NATO but aims at emancipating from the US security umbrella and thus, balances against US abandonment in Europe. Germany stresses the inclusive institutional approach since CFSP is regarded as a European integration project. Even though NATO is the undisputed security guarantor, Germany has invested a lot of political capital to advance European efforts. Since the Trump administration is in power, Germany pursues a hedging strategy. The Czech Republic lacks in having a substantial security strategy. Russia is not perceived as a direct threat and domestic policy is dominating the political agenda. The Czech Strategy consists of welcoming the initiatives from Germany and France as long as it is not contrary to fundamental interests. It remains to stay a bandwagoner with hedging tendencies, which thinks of ESA as an enabler of European capabilities that will strengthen the relationship to NATO through burden-sharing.

To conclude, the perceptions differ widely, which proves the ambiguity of ESA even among policy experts. Thus, on the political level, the debate on ESA must be narrowed down or changed in the following areas:

1. strategic dimension:

The debate is basically about threats from the south (failed states, terrorism) and threats from the east (Russia). For the “South”, the priority lies in managing chaos and instability and preventing it from spreading whereas the East puts emphasis on “preserving the European security order”. A comprehensive European security strategy must include both and reconcile the positions.

2. **capability dimension:**

It grapples with the question of what tools should be used and what is acceptable burden-sharing. A nuclear deterrent and a European Army seem to be inconceivable at least in the medium-term. Yet, Europe must determine the extent to which the Petersberg tasks reflect the level of ambition. This applies especially to the question if Europe wants to go beyond peace-keeping missions and acquire peace-making capabilities.

3. **institutional dimension:**

It deals with the topic of how to organize defence. When talking about “European defence” the French hear the word “Defence” and the Germans hear the word “Europe”.²³⁷ The author of this paper agrees with Major's assessment that in order to move forward on the topic, it is necessary to disconnect and “liberate” ESA from institutional thinking because it curbs the debate. Before determining the institutional design, the level of ambition should be defined, not the other way around.

If these challenges can be tackled, ESA will reach a level of ambition Europe has set up for itself. Yet, the comparative analysis has illustrated that even among countries with an inherent positive attitude towards ESA, the perceptions are very diverging. Given the fact that the unanimity principle is in place and considering the countries that have an opposing view of ESA, it seems unlikely that these challenges will be resolved in the foreseeable future.

²³⁷ Major interview

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List of Appendices:

Table 1: Types of operations relevant for EU's level of ambition

Table 2: Concurrency suite one: capabilities and shortfalls

Table 3: Concurrency suite two: capabilities and shortfalls

Appendix

Table 1: Types of operations relevant for EU’s level of ambition

	Rescue and evacuation	Support to humanitarian assistance	Conflict prevention	Stabilisation and support to capacity-building	Peace enforcement
Possible CSDP military operations	Civilian and military rapid response, including military rapid-response operations <i>inter alia</i> using the EU		Preventive engagement	Civilian capacity-building	Joint crisis-management operations
	Battlegroups as a whole or within a mission-tailored force package		Preventive deployment	Security-sector reform	Tasks of combat forces in crisis management
			Joint disarmament operations	Peacekeeping	Peacemaking
			Embargo operations	Election-monitoring	Secure lines of communication
			Counter-proliferation	Institution-building	
				Support third countries in fight against terrorism	
	Non-combatant evacuation operation	Atrocity prevention Consequence management	Joint stabilisation operations, including air and special operations		
			Aerial security operations, including close air support and air surveillance		
			Maritime security or surveillance operations; longer term in the European region		
Type	Smaller Joint Operation	Smaller Joint Operation	Smaller Joint Operation	Smaller Joint Operation	Major Joint Operation

Source: Protecting Europe: meeting the EU’s military level of ambition in the context of Brexit; International Institute for Strategic Studies

Table 2: Concurrency suite one: capabilities and shortfalls

		CAPABILITY ASSESSMENT EU 28 FOR CONCURRENCY SUITE ONE			EU 27
		Shortfall	Adequate	More available	Additional shortfalls if UK not included
Domain	Land	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Information operations ■ Civil-military cooperation (CIMIC) ■ Explosive ordnance disposal (EOD) ■ Military police ■ Medical ■ Intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance (ISR) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Amphibious ■ Airborne ■ Special-operations Forces ■ Signals ■ Mechanised ■ Logistics ■ Engineer ■ Reconnaissance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Air defence ■ Artillery ■ Armoured 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Signals ■ Mechanised ■ Amphibious ■ Special-operations forces
	Air	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Combat ISR (CISR) uninhabited aerial vehicle (UAV) ■ ISR aircraft ■ Heavy transport aircraft ■ Electronic-warfare aircraft ■ Tanker aircraft 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Medium transport aircraft ■ Heavy transport helicopter ■ Attack helicopter ■ Fighter ground-attack aircraft 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Medium transport helicopter ■ ISR UAV 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ None
	Naval	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Aircraft carriers ■ Principal amphibious ships 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Surface combatants ■ Nuclear submarines 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Mine countermeasures ■ Replenishment vessels 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Nuclear submarines

Source: Protecting Europe: meeting the EU’s military level of ambition in the context of Brexit; International Institute for Strategic Studies

Table 3: Concurrency suite two: capabilities and shortfalls

		CAPABILITY ASSESSMENT EU 28 FOR CONCURRENCY SUITE TWO			EU 27
		Shortfall	Adequate	More available	Additional shortfalls if UK not included
Domain	Land	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Information Operations ■ Civil–military cooperation (CIMIC) ■ Explosive ordnance disposal (EOD) ■ Military Police ■ Medical ■ Intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance (ISR) ■ Amphibious ■ Special-operations forces 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Airborne ■ Air defence 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Signals ■ Mechanised ■ Logistics ■ Engineer 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ None
	Air	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Electronic-intelligence aircraft ■ Tanker aircraft ■ Maritime patrol aircraft ■ Combat ISR (CISR) uninhabited aerial vehicle (UAV) ■ ISR aircraft ■ Signals intelligence aircraft 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Anti-surface warfare/ anti-submarine warfare helicopter ■ Medium transport aircraft ■ Fighter ground-attack aircraft 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Light transport aircraft ■ Medium transport helicopter ■ ISR UAV ■ Attack helicopter 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ None
	Naval	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Aircraft carriers ■ Mine countermeasures ■ Principal amphibious ships ■ Surface combatants ■ Nuclear submarines ■ Replenishment vessels ■ Conventional submarines 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ None 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ None 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ None

Source: Protecting Europe: meeting the EU’s military level of ambition in the context of Brexit; International Institute for Strategic Studies