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**The EU as a Global Actor: French Outermost Regions as
Geopolitical Assets**

Master's Thesis

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Study programme: Master in Area Studies

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Year of the defense: 2024

Declaration

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In Prague on
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Abstract

This thesis investigates the changing geopolitical role of the French outermost regions (ORs) within the European Union (EU). These regions, located in the Caribbean, the Indian Ocean, and South America, have increasingly been recognized for their strategic importance as they contribute to international trade routes, regional cooperation, space exploration, and maritime security. This thesis answers the research question: “How has the EU approached the French outermost regions geopolitically?” To address this, the study explores two subquestions: ‘How has the EU's discourse on its ORs evolved over time?’ and ‘What specific policies and actions have been implemented in the French ORs that reflect its geopolitical strategy?’. Using a qualitative approach, this research analyzes the evolution of EU discourse through official documents, speeches, and policy papers, and conducts case studies focusing on the ORs in their geographic region. The findings indicate a notable shift in the discourse, as these regions are now seen as geopolitical assets rather than peripheral locations. French Guiana, with its European Spaceport, plays a critical role in space exploration, while the Indian Ocean ORs are integral components to maritime security in the Indo-Pacific region. The Caribbean ORs, though less specialized, contribute to regional trade, economic integration, and disaster response in their neighbourhood. The study finds that although the EU has made progress in matching its rhetoric with its actions, there are still constraints caused by the insularity, peripherality of the regions, the EU's restricted competences in certain policy areas and the varying geopolitical importance of each region poses to the EU. Further research could explore the geopolitical importance of non-French ORs for a more comprehensive understanding of the EU's strategic use of its ORs in broader geopolitical contexts.

Abstrakt

Tato práce zkoumá měnící se geopolitickou roli francouzských nejvzdálenějších regionů (OR) v rámci Evropské unie (EU). Tyto regiony, které se nacházejí v Karibiku, Indickém oceánu a Jižní Americe, jsou stále více uznávány pro svůj strategický význam, přispívají k mezinárodním obchodním trasám, regionální spolupráci, průzkumu vesmíru a námořní bezpečnosti. Tato práce odpovídá na výzkumnou otázku: „Jak se EU geopoliticky postavila k francouzským nejvzdálenějším regionům?“ Za tímto účelem studie zkoumá dvě dílčí otázky: „Jak se v průběhu času vyvíjel diskurz EU o jejích nejvzdálenějších regionech?“ a „Jaké konkrétní politiky a akce byly ve francouzských nejvzdálenějších regionech zavedeny, které odrážejí její geopolitickou strategii?“. Tento výzkum pomocí kvalitativního přístupu analyzuje vývoj diskurzu EU prostřednictvím oficiálních dokumentů, projevů a politických dokumentů a provádí případové studie zaměřené na nejvzdálenější regiony v jejich geografickém regionu. Zjištění naznačují pozoruhodný posun v diskurzu, protože tyto regiony jsou nyní považovány spíše za geopolitická aktiva než za periferní lokality. Francouzská Guyana se svým evropským kosmodromem hraje zásadní roli při průzkumu vesmíru, zatímco nejvzdálenější regiony Indického oceánu jsou nedílnou součástí námořní bezpečnosti. I když jsou karibské nejvzdálenější regiony méně specializované, přispívají k regionálnímu obchodu, hospodářské integraci a reakci na katastrofy. Studie zjišťuje, že ačkoli EU dosáhla pokroku v sladění své rétoriky se svými činy, stále existují omezení způsobená ostrovní povahou regionů, omezenými pravomocemi EU v určitých oblastech politiky a rozdílným geopolitickým významem každého regionu. Další výzkum by mohl prozkoumat geopolitické role nefrancouzských nejvzdálenějších regionů pro komplexnější pochopení strategického využívání nejvzdálenějších regionů EU v širších geopolitických kontextech.

Keywords

European Union, outermost regions, geopolitics, maritime security, space exploration, trade, regional integration.

Klíčová slova

Evropská unie, nejvzdálenější regiony, geopolitika, námořní bezpečnost, průzkum vesmíru, obchod, regionální integrace.

Název práce

Evropská unie jako globální aktér: Francouzské nejvzdálenější regiony jako geopolitická hodnota

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Introduction

The French Outermost Regions (ORs) of the European Union (EU) are critical elements in the EU's geopolitical agenda due to their unique combination of cultural diversity, strategic locations, and abundant resources, and regional integration. These territories, spread throughout the Caribbean, the Indian Ocean, and South America, provide the EU with access to a variety of global regions, therefore expanding its influence beyond continental Europe. The ORs, which were previously perceived as peripheral regions with minimal significance, have progressively been acknowledged for their strategic value by the EU. They serve as crucial points in international trade routes, space exploration, and maritime security. With the EU's global strategy evolving, this reflects a more comprehensive understanding of how these regions can enhance their geopolitical position and be considered as geopolitical assets.

By integrating the ORs into its geopolitical framework, the EU may better address contemporary global concerns including preserving safe maritime routes, enhancing trade networks, and advancing its space exploration objectives. The ORs play a crucial role in the EU's endeavors to strengthen its worldwide presence and impact. The objective of this thesis is to investigate the dynamics of this change, illuminating the critical events and tactical choices that have transformed the French ORs from isolated areas to essential components of the EU's geopolitical framework. The goal of this research is to offer a comprehensive overview of whether the evolution of the rhetoric of ORs as 'strategic assets' matches the policies implemented by the EU that affect the Union's position in the world. The study focuses on two subquestions. First, 'How has the EU's discourse on its outermost regions (ORs) evolved over time?'. Second, 'What specific policies and actions

have been implemented in the French ORs that reflect its geopolitical strategy?'. A qualitative approach is used for this research, analyzing documents, speeches, strategies and case studies of French ORs of three varying regions, the Indian Ocean, the Caribbean and South America. The initial results suggest a notable change in the EU's strategy, acknowledging the ORs as crucial geopolitical assets. Originally seen as peripheral regions, they are today recognized as important parts of the EU's maritime security, space exploration, and regional cooperation initiatives. The objective of this research is to conduct an analysis of these developments, emphasizing the pivotal events and strategic decisions that have turned the French ORs into significant elements of the EU's geopolitical agenda.

1. Literature review

1.1. Geopolitics

Geopolitics is a multidimensional field of study in international relations that explores the complex relationship between geography and political influence at a global level. The phrase is derived from the Greek terms 'geo' (meaning earth) and 'politikos' (meaning related to the state).¹ Literature on geopolitics has been abundant for the last century. Numerous books and articles have been written about the subject of geopolitics, ranging from Halford Mackinder's "The Geographical Pivot of History" to Henry Kissinger's "World Order." The general idea of geopolitics is characterized as the study of "the influence of geographical factors on political action".² At first, geopolitics centered around the concept of geographical determinism, as shown by Mackinder's Heartland

¹ Colin Flint, Introduction to Geopolitics, ResearchGate (Routledge, 2006), https://www.researchgate.net/publication/353134656_Introduction_to_Geopolitic, chapter 2.

² Jean Gottmann, "The Background of Geopolitics," *Military Affairs* 6, no. 4 (1942): 197–206, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1982381>.

theory and Mahan's maritime strategy. The principles were further expanded by Nicholas Spykman's Rimland theory and Karl Haushofer's theories.³ Contemporary geopolitics has shifted towards a more nuanced understanding, incorporating critical geopolitics, the construction and application of geopolitical knowledge.⁴

Nevertheless, geopolitics has broadened its scope beyond purely physical features. In contemporary international relations studies, geopolitics can be defined more elaborately as the study of national foreign policies in light of the power dynamics at play and the allocation of military and financial resources around the world.⁵ Thus, today's geopolitics includes the influence of economic resources, technical breakthroughs, and environmental considerations on power dynamics and foreign policy decisions, in addition to physical and human geography.⁶ This broadened scope also recognizes the impact of non-state players, such as multinational companies and international organizations, on the global landscape.⁷ Consequently, we can conclude that geopolitics is the study of how geography (both physical and human), power dynamics, and allocation of resources (including economic, technological, and environmental resources) shape foreign policy and the global order.

Geopolitical decisions are influenced by a complex interaction of various factors. Geographical factors such as the country's size, geographical position, resources, and climate all influence its potential capacity and security. Politically, internal stability,

³ Nicholas Spykman, "Heartland and Rimland," essay, in *The Structure of Political Geography*, n.d. Hans W. Weigert and Karl Haushofer, "Haushofer and the Pacific," *Foreign Affairs* 20, no. 4 (1942): 732, <https://doi.org/10.2307/20029189>.

⁴ Gearóid Tuathail, "Understanding Critical Geopolitics: Geopolitics and Risk Society," *Journal of Strategic Studies* 22, no. 2–3 (June 1999): 107–24, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01402399908437756>.

⁵ Nicole Koenig, "The 'geopolitical' European Commission and Its Pitfalls," Institute for Human Sciences, December 2, 2019, <https://www.iwm.at/blog/the-geopolitical-european-commission-and-its-pitfalls>.

⁶ Gearóid Tuathail, *Critical Geopolitics*, Taylor&Francis, 1st ed. (Milton: Taylor & Francis, 1997), <https://www.taylorfrancis.com/books/mono/10.4324/97810203973059/critical-geopolitics-gear%C3%B3id-tuathail>.

⁷ Colin Flint, *Introduction to Geopolitics*, Taylor&Francis (Routledge, 2006), <https://www.taylorfrancis.com/books/mono/10.4324/9781003138549/introduction-geopolitics-colin-flint>, chapter 2.

government type, and alliances with other countries determine a nation's reliability and influence. Thus, when governments make geopolitical decisions, they consider the strategic location for trade benefits, natural resources for wealth and power, military capabilities for defense and international influence, economic well-being for global impact, domestic stability for effective policy-making, and alliances for a stronger position in global affairs. These would be the primary factors for a state to consider when making foreign policy decisions.⁸ This makes the case that, rather than implying that geography alone determines politics and policy, it must also take into account material, structural, and conceptual aspects as factors that explain geopolitical decisions.⁹

In today's global order, many foreign policy areas can be considered to be crucial to be a geopolitical actor. Trade has a crucial role in geopolitics since it stimulates economic expansion, molds international connections, and impacts global power dynamics.¹⁰ Having authority over trade routes, especially strategic marine chokepoints, is required for the easy movement of goods and resources. Trade agreements and economic partnerships have the potential to enhance alliances and promote collaboration among nations, whereas trade disputes and tariffs sometimes result in strained relations and hostilities. Geopolitical plans heavily rely on access to markets and resources, including basic goods and energy. Moreover, the interconnectedness of global supply networks and the mutual reliance of economies render trade an indispensable element of both national security and economic

⁸ Colin Flint, *Introduction to Geopolitics*, Taylor&Francis (Routledge, 2006).

⁹ Basil Germond, "The Geopolitical Dimension of Maritime Security," *Marine Policy* 54 (April 2015): 137–42, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.marpol.2014.12.013>.

¹⁰ Zaki Laidi, "How Trade Became Geopolitics," *World Policy Journal* 25, no. 2 (Summer 2008): 55–61, https://www.jstor.org/stable/40210181?casa_token=SIp3DaxdLP4AAAAA:V2YzexnIJ0Ngsx2HfB9ehq2JHdscQu_8w44h6qFygEsXS3ysX1Ogd8ZyGpLWwQ96ejjnOkPZfoCIm80Uk_kGsDO1HGrynRhFFF5BwkTRGMvWsWMKWfJ.

stability. Economic sanctions and trade restrictions are effective strategies employed in geopolitical maneuvering to apply pressure and accomplish foreign policy goals.¹¹

Maritime capacity is another important aspect of a geopolitical actor. In his work ‘The Influence of Sea Power upon History’, Alfred Mahan highlighted the strategic significance of maritime power and access to sea route.¹² Maritime capacity is a crucial aspect of geopolitics because the oceans are vital for global trade, military strategy, and resource extraction. Strategic control of sea lanes, particularly chokepoints, is essential for ensuring the free movement of commercial and military vessels, while territorial claims and disputes over Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZs) and territorial waters often lead to conflicts. Maritime security, thus, possesses a geopolitical aspect.¹³ In ‘Introduction to Geopolitics’, Clint stated that “economic power requires a large merchant fleet to facilitate trade. Economic power provides the public funds needed to build a military naval capacity”.¹⁴ This underscores the interdependence among the different policies.

A less obvious yet important aspect of a geopolitical actor is space and space exploration. Indeed, “space has always been a place for geopolitical competition”.¹⁵ Space exploration is intricately linked to geopolitics due to its strategic, economic, and technological implications. States frequently fund space programs with the intention of attaining strategic and military advantages, given that space technologies frequently cater to both civilian and military objectives. Satellites are essential for communication,

¹¹ Colin Flint, *Introduction to Geopolitics*, Taylor&Francis (Routledge, 2006), <https://www.taylorfrancis.com/books/mono/10.4324/9781003138549/introduction-geopolitics-colin-flint>, chapter 7.

¹² Alfred Thayer Mahan, "The Influence of Sea Power upon History, 1660-1783" (Little, Brown and Company, 1890).

¹³ Basil Germond, "The Geopolitical Dimension of Maritime Security," *Marine Policy* 54 (April 2015): 137–42, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.marpol.2014.12.013>.

¹⁴ Colin Flint, *Introduction to Geopolitics*, Taylor&Francis (Routledge, 2006), <https://www.taylorfrancis.com/books/mono/10.4324/9781003138549/introduction-geopolitics-colin-flint>, 51.

¹⁵ Victoria Samson, "The Geopolitics of a New Modern Space Race," Institut Montaigne, August 12, 2021, <https://www.institutmontaigne.org/en/expressions/geopolitics-new-modern-space-race>.

navigation, and obtaining intelligence. However, the proliferation of weaponry in space, such as anti-satellite systems, may trigger a space arms race and geopolitical conflict. In addition to advancing technological advancement, space exploration holds great economic potential for space mining and satellite-based services. Moreover, the integration of space exploration and global power dynamics is underscored by the geopolitical significance of securing favorable geographical sites for space missions, as evidenced by the growth of spaceports and launch facilities.¹⁶

In this research, geopolitics relates to the strategic use of geographical advantages and resources by states to exert influence over global affairs, safeguard their interests, and bolster their authority. It involves factors like trade routes, military deployments, alliances, and territorial claims, all influenced by a country's location, natural resources, and physical terrain. For states, geopolitics means navigating the complexities of international relations to maintain security, control critical areas like maritime chokepoints, and access essential resources. Additionally, it involves utilizing technological progress in space and cyberspace to attain strategic benefits. Geopolitics is primarily concerned with how countries strategically navigate the international stage, carefully managing both collaboration and rivalry in order to accomplish their national goals and address global issues.

1.2. The emergence of EU in geopolitics

The EU is a unique organization in the context of global governance. It is more than just an international organization, but it is not a full-fledged state. Despite facing frequent crises, the EU continues to grow, strengthen, and integrate further. With the increase in

¹⁶ Gabriel Elefteriu, "The Role of Space Power in Geopolitical Competition," Council on Geostrategy, January 30, 2024, <https://www.geostrategy.org.uk/research/the-role-of-space-power-in-geopolitical-competition/>.
Isabelle Sourbès-Verger, "Espace et Géopolitique," *L'Information Géographique* Vol. 74, no. 2 (July 15, 2010): 10–35, <https://doi.org/10.3917/lig.742.0010>.

geopolitical interdependence in the last few decades, the EU has had to adapt its own ambitions and strategies to keep up with the geopolitical order. In the last years, the EU has been pursuing its ambitions of becoming a global actor with its geopolitical strategies and countless foreign policies outside of its borders.¹⁷ The term ‘geopolitics’ used by politicians in the EU often refers “to an approach to foreign policy focused on the distribution of military and economic power and the resulting power dynamics”.¹⁸ Initially, the EU was established in an attempt to avoid conflict within its borders after the World Wars, which can be considered a success so far. Integration aims at building a certain level of interdependence with shared sovereignty and institutions, but, according to Stefan Lehne, in a world where the hopes for a liberal world order have died, the EU seeks to find its place between dominant powers such as the United States or China, marking the beginning of a geopolitical Europe.¹⁹

1.3. Limitations of the EU as a geopolitical actor

An important factor to keep in mind when discussing the EU as a geopolitical actor is that the EU can be limited in its ability to act as a global actor. Indeed, unanimity between member states is required for EU foreign policy decisions. In order to act more efficiently, Luigi Scazzieri, argues that there is a need to remove the vote by unanimity between member states when it comes to EU foreign policy decisions. Even though member states have to come to a unanimous decisions, larger member states often lead the way in this regard. Researcher Charles Grant, states that Germany and France, “will

¹⁷ Thomas Christiansen, “The European Union and Global Governance,” essay, in *Global Governance from Regional Perspectives: A Critical View*, 208–32, accessed May 18, 2024, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/317176015_The_European_Union_and_Global_Governance, 209.

¹⁸ Stefan Lehne, “How the EU Can Survive in a Geopolitical Age,” *Carnegie Europe*, February 2020, https://carnegieendowment.org/files/2-24_Lehne-EU_Geopolitics.pdf.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

continue to lead Europe, with France having the edge over the next few years”.²⁰ The EU uses soft power to exert normative influence in geopolitics, advocating for democracy, human rights, and the rule of law. Its economic and cultural influence motivates collaboration and acceptance of its standards.²¹ Despite facing challenges in wielding economic sanctions due to member state disagreements, the EU exerts elements of hard power through trade policies and contributing to international security through civilian missions and peacekeeping operations. The future of the EU's hard power depends on member states' willingness to overcome national differences and develop a more unified military structure.²²

Scholars hold varied and sometimes conflicting opinions on the current impact and future progression of the EU as a geopolitical actor. Proponents argue that the EU already makes substantial contributions to many global advancements and predict that it will emerge as a new global superpower. In contrast, the pessimistic viewpoint holds that EU foreign policy is ineffectual, and asserts that the EU's influence in global affairs is waning as new centers of power emerge.²³

²⁰ Charles Grant, “The New Geopolitics” (Centre for European Reform, February 2021), https://www.cer.eu/sites/default/files/2020_annual_report.pdf.

²¹ Patryk Kugiel, “End of European Soft Power? Implications for EU Foreign Policy,” *The Polish Quarterly of International Affairs*, no. 1/2017 (2017): 59–72, www.ceeol.com/search/article-detail?id=561140.

²² Erkki Tuomioja, “The Role of Soft Power in EU Common Foreign Policy,” *Cultural Diplomacy*, July 30, 2009, https://www.culturaldiplomacy.org/academy/content/articles/speakers/detailed/erkki-tuomioja/erkki-tuomioja_-_the-role-of-soft-power-in-eu-common-foreign-policy.pdf.

²³ Stefan Lehne, How the EU can survive in a geopolitical age - Carnegie Europe, February 25, 2020, <https://carnegieendowment.org/research/2020/02/how-the-eu-can-survive-in-a-geopolitical-age?lang=en¢er=europe>.

Vladisava Gubalova, “Geopolitical Europe: Are We There Yet?,” *GLOBSEC*, May 19, 2022, <https://www.globsec.org/what-we-do/press-releases/geopolitical-europe-are-we-there-yet>.

1.4. EU geopolitics

Literature on the subject is not lacking. Zaki Laidi's book, 'EU Foreign Policy in a Globalized World', and his various articles discuss the emergence of a so-called geopolitical Europe which he characterizes as "a vision of the world—a view that breaks with the classically interdependent and liberal vision of the world on which the EU based its policies."²⁴ Nonetheless, he states that geopolitical Europe is not a theory, but rather a set of assumptions that have had a significant impact on how the EU thinks and behaves.²⁵ Another prominent piece of literature on EU geopolitics includes Dumont's and Verluise's 'The Geopolitics of Europe. From the Atlantic to the Urals' which offers a view of the geopolitical parameters of Europe as well as presents nine potential geopolitical scenarios that reflect the challenges Europe may encounter in the future.²⁶

In 2016, the EU articulated a comprehensive Global Strategy aimed at enhancing its geopolitical influence and ensuring its security in which the EU has identified four key goals: the security of the Union, state and societal resilience to the east and south, integrated approach to conflict and crisis, cooperative regional orders, and global governance for the 21st century.²⁷ In terms of security, the EU's plan emphasizes the significance of executing and putting into action its maritime, space, and cyber security strategies. This involves promoting increased collaboration, synchronization, and exchange

²⁴ Zaki Laidi, "The Meaning of Geopolitical Europe: A Response to Hans Kundnani," *Internationale Politik Quarterly*, January 16, 2023,

<https://ip-quarterly.com/en/meaning-geopolitical-europe-response-hans-kundnani>.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Gérard-François Dumont and Pierre Verluise, *The Geopolitics of Europe: From the Atlantic to the Urals* (DiploWeb, 2017),

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/316715465_The_Geopolitics_of_Europe_From_the_Atlantic_to_the_Urals.

²⁷ "Shared Vision, Common Action: A Stronger Europe A Global Strategy for the European Union's Foreign And Security Policy," EEAS - European External Action Service, June 2016, https://www.eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/eugs_review_web_0.pdf.

of information among the naval forces of member states, emphasizing the importance of a comprehensive approach to security in different areas. The EU's strategy also places significant emphasis on space and maritime security. It aims to enhance the autonomy and security of space-based services and establish principles for responsible space behavior, potentially leading to an international voluntary code of conduct.²⁸ The aims and initiatives outlined above demonstrate the EU's dedication to a proactive and unified security framework, which effectively tackles both internal and foreign issues in a comprehensive manner.

In a 2020 EEAS communication, Josep Borrell stated that “to avoid being the losers in today’s US-China competition, we must relearn the language of power and conceive of Europe as a top-tier geopolitical actor” by “capitalizing on Europe’s trade and investment policy, financial power, diplomatic presence, rule-making capacities, and growing security and defense instruments, we have plenty of levers of influence”.²⁹ He goes on to explain that the issue in Europe is not a deficiency in power. The issue lies in the absence of political determination to consolidate its powers in order to assure their consistency and optimize their influence.³⁰

From this research’s perspective, the concept of a "geopolitical EU" signifies a deliberate shift in the EU's approach to global affairs, emphasizing its strategic evolution. This movement goes beyond the traditional focus on liberal norms and values, embracing a more pragmatic approach. Even though the EU is still heavily involved in foreign affairs, it

²⁸ “Shared Vision, Common Action: A Stronger Europe A Global Strategy for the European Union’s Foreign And Security Policy,” EEAS - European External Action Service, June 2016.

²⁹ “Embracing Europe’s Power,” EEAS, February 20, 2020, https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/embracing-europe%E2%80%99s-power_und_en.

³⁰ “Embracing Europe’s Power,” EEAS, February 20, 2020, https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/embracing-europe%E2%80%99s-power_und_en.

now prioritizes achieving strategic autonomy and uses a larger range of instruments to protect its interests. The ability of the EU to function independently in several policy domains, including military, economic, scientific, and political ones, without excessive dependence on external actors is known as strategic autonomy. This aims to ensure that in a global order that is becoming more complex, the EU can defend its interests and values.

In terms of security and defense, the EU is enhancing its capabilities to ensure peace and stability with initiatives like PESCO and the European Defense Fund (EDF) aim to deepen defense collaboration and develop joint military capabilities.³¹ Economically, the EU leverages its substantial influence to set international benchmarks, advocate for equitable trade practices, and facilitate sustainable growth. It uses its single market, trade agreements, and regulatory standards to extend its economic autonomy and dominance globally. Technological autonomy is another critical focus, with the EU investing in digital infrastructure and innovation to reduce dependence on the non-European technology giants.³² In addition, the EU adopts a proactive approach in tackling global concerns, showcasing its dedication to taking the lead on important matter outside its borders. It aims to promote stability, economic growth, and democratic government in neighboring but also farther regions.³³

Importantly, the EU remains committed to its core principles. Its commitment to human rights, democracy, and multilateralism informs its interactions with international organizations and forms its initiatives to promote stability and collaboration internationally.

³¹ Edouard Simon and Alessandro Marrone, “LINKING PESCO AND EDF: Institutional Mechanisms and Political Choices,” French Institute for International and Strategic Affairs, April 2021, <https://www.iris-france.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/66-Report-PESCO-EDF-April-2021.pdf>.

³² “Global Trends - A More Contested World,” Office of the Director of National Intelligence, March 2021, https://www.dni.gov/files/ODNI/documents/assessments/GlobalTrends_2040.pdf.

³³ “Shared Vision, Common Action: A Stronger Europe A Global Strategy for the European Union’s Foreign And Security Policy,” EEAS - European External Action Service, June 2016.

The EU's involvement in global institutions reflects its commitment to promoting these values and fostering international cooperation.³⁴ The EU's geographic position, territorial makeup, and political dynamics deeply influence its geopolitical strategies and aspirations. By examining EU documents, literature, and language, we can identify crucial elements and goals of a 'geopolitical EU'.

Discourse on geopolitics within the EU has been increasing as well. Nonetheless, Stefan Lehne explains that many Europeans find this new discourse and vocabulary of power, strategy, and geopolitics disconcerting since it contradicts the EU's long-standing belief about its role in the world.³⁵ With the war in Ukraine at the EU's immediate borders and the growing global influence of the United States and China, the EU has attempted to develop into a global actor in order to spread its influence and democratic values as well as build economic partnerships across the globe. During Jean-Claude Juncker's EU Commission presidency, the former president stated that he would like to lead a 'political commission' in the EU. This concept, has now shifted to a 'geopolitical commission' under EU Commission president Ursula von der Leyen. In November 2019, Von der Leyen pledged that the EU would advance multilateralism, establish global norms, attain technological sovereignty, support multilateralism, and gain greater autonomy in defense affairs in her speech on claiming the newly appointed Commission would be a "geopolitical one".³⁶ The term "geopolitical commission" describes a better coordination of the Commission's exterior activities. In his article "A 'Geopolitical Commission':

³⁴ "Shared Vision, Common Action: A Stronger Europe A Global Strategy for the European Union's Foreign And Security Policy," EEAS - European External Action Service, June 2016.

³⁵ Stefan Lehne, "How the EU Can Survive in a Geopolitical Age," Carnegie Europe, February 2020, https://carnegieendowment.org/files/2-24_Lehne-EU_Geopolitics.pdf.

³⁶ Romana Vlahutin and Romana Vlahutin, "Europe's Geostrategic Awakening," Internationale Politik Quarterly, January 10, 2024, <https://ip-quarterly.com/en/europes-geostrategic-awakening>.

Supranationalism Meets Global Power Competition”, Pierre Haroche seeks to pinpoint the origins and analyze the operationalisation of the concept of a ‘geopolitical Commission’. Haroche draws the conclusion that endogenous factors, such as the Commission's competition with the European External Action Service and the functional connection between its economic powers and international security issues, and exogenous factors, such as global power competition and geoeconomic strategies, are what lead to the geopolitical Commission.³⁷

1.5. Literature on EU ORs

1.5.1. Literature on ORs in a geopolitical context

EU geopolitics is often concerned with the EU acting in its neighborhood, with a wide variety of scholarly articles mentioning the EU’s geopoliticization when discussing its strategies in countering Russia, in the Eastern Neighbourhood, or its strategies in the Southern neighborhood.³⁸ However, rare is the literature that acknowledges the other borders of the EU, the ultra peripheral borders that are the ORs.³⁹ Literature on the Overseas Territories (OCTs) of the EU, including the ORs, has increased over time, though not dramatically.⁴⁰ Numerous authors and academics have examined their history, traits, particularities, and difficulties. A majority of the literature on the topic acknowledges that,

³⁷ Pierre Haroche, “A ‘Geopolitical Commission’: Supranationalism Meets Global Power Competition,” *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies* 61, no. 4 (2022): 970–87, <https://doi.org/10.1111/jcms.13440>.

³⁸ Luiza Bialasiewicz, “Interventions in the New Political Geographies of the European ‘Neighborhood,’” *Political Geography* 28, no. 2 (February 2009): 79–89, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.polgeo.2008.12.002>.

James Wesley Scott, “Reflections on EU Geopolitics: Consolidation, Neighbourhood and Civil Society in The Reordering of European Space,” *Geopolitics* 16, no. 1 (January 31, 2011): 146–75, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14650045.2010.493781>.

Cristian Nitoiu and Monika Sus, “Introduction: The Rise of Geopolitics in the EU’s Approach in Its Eastern Neighbourhood,” *Geopolitics* 24, no. 1 (November 19, 2018): 1–19, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14650045.2019.1544396>.

³⁹ Alexis Hieu Trong, Europeans, with Manuela Boatcă, other, *Uncommon Sense Podcast* (Ottawa, Canada, June 16, 2023).

⁴⁰ Diogo Vieira Ferreira, “European Space Policy and the EU’s ‘Outermost Regions,’” *The Loop*, August 29, 2023, <https://theloop.ecpr.eu/european-space-policy-and-the-eus-outermost-regions/>.

despite their insularity, ORs are geopolitical assets of the EU, as they enable the EU to have presence in three oceans (the Pacific, Caribbean, and Indian Oceans). Nevertheless, research on the crucial topic of ORs' strategic role in EU geopoliticization has been limited date.⁴¹ Overall, I have been unable to locate material specifically addressing the EU ORs and their significance in EU geopoliticization.

Nevertheless, the ORs have been researched under different lights. A crucial piece of literature on the matter of OCTs is the book on the EU Law of the Overseas: Outermost Regions, Associated Overseas Countries and Territories, Territories Sui Generis by Dimitry Kochenov which provides a complete legal insight on all the OCTs, which includes the ORs. Chapter 13 of the book, written by Steven Blockmans, includes an interesting insight into the extent of the role and responsibilities of the ORs in the CFSP of the EU. A prominent researcher in postcolonial studies and globalization, World-Systems Analysis, postcolonialism, and decoloniality, Manuela Boatcă has significantly advanced the understanding of the complex dynamics of geopolitical spaces. In the last years, Boatcă has expanded her work to the Overseas territories of the EU, especially the Caribbean. In 2015, in her work “Caribbean Europe: Out of Sight, out of Mind?”, she argues that ORs of the EU are ‘on the map’, but ‘out of charts’ stating that these regions are “forgotten Europe”.⁴²

1.5.2. Lack of literature on EU ORs geopoliticization:

There is a lack of literature on the topic of ORs in general, especially in terms of geopolitics. This is partly rooted in the fact that these are small territories generally considered ultra peripheries to the EU. When translated into English, the French term for

⁴¹ Diogo Vieira Ferreira, “European Space Policy and the EU’s ‘Outermost Regions,’” *The Loop*, August 29, 2023.

⁴² Manuela Boatcă, “Caribbean Europe: Out of Sight, out of Mind?,” *Constructing the Pluriverse: The Geopolitics of Knowledge*, 2018, <https://doi.org/10.1215/9781478002017-011>.

outermost regions becomes 'ultra peripheral region'. While there is no denying that ORs are located far from the EU mainland, they are also regarded as "peripheries" in terms of development. Their isolation, difficulties, and remoteness frequently limit their potential. Furthermore, for a long period of time, the ORs were barely considered by the Commission. In fact, the ORs remained a political and judicial "no man's land" within the European Communities until the late 1970s.⁴³ Their first step into the EU treaties as special territories with particularities was in 1992, in the Treaty of Maastricht. Therefore, although there is general acknowledgement that "ORs occupy a geostrategic position"⁴⁴, the specificities and application of the latter are given little attention and are understudied. This gap hinders a thorough comprehension of how the EU may exploit the strategic potential of ORs.

The presence of the ORs in EU discourse, although increasing, remains insufficient leading to the ORs being considered as 'forgotten Europes'.⁴⁵ Over time, there has been a substantial shift in the discussion around the EU's ORs and their geopolitical significance. Originally considered to be at a distant location and facing economic challenges, the conversation has now changed to acknowledge the significant role these regions play in determining the geopolitical landscape of the EU. Previously excluded, the ORs are today recognized as vital resources that contribute to the Union's worldwide influence. The discussion has developed to highlight the geopolitical importance of these areas in tackling common issues such as climate change, migration, and transnational dangers. Moreover, there is an increasing acknowledgement of the ORs as cultural and diplomatic connectors,

⁴³ André-Louis Sanguin, "Périphéricité et Ultrapériphéricité Insulaires Dans l'union Européenne," *L'Espace Politique*, no. 2 (2007), <https://doi.org/10.4000/espacepolitique.857>.

⁴⁴ Tiago Freitas, "Development of EU's Outermost Regions - Parliamentary Briefing," Academia, 2010, https://www.academia.edu/3825218/Development_of_EUs_Outermost_Regions.

⁴⁵ Manuela Boatcă, "Caribbean Europe: Out of Sight, out of Mind?," *Constructing the Pluriverse: The Geopolitics of Knowledge*, 2018, <https://doi.org/10.1215/9781478002017-011>.

promoting cooperation with neighboring regions. The shift in discourse presents them as essential elements in the EU's wider geopolitical agenda, which is a change from their previous portrayal as peripheral regions to the EU, with little to no geopolitical importance.

2. Methodology

The goal of this dissertation is to answer the research question: “How has the EU approached the French outermost regions geopolitically?” This study focuses on the French ORs located in the Indian Ocean (Mayotte and Réunion), in the Caribbean Sea (Guadeloupe, Martinique, and Saint-Martin), and in South America (French Guiana). The methodology is designed to examine the evolution of EU discourse on ORs as geopolitical assets and to evaluate the EU's geopolitically inclined policies or actions in these ORs. To achieve this, the dissertation will address two subquestions: first, ‘How has the EU's discourse on its ORs evolved over time?’. Second, ‘What specific policies and actions have been implemented in the French ORs that reflect its geopolitical strategy?’. This question will focus on how these policies enhance the EU's geopolitical standing in terms of space strategy, maritime security, and trade routes, as well as how they have evolved over time in response to regional dynamics and international relations. These subquestions will lead the research on how the EU's approach to the French ORs has evolved and what implications that this has for its broader geopolitical strategy.

This research adopts a qualitative approach, looking through the chronological evolution of discourse and case study methodology. The qualitative nature of this study is appropriate given the focus on understanding the complexities and nuances of geopolitical discourse and policy impacts. The research design is divided into two main phases, first, the analysis of the evolution of discourse and, second, case studies. The analysis of the

evolution in discourse examines how the EU's discourse on ORs has shifted through time, focusing on official documents, speeches, and policy papers. The case study phase involves an in-depth analysis of specific policies and actions implemented by the EU in the French ORs, particularly in the Indian Ocean, French Guiana, and the Caribbean. This is important to mention, as the ORs serving as case studies in this research are all French regions, and France having the upper hand on the EU foreign policy agenda could influence the discourse and interests on the ORs within the EU. To provide a comprehensive understanding, the study will begin with an introduction of the ORs, which includes understanding the ORs in an EU context. This involves providing brief background information on the ORs in the EU, from their legal status to the nature of the relationship between the EU and its ORs.

Next, the research will provide an analysis of the evolution in discourse in the context of ORs as geopolitical tools. This section will examine how the EU's discourse on ORs has evolved over time, focusing on official documents and speeches. Comparing the past and ongoing conversation allows to recognize the emerging areas of focus, changing relationships of influence, and developing policy structures within the EU. The evolution of discourse will be presented chronologically to identify significant turning points. The time frame for the evolution in discourse spreads from the early 2000s to the present, capturing significant shifts in policy and geopolitical context. Examining the evolution of discourse on the EU's ORs is crucial for understanding the strategic and policy shifts within the EU. This analysis will look at how geopolitical perspectives on the ORs have changed, highlighting the strategic motivations that encourage the EU's approach. Understanding this evolution is crucial to assessing the EU's consistency and efficiency in translating the rhetoric into tangible actions.

When analyzing the discussion over the EU's ORs, I investigate the evolution of focus and terminology employed by EU and French officials in accordance with changing strategic objectives. Through chronological analysis, I demonstrate the evolution of the EU's perception of the ORs from considering them as solely economically disadvantaged regions to acknowledging their significance as valuable geopolitical assets. This shift signifies a more extensive strategic strategy aimed at leveraging these regions to strengthen the EU as a global actor.

Following the evolution of the discourse, this research proceeds with case studies, in order to analyze specific policy areas and actions implemented by the EU in the French ORs. Depending on the regions, these policy areas include maritime security, space exploration, trade, strategic developments, and memberships in regional organizations. Due to the limitation of the EU's competences across certain policy areas, the case studies also involve policies and coordination from the member state, France. The selection of French ORs for detailed case studies is based on their unique geographical locations and the diverse geopolitical roles they play. In order to evaluate the policies and their geopolitical significance, I carry out case studies on specific policies and initiatives adopted in the French ORs, either by France or the EU. I look at the impact of measures related to maritime security, space exploration, trade, and regional cooperation on the EU's geopolitical position. Through the review of the relevance in EU geopolitical ambitions and an examination of these policies implemented, I look at their significance as geopolitical assets. This approach will enable me to evaluate not only the intended objectives of the policies but also their relevance and their contribution to the EU's geopolitical aspirations.

The chosen regions of the Réunion Island and Mayotte in the Indian Ocean, French Guiana in South America, and Guadeloupe, Saint-Martin and Martinique in the Caribbean

Sea represent different strategic contexts and challenges. Primary resources for the case studies will be collected from relevant policy documents and reports. These documents will be sourced from EU institutions, the French government, and local authorities in the ORs. By examining these documents, the research will identify specific policies and initiatives aimed at enhancing the strategic value of the ORs. Secondary sources such as academic articles, books, and media reports will be used to contextualize the findings and provide additional perspectives. Finally, the findings from the evolution of discourse and case studies will be summarized to draw general conclusions about the role of French ORs in the EU's geopolitical strategy. This synthesis will integrate insights from the evolution in discourse and case studies, providing a comprehensive understanding of how the EU perceives and utilizes its ORs as geopolitical assets. The conclusions will also discuss the potential for further research on other ORs in this aspect.

In this dissertation, the relationship between doing case studies and analyzing the shift in discourse is crucial to comprehending the EU's geopolitical strategy regarding the French ORs. The discourse evolution analysis focuses on the changes in the EU's perception of these ORs over time, as seen in speeches, policy papers, and official documents. This evolution in discourse demonstrates how to better understand the EU's geopolitical objectives by examining its strategic shifts and priorities. On the other hand, the case studies explore the specific policies and measures such as trade, strategic investments, space exploration projects, and maritime security initiatives undertaken in French ORs. The research demonstrates if and how the EU's rhetoric translates into concrete actions by tying together the results of the evolution in discourse with the in-depth investigation of policies in the case studies. As a result, the case studies offer empirical evidence of the EU's geopolitical actions, while the discourse analysis offers a historical

context and framework, resulting in a comprehensive picture of the EU's strategy toward the French ORs.

While this study aims to provide a comprehensive analysis, it is susceptible to certain limitations. First, the Spanish and Portuguese ORs in the Atlantic Ocean will not be included in the case studies for this research for various reasons. The Azores, Madeira, and Canary Islands are less distant from mainland Europe, fostering closer cultural, economic, and political ties with the continent. Furthermore, the autonomy of EU ORs varies, with Spanish and Portuguese regions enjoying more autonomy than French ones. Spanish and Portuguese ORs have significant self-governing powers, while French ORs operate under a centralized governance structure, limiting their legislative autonomy. Despite some self-governance, Spanish and Portuguese ORs generally have more autonomy. As a result, the policies may be implemented at various levels of governance in different ORs. This presents several limitations to the research as restricting the analysis of EU geopolitical discourse and policies to only French ORs may result in a narrower perspective, which would not be applicable to the Portuguese and Spanish ORs.

Secondly, the data's availability and comparability differ greatly among locations, which could potentially impact the reliability of my conclusions. Furthermore, because geopolitical discourse is subjective, various interpretations may arise, making it challenging to ascertain whether the actions I observe actually match the shift in discourse. Finally, with the EU not being a state and having exclusive competence over various policy areas, particularly external action, it is important to keep in mind that the EU is not able to act like a state, and therefore is limited in the decisions and implementation of policies in the ORs.

3. Background on the Outermost Regions (ORs) of the EU

3.1. General information

The ORs of the EU are specific territories of Member States, that are remote from mainland Europe and have particular geographical, environmental, economic, and social difficulties. As of March 2024, the EU counts nine ORs; Guadeloupe, French Guiana, Martinique, Mayotte, Réunion Island, Saint-Martin (France), the Azores and Madeira (Portugal), and the Canary Islands (Spain). Some are islands, like the Azores and Madeira, while others are archipelagos, like Guadeloupe, while French Guiana is a land territory.⁴⁶

The Spanish and Portuguese islands are located in the Atlantic Ocean, and are the geographically closest ORs to mainland Europe, while Mayotte and Reunion Island are located in the Indian Ocean. As for the remaining French territories, they are situated in the Carribean Sea. The ORs are home to about five million people, some of whom have seen notable population expansion as a result of inbound migration. Due to the fact that most of these territories have substantially younger populations than the EU mainland, there is also a relatively strong natural population growth rate.⁴⁷

It is important to emphasize that ORs should not be confused with EU overseas countries and territories (OCTs) of the EU. Denmark, France, and the Netherlands are constitutionally connected to a total of 13 OCTs. They are not included in the single market and are required to adhere to the trade responsibilities imposed on non-EU nations. These obligations primarily pertain to rules of origin, health and plant health standards, as well as safety measures. Article 355 of the TFEU allows the European Council to change

⁴⁶ The EU and its outermost regions, accessed April 2024, https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/policy/themes/outermost-regions_en.

⁴⁷ “THE OUTERMOST REGIONS - EUROPEAN LANDS IN THE WORLD,” European Commission, 2017, https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/policy/themes/outermost-regions/rup_2017/rup_eu_lands_world_en.pdf.

the status of an overseas country or territory, or the EU OR, without TFEU amendment. For example, in 2014, Mayotte, a former OCT, became an OR after a decision by the European Council.⁴⁸

Colonialism, exploration, and strategic considerations frequently characterize the history of the ORs. During the historical era known as the Age of Exploration, European colonial powers acquired a significant number of these regions. The historical connections between the Portuguese, Spanish, and French overseas territories and European colonial activities in the Americas, Africa, and the Indian Ocean are evident. The historical development of these regions has shaped their cultural, linguistic, and economic aspects. In terms of economic activities, the ORs often rely on sectors such as agriculture, fisheries, and tourism. The EU offers financial assistance through targeted initiatives aimed at tackling the specific difficulties encountered by certain areas, fostering sustainable development and economic diversification. Furthermore, the ORs derive advantages from distinct exemptions and modifications to EU legislation in order to accommodate their distinct situations.⁴⁹

The ORs face a distinct range of issues as a result of their geographically isolated positions, relatively small size, and particular economic (and often even social) conditions. An important obstacle is the large expense associated with transportation and logistics. The previously mentioned regions, situated at considerable distances from continental Europe, frequently encounter increased prices associated with the importation of commodities,

⁴⁸ “Outermost Regions (ORS),” European Parliament, 2024, https://www.europarl.europa.eu/ftu/pdf/en/FTU_3.1.7.pdf.

⁴⁹ “THE OUTERMOST REGIONS - EUROPEAN LANDS IN THE WORLD,” European Commission, 2017, https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/policy/themes/outermost-regions/rup_2017/rup_eu_lands_world_en.pdf.

which leads to raised living expenses for their inhabitants.⁵⁰ Another notable obstacle is the constrained diversity of their economies. A significant number of ORs rely substantially on a limited amount of main sectors of income, usually agriculture, fishing, and tourism. Due to lack of diversification of their economies, they are more susceptible to external factors like the effects of climate change on agriculture or the disruptions brought on by international events (such as the COVID-19 pandemic) in the tourism industry. The imperative to solve these issues, ensure sustainable development, and mitigate the vulnerability of the ORs to external forces necessitates the implementation of measures aimed at fostering economic resilience and stimulating innovation. The EU acknowledges the distinctive problems faced by certain regions and enacts targeted policies and financial assistance to facilitate the resolution of these barriers and promote the sustained welfare of these areas.⁵¹

From a national standpoint, the French Overseas Departments and Regions are fully integrated into the French Republic and are therefore subject to the French constitutional and legal provisions.⁵² Similarly, the Azores and Madeira are declared autonomous regions within Portugal, and the Canary Islands are an autonomous community within Spain. Despite their great distance from the continent, the ORs are an essential component of the EU, and all EU laws and treaties are fully enforceable there. However, because of their distinct geographic location and the difficulties that come with it, EU legislation has had to be adjusted to take into account their particular circumstances.⁵³ The pertinent

⁵⁰ “THE OUTERMOST REGIONS - EUROPEAN LANDS IN THE WORLD,” European Commission, 2017.

⁵¹ “THE OUTERMOST REGIONS - EUROPEAN LANDS IN THE WORLD,” European Commission, 2017.

⁵² “Outre-Mer,” RPUE - Représentation Permanente de la France auprès de l’Union européenne, accessed May 2024, [https://ue.delegfrance.org/outre-mer-2038#:~:text=Les%20r%C3%A9gions%20ultrap%C3%A9riph%C3%A9riques%20\(RUP\),-Les%20neuf%20RUP&text=Au%20sein%20de%20l'Union,du%20statut%20de%20r%C3%A9gions%20ultrap%C3%A9riph%C3%A9riques.](https://ue.delegfrance.org/outre-mer-2038#:~:text=Les%20r%C3%A9gions%20ultrap%C3%A9riph%C3%A9riques%20(RUP),-Les%20neuf%20RUP&text=Au%20sein%20de%20l'Union,du%20statut%20de%20r%C3%A9gions%20ultrap%C3%A9riph%C3%A9riques.)

⁵³ “THE OUTERMOST REGIONS - EUROPEAN LANDS IN THE WORLD,” European Commission, 2017.

measures specifically address matters like trade and customs regulations, fiscal policies, free zones, policies pertaining to agriculture and fisheries, and requirements for the provision of basic consumer goods and raw materials. Furthermore, it is possible to modify state aid regulations as well as the prerequisites for accessing EU horizontal programs and the Structural Funds to better suit the demands of these areas. In addition, the ORs benefit from special allocations, such as the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), due to the many challenges they face and their differing needs from the European continent.

The legal basis of the ORs was established in 1997, in the Treaty of Amsterdam. The principles of equality and proportionality, which permit different treatments to take into consideration the unique circumstances of specific regions, are the foundation for the Treaty of Amsterdam's acknowledgment of their special status in Article 299(2) of the treaty. In order to provide residents of the ORs with the same opportunities as the rest of the EU residents, the EU modifies community measures in accordance with that status. In 2009, the Lisbon Treaty, which acknowledged the unique characteristics of the OMRs and the necessity for particular measures to support their growth, served as further confirmation of this. The ORs have established a political unity of action to create methodical collaboration with the EU and ensure that the Union's regional and other development policies and initiatives address their shared issues in a consistent and methodical manner.⁵⁴

Article 349 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU) lays out the legal basis for the EU's ORs. This article acknowledges the unique challenges that these areas experience as a result of their isolation, economic reliance on a small number of products, and geographic remoteness. It enables tailored responses to the problems these

⁵⁴ "THE OUTERMOST REGIONS - EUROPEAN LANDS IN THE WORLD," European Commission, 2017.

unique characteristics present in an effort to support their social and economic advancement.⁵⁵

3.2. Strategies for the ORs

The European Commission released its inaugural communication in support of the ORs in 2004. In order to effectively adapt to the realities of Europe and the other regions, it was necessary to incorporate various development tactics. The suggestions put out in this message are centered on three primary pillars: accessibility, competitiveness, and cooperation and integration with the EU.⁵⁶ In 2012, the European Commission acknowledged the fragile economies of ORs and invited them to restructure traditional sectors like tourism, agriculture, and fishing. This would create more stable economic conditions and reduce disparities within EU regions. In 2013, the Commission adopted several strategic policies for ORs from 2014–2020.⁵⁷

In October 2017, the European Commission released a communication titled 'A stronger and renewed strategic relationship with the EU's ORs. This strategy introduced an entirely new approach to more effectively cater to the distinct requirements of each of the nine ORs of the EU. It facilitated the generation of new opportunities for their residents, heightened competitiveness and innovation in industries such as agriculture, fisheries, and tourism, and strengthened collaboration with neighboring nations.⁵⁸ Two of the strategy's

⁵⁵ Consolidated version of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (2012), *OJ C 326*, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A12012E349>.

⁵⁶ Paul Hammoud, Antoine Masquelin, and Tristan Thomas, "THE OUTERMOST REGIONS - Challenges and Prospects," Egmont Institute, February 2018, <https://www.egmontinstitute.be/app/uploads/2018/04/Outermost-Regions-PLS-v2.pdf>.

⁵⁷ Paul Hammoud, Antoine Masquelin, and Tristan Thomas, "THE OUTERMOST REGIONS - Challenges and Prospects," Egmont Institute, February 2018.

⁵⁸ "A Stronger and Renewed Strategic Partnership with the EU's Outermost Regions," Access to the European Union Law, October 24, 2017, https://eur-lex.europa.eu/resource.html?uri=cellar:32f72786-b980-11e7-a7f8-01aa75ed71a1.0018.02/DOC_1&format=PDF.

four goals were to "build on each region's particular assets" and "enhance and scale up cooperation."⁵⁹ This is because the EU thinks that the ORs have unique natural resources, such as a wide range of species; large areas that can only be used for economic activity; a strategic location and climate for space and astrophysical research; and easy access to markets in non-EU countries. The Commission will assess the possibility of directing new EU investments towards priority and larger-scale projects in the geographic basins of the ORs. It will promote cooperation between the ORs and their neighboring countries by aligning funding rules more closely and exploring the establishment of joint programs.⁶⁰

On May 3, 2022, the Commission implemented a revised strategy for the ORs titled 'Putting people first, securing sustainable and inclusive growth, unlocking the potential of the EU's outermost regions' with the objective of maximizing their capabilities through suitable investments and reforms. This is based on a public survey, as well as specific consultations and one-on-one discussions with EU member states. This also takes into account comments from Parliament, the European Economic and Social Committee, and the ORs themselves. The plan presents ideas in various sectors, such as social policy, health, state aid, energy, and administrative capability, based on five fundamental foundations. Like its predecessor, one of the objectives of the strategy is "Building on each regions' unique assets". The objective based on cooperation has been thoroughly updated into "Strengthening outermost regions' regional cooperation with neighbouring countries and territories".⁶¹

⁵⁹ "A Stronger and Renewed Strategic Partnership with the EU's Outermost Regions," Access to the European Union Law, October 24, 2017.

⁶⁰ "A Stronger and Renewed Strategic Partnership with the EU's Outermost Regions," Access to the European Union Law, October 24, 2017.

⁶¹ "Putting People First, Securing Sustainable and Inclusive Growth, Unlocking the Potential of the EU's Outermost Region," European Commission, May 3, 2022, https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/information/publications/communications/2022/putting-people-first-securing-sustainable-and-inclusive-growth-unlocking-the-potential-of-the-eu-s-outermost-regions.

The EU's policies for its ORs in 2017 and 2022 both tackle geopolitical concerns, but they do so with distinct emphases and techniques, reflecting evolving priorities and global settings. The 2017 plan focused on utilizing the strategic locations and diverse biodiversity of the ORs to support environmental and maritime policy. The goal was to achieve a balance between development and conservation. The main objective was to stimulate economic growth by promoting collaboration across regions, enhancing transportation links, and incorporating the ORs into the EU's single market. In addition, it tackled security issues, specifically irregular migration, by implementing strong steps to control migration and strengthen border security. The strategy also sought to bolster the resilience of the operating rooms (ORs) to the effects of climate change by implementing environmentally friendly procedures and actions to protect the environment.

In contrast, the 2022 strategy prioritizes regional cooperation and integration with neighboring countries to enhance the EU's influence and stability in important areas like the Atlantic, Indian Ocean, and Caribbean. This approach fosters collaboration in the fields of environmental preservation, maritime security, and economic development. The 2022 strategy also incorporates a more comprehensive approach to security, taking into account the wider geopolitical circumstances and placing particular emphasis on maritime security and regional stability. In addition, the objective is to take advantage of the distinctive resources of each OR, such as biodiversity and key geographic locations, in order to support the blue economy, sustainable tourism, and utilize scientific research and innovation to foster economic growth and environmental sustainability. An important statement by the Commission within the official strategy document can be found under point 43 where the Commission “UNDERLINES the importance of the outermost regions

for EU's external relations, enabling the projection of EU interests and values in their geographical areas".⁶²

Although the two objectives recognize the need of regional cooperation, the 2022 strategy places a higher priority on strengthening the ties with neighbouring nations and regions. This shift reflects a broader geopolitical goal to increase EU stability and influence in these regions of importance. The 2022 plan places greater emphasis on green and digital transitions, in line with the EU's overall objectives of achieving climate neutrality and digital leadership. This is a departure from the 2017 strategy, which had a more general focus on economic development and connectivity. In addition, the 2022 plan takes a more comprehensive approach to security, taking into account the current geopolitical environment and placing a strong emphasis on maritime security and regional stability. Both techniques seek to exploit the distinctive natural assets of the ORs.⁶³

In 2020, a report was released on the implementation of the Commission Communication on a stronger and renewed strategic partnership with the EU's ORs.⁶⁴ The report sets out progress and achievement in each sector of priority for every OR. From the report, we can observe that French ORs have made progress in areas such as setting out a strategy for blue economy, energy efficiency and renewable energies, competitiveness and

⁶² "Putting People First, Securing Sustainable and Inclusive Growth, Unlocking the Potential of the EU's Outermost Region," European Commission, May 3, 2022, https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/information/publications/communications/2022/putting-people-first-securing-sustainable-and-inclusive-growth-unlocking-the-potential-of-the-eu-s-outermost-regions.

⁶³ "Putting People First, Securing Sustainable and Inclusive Growth, Unlocking the Potential of the EU's Outermost Region," European Commission, May 3, 2022. "A Stronger and Renewed Strategic Partnership with the EU's Outermost Regions," Access to the European Union Law, October 24, 2017.

⁶⁴ "REPORT FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT, THE COUNCIL, THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE, THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS AND THE EUROPEAN INVESTMENT BANK on the Implementation of the Commission Communication on a Stronger and Renewed Strategic Partnership with the EU's Outermost Regions," European Commission, March 23, 2020, https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/policy/themes/outermost-regions/rup_2020/report_rup_implem_partner_2020_annex_en.pdf.

education. Although some achievements were listed under the section of cooperation with neighbourhood and beyond, the progress does not seem homogenous throughout the ORs. The Réunion Island, Guadeloupe, Martinique and Saint-Martin show the most progress in this area. Martinique most notably “Launched the project for Trade Enhancement for Eastern Caribbean (TEECA) in January 2018 to assist 30 local businesses in exporting to Caribbean states”.⁶⁵ The Reunion Island has implemented a few Interreg programmes that lead to framework agreements in order to improve coordination on areas of common interest. Guadeloupe joined the Organization of States of the East Caribbean, while Saint-Martin was granted the observer status in the Organization of Eastern Caribbean States. Overall, there is the least progress and achievements under the priority of cooperation with the neighbourhood and beyond for the French ORs in this report of the 2017 strategy for the ORs.⁶⁶ As of today, there is no report on the 2022 strategy yet, as it is still in process.

4. Evolution of discourse on the ORs as Geopolitical Assets

There are other significant factors to look into outside the literature, such as discourse. Examining the shift in discourse on the EU ORs and their involvement in EU geopolitics is essential for a thorough understanding of the changing dynamics in this

⁶⁵ “REPORT FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT, THE COUNCIL, THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE, THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS AND THE EUROPEAN INVESTMENT BANK on the Implementation of the Commission Communication on a Stronger and Renewed Strategic Partnership with the EU’s Outermost Regions,” European Commission, March 23, 2020.

⁶⁶ “REPORT FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT, THE COUNCIL, THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE, THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS AND THE EUROPEAN INVESTMENT BANK on the Implementation of the Commission Communication on a Stronger and Renewed Strategic Partnership with the EU’s Outermost Regions,” European Commission, March 23, 2020.

particular context. The presence of the ORs in EU discourse, although increasing, remains insufficient leading to the ORs being considered as ‘forgotten Europes’.⁶⁷ It is important to examine the evolution in discourse in this research for a number of reasons. First of all, it sheds light on the variables influencing policy changes by revealing how the EU's decision-making circles are changing their perspectives on the ORs. Understanding this evolution is instrumental to identify the underlying motivations and strategic considerations that guide the EU's approach. Examining the evolution of the discourse on the geopolitical assets of the EU's ORs is pivotal in assessing the extent to which the EU translates its rhetoric into tangible actions. The acknowledgement of these regions as geopolitical assets, enshrined in documents such as the renewed Strategy for the ORs, raises pertinent questions about the consistency and efficacy of the EU's approach. By scrutinizing the evolution in discourse, this research can uncover whether the EU actively engages in actions that align with its recognition of the OR's' strategic importance. This investigation is important for figuring out how the geopolitical talk shows how committed and successful institutions and policies are at using the unique strengths of these regions in line with EU policies and goals. For the purpose of this research and clarity, the analysis of the discourse will be done in chronological order and will begin from the year 2000, as the ORs were given little to no consideration prior to the 21st century, up until the year 2023.

For the purpose of this research, the focus will be on the discourse from both EU institutions and French representatives, reflecting the significant role France plays in this context due to its numerous ORs. Although the EU and its officials as a collective recognize the strategic significance of the ORs, individual member states within the EU,

⁶⁷ Manuela Boatcă, “Caribbean Europe: Out of Sight, out of Mind?,” *Constructing the Pluriverse: The Geopolitics of Knowledge*, 2018, <https://doi.org/10.1215/9781478002017-011>.

apart from France, as well as Spain and Portugal, though to a lesser extent, rarely make significant statements about these regions. Other member states' limited participation causes French viewpoints to dominate the conversation. As a result, given that France is home to the majority of the EU's ORs, France's specific interests and priorities frequently influence the broader EU discourse on ORs. To fully comprehend the perception and utilization of ORs as geopolitical assets, it is crucial to analyze both the institutional narrative of the EU and the national attitude of France, within the context of the EU as well.

The discourse around the ORs of the EU has seen substantial development over time, mirroring the shifting geopolitical environment and the EU's recognition of the unique potential of these remote territories. Over the years, the EU has gradually recognized the strategic significance of these regions as geopolitical assets that enhance EU global influence, commercial partnerships, and scientific pursuits. Historically, the ORs were seen as peripheral areas with limited economic opportunities. Their remoteness made it challenging to connect to the European mainland and access markets, while their insularity and small size limited their economic diversification. This view frequently resulted in programs that attempted to lessen the economic disadvantages of the regions by offering both structural support and financial aid.⁶⁸

After their entry into the EU Treaties of Maastricht and Amsterdam, the EU began showing interest in and take action towards the regions. As mentioned above, the discourse on the ORs in the late 1990s and early 2000s solely focused on economic and structural policies. On the 27th of March 2000, in Brussels, Michel Barnier, European Commissioner

⁶⁸ Kristian Behrens and Carl Gaigne, "Developing the "outermost Regions" of Europe: Some Lessons from Economic Geography," Hal Open Science, October 2006, <https://hal.science/hal-02285630/document>.

for Regional Policy and Institutional Reform at the time, held a speech in which he first provided a precise assessment of the actions implemented in over ten years in these areas, specifically focusing on the French overseas departments, but also sought to outline the Commission's strategy for future planning and the actions it would propose.⁶⁹ Throughout this speech, the ORs are not characterized as geopolitical assets in any manner, and the Commission's priorities encompass sustainable agricultural and rural development, enhanced competitiveness, environmental safeguards, and decreasing unemployment. The speech makes no mention of the ORs' continued regional integration or international collaboration. It is undeniable that, at the time, these peripheral areas were not perceived as a geopolitical tool for the EU, however, this is partly a result of the EU's lack of global actor status at the time.⁷⁰

French representatives also mirrored this focus. In May 2001, French President Jacques Chirac highlighted the economic and social challenges of the ORs, particularly La Réunion, while recognizing the potential future strategic value of these regions.⁷¹ In this speech, President Chirac states that “Europe is a chance for the ORs, just as the ORs are a richness for Europe”⁷². The speech primarily sheds light on the article 299.2 in the Treaty of Amsterdam, pushed by the French during their Presidency in the Council of the EU, to have the particularities of the ORs acknowledged at EU level. However, Jacques Chirac,

⁶⁹ Michel Barnier, “The Outermost Regions: The Commission’s Report on the Implementation of Article 299(2) of the Treaty,” European Commission (speech), accessed January 5, 2024, https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/speech_00_103.

⁷⁰ Barnier, Michel. “The Outermost Regions: The Commission’s Report on the Implementation of Article 299(2) of the Treaty.” *European Commission*. Speech presented at the EURODOM meeting. Accessed January 5, 2024. https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/speech_00_103.

⁷¹ Jacques Chirac, “Sur l’avenir de La Réunion, l’aide de l’Union Européenne Aux Régions Ultrapériphériques, l’économie de l’île, Sa Situation Économique et Sociale, Son Développement, Les Mesures En Sa Faveur, l’évolution de Son Statut et Les Réformes Nécessaires,” *Vie Publique* (speech, La Reunion), accessed January 5, 2024, <https://www.vie-publique.fr/discours/180278-discours-de-m-jacques-chirac-president-de-la-republique-sur-la-venir>.

⁷² Ibid.

the former president of France, ignores the strategic advantages that the ORs offer the EU. The speech focuses on social and economic challenges that these regions face, and goes into more detail of the latter for the Reunion Island. A few policies are discussed, including POSEI⁷³ and tax exemption.⁷⁴ President Chirac acknowledges that as we transition to a multipolar system, the EU's ORs will eventually become valuable geographic locations in their respective regions of the world, even though he does not explicitly refer to them as geopolitical assets.⁷⁵

In September 2005, at the fourth Forum for ORs, Danuta Hübner, Commissioner responsible for Regional Policy, gave a speech outlining the reasons the ORs are important assets for the EU. Before characterizing the ORs as only geographically peripheral, Hübner stated that the ORs “allow the European Union to hold a very extensive maritime territory, a source of fishery, environmental and geopolitical asset”.⁷⁶ Despite acknowledging that these areas are a geopolitical advantage, the speech does not go into further detail on this. A little excerpt from the speech does mention that the Commission sees the need to increasingly integrate the ORs into their regions, but little detail is provided on how that is to be put into practice. Like most speeches held on the ORs, the main content of the debate is cohesion policy, and the socioeconomic issues that the ORs face.⁷⁷

⁷³ POSEI is the tool for providing European and national aid to the agricultural sector for all the ORs. It generally aims to improve the economic and technical competitiveness of overseas agricultural sectors.

⁷⁴ Jacques Chirac, “Sur l’avenir de La Réunion, l’aide de l’Union Européenne Aux Régions Ultrapériphériques, l’économie de l’île, Sa Situation Économique et Sociale, Son Développement, Les Mesures En Sa Faveur, l’évolution de Son Statut et Les Réformes Nécessaires,”.

⁷⁵ Jacques Chirac, “Sur l’avenir de La Réunion, l’aide de l’Union Européenne Aux Régions Ultrapériphériques, l’économie de l’île, Sa Situation Économique et Sociale, Son Développement, Les Mesures En Sa Faveur, l’évolution de Son Statut et Les Réformes Nécessaires,”.

⁷⁶ Danuta Hübner, “Les Régions Ultrapériphériques, Une Chance Pour l’Europe,” *European Commission* (speech, Île de la Réunion, September 4, 2005), https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/fr/SPEECH_05_497.

⁷⁷ Danuta Hübner, “Les Régions Ultrapériphériques, Une Chance Pour l’Europe,”.

The first addition of a geopolitical perspective is noticeable in the Commission policy paper “The Outermost Regions – an Asset for Europe”, published in October 2008.⁷⁸ The policy paper aims to address globalization, climate change, demographic trends, sustainable resource management, and economic development in ORs, focusing on high-value assets like agri-food, biodiversity, and EU outposts. This publication states that the ORs contribute significantly to the EU's external endeavors and play a crucial role in shaping an authentic and comprehensive neighborhood policy. This is achieved through their geographical, cultural, and historical connections with other nations and populations, notably in Africa and the American continent. Furthermore, “Inserted in geopolitical and geographical realities different from those of the continental European Union, the ORs represent advanced positions of the EU in contact with other large economic groups.”⁷⁹ Undeniably, with this publication, the EU presents the ORs as regions that are able to reach third countries and therefore pursue the EU’s economic or diplomatic interests in new markets and countries. With the financial crisis in 2008, there may have been one of the motivations behind the EU's search for new markets, and therefore, their new considerations for the ORs, as part of a relief solution.⁸⁰ Lastly, an important outcome of the policy paper was the establishment of a Forum for 'Outermost Europe' every two years with both the member states and the ORs. The EU's increased engagement with its ORs is demonstrated by the establishment of a forum in which it acknowledges their strengths rather than focusing solely on their weaknesses.⁸¹

⁷⁸ “Les Régions Ultrapériphériques : Un Atout Pour l’Europe,” European Commission, October 17, 2008, https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/communication/rup2008/rup_com2008642_fr.pdf.

⁷⁹ “Les Régions Ultrapériphériques : Un Atout Pour l’Europe,”.

⁸⁰ George Friedman, “How 2008 Changed Everything,” Geopolitical Futures, April 25, 2019, <https://geopoliticalfutures.com/how-2008-changed-everything/>.

⁸¹ Ibid.

In 2010, in Brussels, Marie-Luce Penchard, the French Secretary of State for Overseas Territories, stressed the fact that the ORs serve as European frontiers that extend globally, enabling the EU to promote its principles beyond its own geographical boundaries. This may be regarded as a geopolitical declaration, given that the EU, in its capacity as a soft power, regards the spread of its values internationally as one of its primary geopolitical goals.⁸² Two years later, in July 2012, Johannes Hahn, Commissioner for Regional Policy, held a speech in the EU for the second Forum for Outermost Europe, ‘The Outermost Regions, an integral part of an innovating European Union’.⁸³ As in the previous speeches, the speech begins by acknowledging the economic effects of the previous financial crisis on the ORs. It then goes on to highlight and take into consideration the unique challenges and characteristics of the ORs, as well as the wealth and opportunities they bring to the EU. As emphasized by Hahn, “[The ORs] are treasures too few people in continental Europe appreciate their value, their contribution to the EU, and their potential”.⁸⁴ The primary point discussed in the speech is the Europe 2020 program and increased consideration for the ORs in cohesion policy, agriculture, fisheries, and other relevant policy sectors. One of the key points highlighted in the speech is that each region will be required to make distinct decisions and prepare for Partnership Agreements and regional neighborhood plans. In fact, Hahn insists on the geopolitical aspect, saying that the ORs can successfully integrate into their local neighborhoods.⁸⁵

⁸² Marie-Luce Penchard, “La prise en compte du mémorandum des régions ultra-périphériques (RUP) lors du débat budgétaire européen, le maintien des dispositifs financiers en faveur des RUP et les stratégies de coopération régionales,” *Vie Publique* (speech, Tenerife), accessed January, 2024, <https://www.vie-publique.fr/discours/180349-declaration-de-mme-marie-luce-penchard-ministre-de-loutre-mer-sur-la>.

⁸³ Johannes Hahn, “First Forum on the Outermost Regions,” *EU Monitor* (speech), accessed January 9, 2024, https://www.eumonitor.eu/9353000/1/j9vvik7m1c3gyxp/vifjg79efyyb?ctx=vh7dowstigi&start_tab0=5.

⁸⁴ Johannes Hahn, “First Forum on the Outermost Regions,” *EU Monitor* (speech), accessed January, 2024, https://www.eumonitor.eu/9353000/1/j9vvik7m1c3gyxp/vifjg79efyyb?ctx=vh7dowstigi&start_tab0=5.

⁸⁵ Johannes Hahn, “First Forum on the Outermost Regions,”

Over the ensuing years, there was an increasing amount of talk regarding the ORs as geopolitical assets. In a speech on the need for better integration of the ORs in the EU, Erika Bareigts, French Minister of OCTs, presented the ORs with “countless assets, geopolitical and human”, from research aspects, to maritime importance.⁸⁶ A similar statement was made by the then European Commission President, Jean-Claude Juncker, when he affirmed that [the ORs] give us - to Europe, the EU, a global dimension”.⁸⁷ Furthermore, he adds that the spaceport in French Guiana reinforces the EU’s strategic independence. Indeed, for the last years, some EU Member States, such as France, have pushed for a strategically independent EU as a geopolitical means to distance itself from depending on big powers such as China, or even the US.⁸⁸ It is crucial to remember that the ORs are viewed as helpful in achieving this goal in this speech.

In the same year, 2017, the 22nd Conference for the ORs took place, and French President Macron held the closing speech. Like Juncker, President Macron begins by affirming that, beside their title of ‘ultra-peripheries’ in French, he does not see them as such, but rather as “ultramarine” regions.⁸⁹ The ORs provide the EU with a marine richness of 25 million square kilometers of global exclusive economic zone, despite its smaller continental size in comparison to others. When using the term ‘ultramarine’ President Macron acknowledges that the ORs are what makes the EU the leading maritime power in

⁸⁶ Erika Bargeits, “La Nécessité d’une Meilleure Intégration Des Régions Ultrapériphériques (RUP) Au Sein de l’Union Européenne,” *Vie Publique* (speech, Madeira), accessed January, 2024, <https://www.vie-publique.fr/discours/200527-declaration-de-mme-erika-bareigts-ministre-des-oultre-mer-sur-l-a-necess>.

⁸⁷ Jean-Claude Juncker, “Discours Du Président Juncker,” *European Commission* (speech), accessed January 11, 2024, https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/fr/SPEECH_17_4247.

⁸⁸ Julien Barnes-Dacey Aslı Aydıntaşbaş, “Strategic Interdependence: Europe’s New Approach in a World of Middle Powers,” *ECFR*, October 3, 2023, <https://ecfr.eu/publication/strategic-interdependence-europes-new-approach-in-a-world-of-middle-powers/>.

⁸⁹ Emmanuel Macron, “Discours Du Président de La République à La 22ème Conférence Des Présidents Des RUP,” *Elysee* (speech, French Guiana), accessed January 12, 2024, <https://www.elysee.fr/emmanuel-macron/2017/10/27/discours-du-president-de-la-republique-a-la-22eme-conf-erence-des-presidents-des-rup>.

the world. The next section of his speech is devoted to the geopolitical aspect of the ORs to the EU. According to his speech, the ORs are located at “the heart of the ambition [...] where most of our geopolitical and geostrategic issues are focused”.⁹⁰ This is a clear and direct statement, accentuating the ORs as geopolitically important for the EU. In the Presidents’ perspective, the geopolitical objective should be to unleash the potential of these European regions beyond its borders, integrating it completely into the EU, while ensuring its success in the midst of significantly diverse regions and intense competition. This must be achieved despite challenges related to migration, security, economy, and regional dynamics that differ from the rest of the EU and continental Europe.⁹¹ Additionally, he notes that cooperation and integration within their respective geographic zones are critical for geopolitical factors, resulting in significant added value. This is one of the first ORs speeches that puts a strong emphasis on the geopolitical dynamics with the ORs and the EU, as well as France.

Prior to the release of the 2022 Renewed Strategy for the ORs, the European Parliament released a report titled, ‘Towards a strengthening of the partnership with the outermost regions of the Union’, in which the European Parliament an opinion on the improvement of the strategy towards the ORs for the future.⁹² In the report, the European Parliament states that the ORs are a richness for the EU “which contributes to Europe’s influence and strengthens its 'soft power' in the world”.⁹³ The EU’s main approach to

⁹⁰ Emmanuel Macron, “Discours Du Président de La République à La 22ème Conférence Des Présidents Des RUP,”.

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² “Putting People First, Securing Sustainable and Inclusive Growth, Unlocking the Potential of the EU’s Outermost Regions,” European Commission, May 3, 2022, https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/policy/themes/outermost-regions/rup-2022/comm-rup-2022_en.pdf.

⁹³ Stéphane Bijoux, “Rapport Vers Un Renforcement Du Partenariat Avec Les Régions Ultrapériphériques de l’Union,” European Parliament, July 20, 2021, https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/A-9-2021-0241_FR.html#_section1.

foreign policy is through the use of soft power, mostly defined as the strategy that brings about desired results by enticing foreign governments to support you through diplomatic means such as providing financial assistance or making appeals to common ideals.⁹⁴ The recognition of the ORs as tools to reinforce EU ‘soft power’ means an integration to its foreign policy ambitions and potentially actions.

The renewed strategy for the ORs adopted in 2022 reflects the recurring discourse on the geopolitical importance of the ORs for the EU. The strategy highlights the significance of cultivating the unique resources of the ORs and leveraging their advantageous geographical position. A fresh approach to taking advantage of this advantageous location is also revealed by this new plan, which calls for more regional cooperation as well as cooperation with third nations as geopolitical measures. In fact, one of the five pillars of the most recent strategy is ‘Strengthening outermost regions’ regional cooperation with neighboring countries and territories’. According to the European Commission communication, the location of the ORs makes them a special advantage for the EU's external relations and for projecting its values and interests. They elevate the EU to a genuinely global player. Cooperation with neighboring nations and territories is also crucial for the economic growth and regional integration of these areas, in keeping with the EU's Global Gateway agenda. One of the top five priorities chosen by participants in a public survey was this kind of cooperation. Initiated in 2021, the EU/Africa-Caribbean-Pacific (ACP) Partnership Agreement promotes ACP governments'

⁹⁴ Tuomas Forsberg, “The Power of the European Union,” *Politique Européenne* n° 39, no. 1 (April 1, 2013): 22–42, <https://doi.org/10.3917/poeu.039.0022>.

collaboration with the OCTs and the most remote regions in areas such as commerce, energy, digitalization, environment, tourism, and climate change.⁹⁵

In conclusion, over time, we can observe an increasing recognition of the strategic importance of ORs in geopolitical terms. EU officials and other relevant politicians began to emphasize the unique geographical positions of these regions, highlighting their potential contributions to the EU's broader geopolitical objectives, including maritime security, defense, space exploration and regional stability. The renewed strategy for the ORs adopted in 2022 reflects this evolving discourse. All EU policies prioritize local approaches and tailored support for the regions, aiming to help them leverage their full potential through appropriate investments and policies. The plan also highlights how critical it is to leverage the unique resources of the ORs and take advantage of their strategic location, in today's changing geopolitical order.⁹⁶

5. Case Studies

5.1. Presentation of the case studies

Since the EU's rhetoric on its French ORs has evolved from considering them to be isolated and insular islands to acknowledging them as geopolitical assets, it is necessary to look at how this change has been reflected in practical terms. The aim is to determine whether this shift in perspective has not only influenced policy and rhetoric but has also led to tangible changes in how these regions are integrated into the EU's broader geopolitical strategy. To fully understand the implications of this evolution, we must delve into specific

⁹⁵ "Putting People First, Securing Sustainable and Inclusive Growth, Unlocking the Potential of the EU's Outermost Regions," European Commission, May 3, 2022, https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/policy/themes/outermost-regions/rup-2022/comm-rup-2022_en.pdf.

⁹⁶ "Putting People First, Securing Sustainable and Inclusive Growth, Unlocking the Potential of the EU's Outermost Regions,".

case studies that illustrate the concrete actions and strategic initiatives undertaken by the EU in these territories. By focusing on the Indian Ocean ORs, French Guiana, and the Caribbean ORs, we can observe how the EU's geopolitical ambitions materialize in different regional contexts, especially for maritime security, space exploration, and trade. These case studies will provide insight on the strategic importance of the French ORs and how they contribute to strengthening the EU's global standing.

5.2. Case study 1 - French Guiana as a geopolitical asset to the EU

5.2.1. French Guiana

French Guiana is situated on the northeastern coastline of South America, adjacent to Brazil to the south and east, Suriname to the west, and the Atlantic Ocean to the north, and is home to over 300,000 people. French Guiana is a unique OR due to its unique location on the South American continent, while the rest are islands.⁹⁷ It also holds the largest surface area, accounting for 93% of the French ORs and 83% of all the ORs. Additionally, it has the lowest population density, and its GDP per capita falls below the average for the ORs, not even reaching half of the recorded value of Metropolitan France.⁹⁸ The region, which covers an area of about 83,534 square kilometers, is known for its extensive rainforests (covering 97% of the country's land area), rich biodiversity, and impressive river networks. The capital of Cayenne functions as the central location for administrative and commercial activities. The population of French Guiana is diverse,

⁹⁷ "Régions Ultrapériphériques (RUP)," European Parliament, March 2023, https://www.europarl.europa.eu/erpl-app-public/factsheets/pdf/fr/FTU_3.1.7.pdf.

⁹⁸ "Régions Ultrapériphériques (RUP)," European Parliament, March 2023.

comprising a mixture of indigenous peoples and immigrants from other regions across the globe.⁹⁹

French Guiana's strategic importance is multidimensional from its geographic location, natural resources, space industry, and environmental significance. Its position on the northeastern coast of South America gives it a key position as a gateway connecting South America, the Caribbean, and North America, making it a unique outpost of the EU.¹⁰⁰ Its geographical location on the globe makes French Guiana the closest EU point to the equator, which provides a huge benefit for satellite launches, since payloads can make use of the Earth's spinning speed to achieve more effective orbital insertions. For this reason, De Gaulle decided to establish the Guiana Space Center in the commune of Kourou in 1965.¹⁰¹

5.2.2. Geopolitics of the EU for space

In this complex and interconnected world, the phrase ‘great power competition’ is frequently used to characterize strategic and diplomatic maneuvers. Space is a significant factor in this competition and it is crucial to comprehend the distinctive qualities of this domain.¹⁰² States acknowledge space as an operational dimension, but space is also important from a military perspective. It also provides a stage for exhibiting skills and technological developments. As a result, it is also the ideal setting for projecting soft

⁹⁹ “The Outermost Regions: European Lands In the World - French Guiana,” European Commission, March 25, 2020, https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/policy/themes/outermost-regions/rup_2020/2020_french_guyana_factsheet_en.pdf.

¹⁰⁰ “Outermost Regions at a Glance – Assets, Challenges and Opportunities,” European Commission, May 3, 2022, https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/policy/themes/outermost-regions/rup-2022/comm-rup-2022-glance_en.pdf.

¹⁰¹ “Europe’s Spaceport,” ESA - European Space Agency, accessed June 14, 2024, https://www.esa.int/Enabling_Support/Space_Transportation/Europe_s_Spaceport/Europe_s_Spaceport2.

¹⁰² Fabrizio Botti and Ettore Greco, “The Geopolitics of Space,” IAI - Istituto Affari Internazionali, June 16, 2023, <https://www.iai.it/sites/default/files/9788893682923.pdf>.

power.¹⁰³ According to Wang, “international space politics can be treated as the projection of terrestrial geopolitics”.¹⁰⁴

In the early 2000s, the EU started thinking of a common space policy, unifying the interests and actions of all member states. As a result, on May 22, 2007, an EU space policy was established consolidating the approach of the ESA with that of the different member states of the EU. The goal of this policy, which was created in cooperation with the ESA, was to improve and coordinate Europe's space activities capabilities. Thus, attaining EU strategic autonomy depends heavily on EU space policy. It seeks to increase the EU's capacity to participate in space activities for security and defense goals while simultaneously protecting EU space infrastructure and industry from outside threats.¹⁰⁵ EU space policy is at present of great importance in the pursuit of strategic goals for both the EU and its member states due to the prevailing geopolitical circumstances. In a European Commission communication, ‘Space Strategy for Europe’, the institution states; “It [space] reinforces Europe’s role as a stronger global player and is an asset for its security and defence.”¹⁰⁶ Furthermore, space serves as a technological boundary that plays a crucial role in promoting the economic growth, digital transition, connection, resilience, and strategic autonomy of the EU. Space is becoming an increasingly disputed geopolitical aspect, which is closely related to the previous point discussed. It serves as a prospective element

¹⁰³ Fabrizio Botti and Ettore Greco, “The Geopolitics of Space,” IAI - Istituto Affari Internazionali, June 16, 2023, <https://www.iai.it/sites/default/files/9788893682923.pdf>.

¹⁰⁴ Sheng-Chih Wang, “The Making of New ‘Space’: Cases of Transatlantic Astropolitics,” *Geopolitics* 14, no. 3 (August 21, 2009): 433–61, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14650040802693820>.

¹⁰⁵ Chiara Cellerino, “EU Space Policy and Strategic Autonomy: Tackling Legal Complexities in the Enhancement of the ‘Security and Defense Dimension of the Union in Space,’” *European Papers*, July 2023, <https://www.europeanpapers.eu/en/europeanforum/eu-space-policy-and-strategic-autonomy>.

¹⁰⁶ “Space Strategy for Europe,” European Commission, October 26, 2016, https://defence-industry-space.ec.europa.eu/document/download/2a24ae1d-758f-4b8f-8a07-3d2987ab0bff_en?filename=EU-Space-Strategy-2016_0.pdf.

for military operations and as a facilitator of various security and defense actions.¹⁰⁷ In conclusion, space is a vital resource for the social and economic well-being of the EU and its residents, but is also of great geopolitical importance.

Two of the EU space policy's four priorities serve as an important and recent illustration of how the EU approaches space policy geopolitically. The first, 'reinforcing Europe's autonomy in accessing and using space in a secure and safe environment' emphasizes that space capacities are crucial for civil, commercial, security, and defense policy objectives. Europe must ensure freedom of action, safe access, and protection from interference. New competitors and threats increase synergies.¹⁰⁸ The second geopolitical priority, 'strengthening Europe's role as a global actor and promoting international cooperation', emphasizes that Europe must strengthen its global role in space access, governance, and global markets to achieve strategic goals and ensure sustainable use of space for all nations.¹⁰⁹ Overseas regions (both OCTs and ORs) of the EU are highly valuable in this aspect, as they provide adequate conditions for the establishment of space stations and tracking stations such as Kourou, New Norcia, Santa Maria, and Malargüe, as well as other land-based infrastructure. In this regard, "French Guiana, with its Kourou launch pad is the most significant among these overseas territories in terms of spaceflight".¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁷ Chiara Cellerino, "EU Space Policy and Strategic Autonomy: Tackling Legal Complexities in the Enhancement of the 'Security and Defense Dimension of the Union in Space,'" *European Papers*, July 2023.

¹⁰⁸ "Space Strategy for Europe," European Commission, October 26, 2016, https://defence-industry-space.ec.europa.eu/document/download/2a24ae1d-758f-4b8f-8a07-3d2987ab0bff_en?filename=EU-Space-Strategy-2016_0.pdf.

¹⁰⁹ "Space Strategy for Europe," European Commission, October 26, 2016.

¹¹⁰ Bohumil Doboš, "Geopolitics of the Outer Space," *Contributions to Political Science*, 2019, <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-96857-5>.

5.2.3. Guiana Space Center - European Space Agency

Today, the Guiana Space Center (GSC) is also home to the European Space Agency (ESA), “Europe’s gateway to the galaxy”.¹¹¹ It is a European intergovernmental organization dedicated to the exploration of space, which was established in 1975. As previously mentioned, the close proximity of Kourou to the equator, around 5 degrees north, renders it a highly suitable site for launching satellites into geostationary orbit. It is important to note that the ESA “was founded as an independent institution entirely, separate from the European Communities”, however, “there is now close cooperation with the EU,” which is highly significant.¹¹² The ESA’s membership includes most EU member states¹¹³, and Canada to an extent, which takes part in some projects under a cooperation agreement.¹¹⁴

The EU may launch a variety of missions from this ideal launch point, increasing its worldwide impact on space operations. Additionally, the ESA gives the EU autonomous access to space, minimizing its dependency on other nations, most notably the US and Russia, for satellite launches. This independence is essential for preserving technological and strategic sovereignty, particularly for space assets linked to defense and security. In addition, the spaceport fosters technological advancement and generates high-tech employment within the EU, promoting economic expansion and preserving Europe's competitive advantage in space technology.¹¹⁵ Furthermore, the ESA establishes Europe as

¹¹¹ “Kourou: Europe’s Gateway to the Galaxy: Topics: European Parliament,” European Parliament, 2014, <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/topics/en/article/20140514STO47019/kourou-europe-s-gateway-to-the-galaxy>.

¹¹² Thomas Christian Hoerber, “The European Space Agency and the European Union: The next Step on the Road to the Stars,” *Journal of Contemporary European Research* 5, no. 3 (November 6, 2009): 405–14, <https://doi.org/10.30950/jcer.v5i3.133>.

¹¹³ Slovakia, Slovenia, Latvia and Lithuania are Associate Members and Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus and Malta have cooperation agreements with ESA.

¹¹⁴ “Esa Facts,” ESA - European Space Agency, accessed June 16, 2024, https://www.esa.int/About_Us/Corporate_news/ESA_facts.

¹¹⁵ Bohumil Doboš, “Geopolitics of the Outer Space,” *Contributions to Political Science*, 2019.

a major actor in global space cooperation and strengthens ties with other space-faring countries. The ESA's collaboration with other space agencies also makes it possible to use tracking stations in places like Poker Flat and Goldstone in the United States, Hartebeesthoek in South Africa, Usuda and Masuda in Japan, or Canberra in Australia. Additionally, the agency uses spaceports run by other agencies for specific missions, such as Baikonur (for human spaceflight) and Plesetsk (for polar launches).¹¹⁶

The creation of the ESA signified a notable increase in European cooperation in space projects, with the GSC designated as the principal launch point for ESA missions. The inaugural launch of the Ariane program took place in 1980, with the successful deployment of the Ariane 1 rocket from the GSC. This program has played a vital role in European space missions by successfully launching both commercial and scientific satellites. Ariane 1, 2, and 3 (1979-1989) and Ariane 4 (1988-2003) were closely connected, but Ariane 5, being larger and more powerful, was effectively constructed as a whole new launch system. Its incorporation in 2003 greatly reinforced the EU's capacity for heavier payloads launches, hence increasing the importance of the GSC. It is widely recognized as one of the most dependable and accomplished launch vehicles globally. It has played a crucial role in initiating the deployment of commercial, scientific, and military satellites, making a considerable contribution to worldwide satellite communications and Earth observation capabilities.¹¹⁷

In the mid-2000s, the ESA in Kourou has accelerated space-related activities demonstrating how the GSC has become a crucial geopolitical asset for the EU, reinforcing its strategic autonomy, enhancing its global influence, and supporting a wide range of

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ "Ariane 5," ESA - European Space Agency, accessed June 16, 2024, https://www.esa.int/Enabling_Support/Space_Transportation/Launch_vehicles/Ariane_5.

critical space missions. In 2005, as the EU started to consider a European Space policy, the initial Galileo test satellite, GIOVE-A (Galileo Satellite Navigation System), was successfully launched at the GSC. This was of great importance for Europe to have its own worldwide navigation satellite system and solidified the strategic geopolitical significance of the GSC for Europe.¹¹⁸ Galileo offers precise positioning data, which improves the EU's ability to navigate and time key services independently and reduces reliance on the US GPS system. This system facilitates a wide range of applications in transportation, telecommunications, and numerous other industries, promoting economic expansion and technological progress inside the EU. Galileo enhances the EU's autonomy in critical infrastructure, reducing reliance on non-European systems for navigation and timing services, which are crucial for both civilian and military applications.¹¹⁹

From 2008 onwards, the Ariane 5's operations were broadened to include the launch of the 20-ton European-built Automated Transfer Vehicle (ATV) cargo resupply spacecraft. This development elevated the Spaceport to the exclusive group of space centers that cater to cosmonaut and astronaut crews aboard the International Space Station (ISS).¹²⁰ Europe's capability to provide resources to the ISS has positioned it in a key role within the global collaboration overseeing the operations of the ISS, which involves NASA and other international space agencies.¹²¹ In April 2004, preparations for the debut of the Soyuz spacecraft at the Spaceport started with the initiation of building on the extensive ELS launch complex for this Russian-made versatile medium-lift spacecraft. This

¹¹⁸ "What Is Galileo?," ESA - European Space Agency, accessed June 16, 2024, https://www.esa.int/Applications/Satellite_navigation/Galileo/What_is_Galileo.

¹¹⁹ "What Is Galileo?," ESA - European Space Agency, accessed June 16, 2024, https://www.esa.int/Applications/Satellite_navigation/Galileo/What_is_Galileo.

¹²⁰ "Site Advantages," Arianespace, July 27, 2022, <https://www.arianespace.com/spaceport-facility/site-advantages/>.

¹²¹ Ibid.

additional facility has expanded the operational area of the spaceport in the northern direction along the coast of French Guiana. The final establishment of the Soyuz launch complex at GSC in 2011 enabled the utilization of Russian Soyuz rockets for medium-lift missions, hence broadening the scope of operations carried out from the spaceport.¹²² The establishment of Soyuz launch operations at the GSC held significant geopolitical significance for Europe as it enhanced international collaboration and broadened launch capabilities. The partnership between the ESA and Roscosmos, the Russian space agency, with the use of the Soyuz spacecraft from the GSC signified an enhancement of space collaboration between Europe and Russia. This collaboration enhanced the diplomatic and technological connections between the two regions.¹²³

In 2014, another noteworthy launch occurred, when the Vega launch vehicle was developed, offering a flexible choice for smaller payloads and expanding the range of launch capabilities at the GSC. The initial flight of the Vega rocket in 2012 resulted in an increase in launch operations, as this more compact launcher allowed the ESA to accommodate various mission types, particularly those with smaller payloads. This demonstrated Europe's capacity to support human spaceflight and international collaboration. In addition, the Vega and Vega-C launch vehicles specifically target the growing market for smaller satellites, mainly those used for Earth observation as well as scientific missions.¹²⁴ Next, the 2021 launch of the James Webb Space Telescope on an Ariane 5 rocket from the Esa in Kourou highlighted the ongoing significance of the

¹²² After Russia invaded Ukraine and the Russian authorities unilaterally decided to withdraw, the operation of Soyuz in Europe's spaceport is currently paused. -

¹²³ "ExoMars: ESA and Roscosmos Set for Mars Missions," ESA - European Space Agency, March 14, 2013, https://www.esa.int/Science_Exploration/Space_Science/ExoMars_ESA_and_Roscosmos_set_for_Mars_missions.

¹²⁴ "About the International Space Station," ESA - European Space Agency, accessed June 19, 2024, https://www.esa.int/Science_Exploration/Human_and_Robotic_Exploration/International_Space_Station/About_the_International_Space_Station.

spaceport for major international missions. In 2022, the European Commission declared a rise in financing for space activities, including allocating more resources to the infrastructure at CSG. This decision reflects the EU's dedication to preserving and improving its independent ability to access space. In July 2024, the new Ariane 6 rocket, which is intended to replace Ariane 5, completed its final preparations for its first launch. The primary objective of Ariane 6 is to enhance cost-efficiency and adaptability, thereby ensuring the EU's competitiveness in the worldwide launch industry.¹²⁵

In the future, in line with the larger EU objectives of sustainability and environmental stewardship, the EU is investing in green technologies and sustainable practices at CSG. CSG stays at the forefront of international space exploration efforts thanks to ongoing and upcoming partnerships with international partners like NASA and commercial space firms. Further support will be evaluated to address emerging needs in particular areas of EU value, such as climate change and sustainable development, for the purpose of monitoring CO₂ and other greenhouse gas emissions, land use and forestry, or changes in the Arctic using Copernicus. Additionally, efforts will be made to enhance the EU's ability to respond to evolving challenges in security and defense, particularly in relation to border controls and maritime surveillance, with the assistance of Copernicus and Galileo/EGNOS.¹²⁶

The EU's increased commitment to space policies can be observed through the significant and steadily increasing funding for space-related activities and the ESA budget.

For 2024, the ESA has experienced a substantial rise in its budget, reaching an

¹²⁵ Frédéric Castel, "Europe Aims to End Space Access Crisis with Ariane 6's Inaugural Launch," SpaceNews, June 24, 2024, <https://spacenews.com/europe-aims-to-end-space-access-crisis-with-ariane-6s-inaugural-launch/>.

¹²⁶ "Space Strategy for Europe," European Commission, October 26, 2016, https://defence-industry-space.ec.europa.eu/document/download/2a24ae1d-758f-4b8f-8a07-3d2987ab0bff_en?filename=EU-Space-Strategy-2016_0.pdf.

unprecedented amount of €7.79 billion, a 10% augmentation in comparison to the preceding year, of which 23.4% is allocated by the EU, reaching €1822.6 million.¹²⁷ For comparison, in 2023, the EU provided 22.9% of the ESA's budget allocating approximately €1708.3 million.¹²⁸ The increase of the ESA budget and EU funding has been steady, as by 2016, ESA's budget reached about €5.25 billion, of which €1324.8 million allocated by the EU¹²⁹, and it rose slightly to €5.72 billion in 2019, however with lower EU allocation which decreased to €1249.7 million.¹³⁰ The European ESA also receives funding from its individual member states in addition to the EU. Among these states, Germany and France contribute the largest amounts of funds to the ESA.¹³¹ Considering all space-related endeavors, the existing 2021-2027 Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF), the EU has designated a total of €14.88 billion to be allocated for the space programme over a span of seven years. This budget includes funding for both EU-specific initiatives like the Copernicus Earth observation program and the Galileo navigation system, as well as support for ESA programs run by the EU.¹³²

Despite its importance to the EU and European members of the ESA, it faces significant challenges in maintaining its fourth position, trailing behind China, the United States, and Russia, in this highly competitive landscape. The launching site in Kourou also faces a lack of interest from European countries as a significant number of individuals are shifting their allegiance to other service providers (SpaceX, namely ISRO). Consequently,

¹²⁷ "ESA Budget 2024," ESA - European Space Agency, January 11, 2024, https://www.esa.int/ESA_Multimedia/Images/2024/01/ESA_budget_2024.

¹²⁸ "ESA Budget 2023," ESA - European Space Agency, January 23, 2023, https://www.esa.int/ESA_Multimedia/Images/2023/01/ESA_budget_2023.

¹²⁹ "ESA Budget 2016," ESA - European Space Agency, January 20, 2016, <https://www.esa.int/eseach?q=budget%2B2016>.

¹³⁰ "ESA Budget 2019," ESA, January 14, 2019, https://www.esa.int/ESA_Multimedia/Images/2019/01/ESA_Budget_2019.

¹³¹ According to the yearly rundown of the ESA budget.

¹³² "Space: EU Budgets €16 Billion for Space Programme," EEAS, June 18, 2018, https://www.eeas.europa.eu/node/46673_en.

it is necessary for it to establish further alliances, similar to its existing collaboration with the Russian Soyuz.¹³³ Furthermore, some of the infrastructure at CSG is aging and requires continuous investment and upgrades to maintain competitiveness, particularly with newer spaceports being developed globally. Given that the ESA is reliant on member states' financial commitments, this may be difficult due to budgetary restrictions. Economic downturns in Europe can affect contributions, leading to budget constraints.

All factors considered, the GSC strengthens the EU's global influence by showcasing its technological prowess and contributing to global space governance and standards. Independent access to space is vital for deploying and maintaining security and defense-related assets, ensuring the EU can safeguard its interests in space. Successful programs launched from Kourou strengthen the EU's position globally in science and commerce, attracting international collaborations and investments. Its accomplishments in introducing noteworthy initiatives and vehicles highlights its significance on the global stage. Overall, the expansion of space programs and a rise in launches show how the GSC has developed into an essential geopolitical tool for the EU, reinforcing its strategic autonomy, enhancing its global influence, and supporting a wide range of critical space missions.

In summary, the rise in launch activity at the GSC during certain time periods indicates the strategic advancement of Europe's space capabilities. Between the 2000s and the mid-2010s, there was a consistent growth in the number of launches, mostly as a result of the frequent utilization of Ariane 5 rockets and the acceleration of Galileo satellite deployments. From 2011 to 2012, there was a significant increase in activity as Soyuz

¹³³ "The Policy on Space Launchers: Significant Challenges to Overcome," Ccomptes, 2019, <https://www.ccomptes.fr/system/files/2019-06/Policy-space-launchers-vol-1.pdf>.

operations were introduced at Kourou and the first Vega launches took place, expanding Europe's launch capability. Between 2014 and 2016, there was a notable increase characterized by the annual launch of several Galileo satellites and the initiation of the Copernicus program's Sentinel satellite missions. The Copernicus Earth Observation Program is a noteworthy initiative that offers useful information for environmental monitoring, natural disaster management, and climate change research. This program plays a vital role in shaping European and global environmental policy. It also supports security applications such as border surveillance, marine safety, and crisis management, strengthening the EU's strategic capabilities.¹³⁴ After 2021, the growth in the number of space launches continued due to the introduction of Ariane 6 and the ongoing need for services provided through space. These advancements highlight the significance of the GSC and the ESA's contribution to strengthening Europe's strategic independence and influence in international space matters. Overall, the GSC is a key element of European space policy and a strategic site for international collaboration. It enables the launch of satellites from operators all over the world to serve essential space application purposes.¹³⁵

5.2.4. The ‘bridge of friendship’:

French Guiana’s geographical borders also hold geopolitical importance. Its shared border with Brazil allows France and the EU to maintain diplomatic relations aimed at encouraging economic ties, environmental cooperation, and addressing border-related issues. Nonetheless, relations remain strained at times, especially due to illegal migration from Brazil to French Guiana. More specifically, when the Guiana Space Center was

¹³⁴ “Copernicus: Earth Observation,” European Commission - Defence Industry and Space, accessed June 16, 2024, https://defence-industry-space.ec.europa.eu/eu-space/copernicus-earth-observation_en.

¹³⁵ “Les Enjeux Stratégiques,” Centre Spatial Guyanais, May 2020, <https://centrespatialguyanais.cnes.fr/fr/centre-spatial-guyanais/qui-sommes-nous/les-enjeux-strategiques>.

established, there was a sharp spike in foreign immigration, as “Brazilians [...] were among the first to take advantage of the opportunity provided by the large-scale construction of the space center”.¹³⁶ The same goes for illegal migration from Suriname, which has also created tensions between French Guiana (as well as France itself) and its neighbors.¹³⁷

Brazil and France share over 700 km of borders, with the river Oyapock accounting for 400 kilometers of that, acting as a natural boundary. Prior to a few years ago, the sole means of crossing the border was by boat. It is on this river that the Oyapock Bridge was opened in 2017. This bridge is highly significant, as it serves as the main and exclusive physical connection between Brazil and Europe.¹³⁸ According to Thery, rather than economic reasoning, geopolitical considerations played a major role in this decision's outcome.¹³⁹ It was not based on diplomatic logic or a comprehensive assessment of potential economic benefits.

Although construction of the project was finished in 2011, it had not been opened for traffic or officially inaugurated until 2017. This delay has the unfortunate effect of transforming this expensive construction between the two countries into a symbol of miscommunication and disagreement. The primary source of the issue was the presence of a Brazilian orphanage in Guyana, which needed to be closed in order for the symbol to take on the importance that its proponents had planned. The question lies in why such an extravagant bridge was constructed for an estimated traffic volume of only around 200

¹³⁶ Mathieu Nacher et al., “Migration in French Guiana: Implications in Health and Infectious Diseases,” *Travel Medicine and Infectious Disease* 57 (January 2024): 102677, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tmaid.2023.102677>.

¹³⁷ Mathieu Nacher et al., “Migration in French Guiana: Implications in Health and Infectious Diseases,” *Travel Medicine and Infectious Disease* 57 (January 2024): 102677, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tmaid.2023.102677>.

¹³⁸ Madeleine Boudoux d’Hautefeuille, “Borders and Scales: The Challenges of a Cross-Border Bridge between French Guiana and Brazil,” *Cybergeo*, December 15, 2010, <https://doi.org/10.4000/cybergeo.23405>.

¹³⁹ Hervé Théry, “À Quoi Sert La Guyane ?,” *Outre-Terre* N° 43, no. 2 (October 23, 2015): 211–35, <https://doi.org/10.3917/oute1.043.0211>.

vehicles per day, which could have been significantly less expensively accommodated by upgraded roads. They explains that this can only be clarified by considering the regional geopolitical dynamics and the diplomatic relations between Brazil and its neighboring countries to the north.¹⁴⁰

5.2.5. Conclusions on French Guiana as a geopolitical asset

In conclusion, French Guiana has held an important position as a geopolitical asset for the EU, even prior to the mid-2000s when we observe the shift in discourse. Due to its distinctive geographical position on the northeastern coast of South America and its close proximity to the equator, it is a crucial resource for the EU, especially in the field of space exploration and satellite launches. The GSC in French Guiana is a crucial geopolitical asset for Europe, providing autonomous space access, reducing reliance on the US and Russia for space exploration, and providing technological and strategic sovereignty. The significance of the GSC began with the first launch of the Ariane 1 rocket in 1980, with the initiation of the Ariane program. This program played a vital role in European space missions, enhancing the EU's capacity to launch commercial, scientific, and military satellites. The introduction of Ariane 5 in 2003 strongly enhanced the EU's ability to launch larger payloads, hence strengthening the GSC's position in global satellite launches and making important contributions to global satellite communications and Earth observation capabilities.

In line with the shift in discourse previously discussed, during the mid-2000s, the GSC intensified its endeavors, emphasizing its increasing geopolitical importance. The launch of the GIOVE-A in 2005, the first test satellite for the Galileo Satellite Navigation

¹⁴⁰ Hervé Théry, "À Quoi Sert La Guyane ?," *Outre-Terre* N° 43, no. 2 (October 23, 2015): 211–35, <https://doi.org/10.3917/oute1.043.0211>.

System, marked a significant strategic achievement. Galileo offers accurate location data, bolstering the EU's independence in crucial infrastructure and decreasing dependence on the US GPS system. Starting in 2008, the GSC experienced growth as Ariane 5 successfully launched the 20-ton ATV to the ISS. This solidified Europe's role as a crucial contributor to global space collaboration. The GSC's jurisdiction was broadened following the implementation of the Soyuz spacecraft in 2011 and the establishment of the ELS launch site.

The collaboration with Roscosmos, the Russian space agency, serves as a prime example of heightened international space cooperation, bolstering political and technological relations between Europe and Russia. Furthermore, the GSC's 2012 Vega launch vehicle improved its capabilities for smaller satellites, for Earth observation and scientific missions, and its 2021 launch of the James Webb Space Telescope highlighted this significance. The GSC's current involvement in European space initiatives is characterized by its preparations for the Ariane 6 rocket, with the goal of improving cost-effectiveness and flexibility. Increased importance of the GSC is also characterized by the rise in budget allocated by the EU for the ESA. In 2024, the budget of the European Space Agency (ESA) is projected to reach €7.79 billion, with the EU contributing €1,822.6 million to this amount.

Although French Guiana has numerous benefits, it also has obstacles that necessitate ongoing investment and strategic partnerships. The deteriorating infrastructure at the GSC, competition from other space service providers, and regional diplomatic tensions require continuous measures to preserve and improve its strategic significance. However, The benefits offered by French Guiana to the EU's geopolitical approach, particularly in the fields of space exploration and international relations, are crucial.

Ultimately, French Guiana is a valuable resource for the EU, as it helps it achieve its goals in space exploration and enhances its relations and presence in South America. Therefore, French Guiana holds diverse geopolitical significance, encompassing its contributions to space technology, economic development, and regional diplomacy.

5.3. Case Study 2 - Indian Ocean ORs (Réunion Island and Mayotte) as geopolitical assets

5.3.1. Indian Ocean ORs

Réunion Island and Mayotte are French ORs situated in the strategically significant Indian Ocean. Réunion, with around 2,512 square kilometers and inhabited by around 860,000 people, is located east of Madagascar. The island is renowned for its varied topography, with both active volcanoes and forests, as well as a culture that draws numerous inspiration from African, Indian, Chinese, and European traditions.¹⁴¹ Mayotte is an archipelago located between Madagascar and the coast of Mozambique. The archipelago has an area of around 374 square kilometers and is home to a population of around 290,000 inhabitants. Mayotte is known for its diverse marine life and strong Comorian cultural influence.¹⁴² In the context of this research, it is important to note that Mayotte used to be an OCT, and only obtained the status of OR in 2014 after decision of the EU Council, and was therefore fully integrated into the EU treaties then.¹⁴³ Its previous

¹⁴¹ “Outermost Regions at a Glance – Assets, Challenges and Opportunities,” European Commission, May 3, 2022, https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/policy/themes/outermost-regions/rup-2022/comm-rup-2022-glance_en.pdf.

¹⁴² “Outermost Regions at a Glance – Assets, Challenges and Opportunities,” European Commission, May 3, 2022.

¹⁴³ “EUROPEAN COUNCIL DECISION of 11 July 2012 Amending the Status of Mayotte with Regard to the European Union (2012/419/EU),” Access to the European Union Law, July 11, 2012, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32012D0419&rid=3>.

status as OCT may have impacted its relationship with the EU, but also France and the implementation of policies and actions in Mayotte.

Réunion and Mayotte are highly valuable to the EU because of their strategic positions in the Indian Ocean. Their region serves as a critical maritime corridor connecting Europe to Asia and the Middle East, which plays a vital role in facilitating international trade and naval activities.¹⁴⁴ In this region, piracy is also a major problem, especially off the coast of Somalia and in the Mozambique Channel, which is developing into a new security hotspot in the Indian Ocean, disrupting trade shipments. The exclusive economic zones (EEZ) of Réunion and Mayotte greatly enlarge the EU's maritime areas, providing it with access to extensive marine resources and enhancing its geopolitical power. The combined EEZ of Réunion and Mayotte offer advantageous opportunities for the EU to engage in scientific investigations, particularly in marine and environmental sciences, as well as fishing.¹⁴⁵

The Indo-Pacific region as a whole includes some of the most crucial maritime corridors in the world, such as the Strait of Malacca, the Suez Canal, or the Mozambique Channel which makes it a central area of concern for maritime security.¹⁴⁶ The strategic rivalry between important nations like the United States, China, and India as each tries to establish their dominance over these crucial maritime pathways, increases the region's strategic significance. Regional collaboration and the participation of external actors, such as the EU, are essential for ensuring the stability and security of the maritime areas of the Indo-Pacific region. Therefore, the existence of the islands of Réunion and Mayotte as ORs

¹⁴⁴ “Outermost Regions at a Glance – Assets, Challenges and Opportunities,” European Commission, May 3, 2022.

¹⁴⁵ “Geopolitics in the Indo-Pacific: Major Players’ Strategic Perspectives,” European Parliament, July 2023, [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2023/751398/EPRS_BRI\(2023\)751398_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2023/751398/EPRS_BRI(2023)751398_EN.pdf).

¹⁴⁶ “Geopolitics in the Indo-Pacific: Major Players’ Strategic Perspectives,” European Parliament, July 2023.

in the EU, strengthens the EU's capacity to exert influence and provide safety in a region characterized by growing rivalry from major global players such as China and India, or even the United States.¹⁴⁷

5.3.2. EU maritime security

Maritime security has been an essential components for global security. It involves safeguarding maritime areas against a number of threats, such as piracy, terrorism, illicit fishing, and even environmental dangers. With more than 80% of all global trade taking place by sea, it is imperative to maintain safe and open oceans. With the increasing impact of globalization, maritime security has adapted to tackle a range of complex issues. These include the protection of sea lines of communication, the safeguarding of marine resources, and the assurance of safety for maritime infrastructure.¹⁴⁸ The need to address emerging threats to marine systems and the effects of climate change on coastal areas, particularly in the early 2000s in the waters near Somalia, motivated this evolution.¹⁴⁹

The EU's focus on maritime security has seen substantial development, indicating an increasing acknowledgment of its strategic significance. The seas and oceans play a crucial role for the EU and its member states. 23 EU member states have access to the sea. These states have jurisdiction over the 90,000 kilometers of coastline that form the shores of four seas and two oceans. Over time, the EU's maritime security policy have grown beyond protecting its maritime boundaries and economic interests to encompass global

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

¹⁴⁸ Emanuele Ferrari, Panayotis Christidis, and Paolo Bolsi, "The Impact of Rising Maritime Transport Costs on International Trade: Estimation Using a Multi-Region General Equilibrium Model," *Transportation Research Interdisciplinary Perspectives* 22 (November 2023): 100985, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.trip.2023.100985>.

¹⁴⁹ Federico Carbone and Giovanni Accordi, "The Indian Ocean Coast of Somalia," *Marine Pollution Bulletin* 41 (2000): 141–59, https://www.nairobiconvention.org/clearinghouse/sites/default/files/The-Indian-Ocean-Coast-of-Somalia_2000_Marine-Pollution-Bulletin.pdf.

concerns. For many decades, individual states were seen as the primary actors in maritime security, with France and the UK as the two European states with the biggest naval capabilities and activities. The EU's involvement in maritime security began in the early 2000s, with a particular emphasis on combating piracy and safeguarding marine commerce routes. According to Germond, geopolitical factors have an impact on the EU's maritime security strategy, and the EU considers maritime areas both within and outside its periphery to possess significant strategic importance.¹⁵⁰

In 2007, The implementation of the Lisbon Treaty strengthened the capacity of the EU to enforce common security and defense strategies, including maritime security as well. The treaty highlighted the responsibility of EU member states to safeguard maritime borders and defend maritime interests. In 2008, the EU emerged as a global actor for maritime security, when it adopted the Integrated Maritime Policy, as well as its first naval mission, Operation Atlanta. The initiation of Operation Atalanta in 2008, with the objective of countering piracy along the coast of Somalia, was a significant event that demonstrated the EU's dedication to ensuring the safety of crucial maritime routes. Later, in 2014, the EU implemented the Maritime Security Strategy (EUMSS), a comprehensive framework aimed at effectively tackling various maritime security challenges. The policy emphasized protecting EU maritime interests, the advancement of international collaboration, and the assurance of the security of marine transportation routes.¹⁵¹ In the years that followed, the

¹⁵⁰ Basil Germond, "The Geopolitical Dimension of Maritime Security," *Marine Policy* 54 (April 2015): 137–42, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.marpol.2014.12.013>.

¹⁵¹ European Commission, "For an open and secure global maritime domain: elements for a European Union maritime security strategy (JOIN/2014/9)", 6 March 2014, <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/en/TXT/?uri=celex:52014JC0009>.

EU proved its commitment to maritime security with Operation Sophia and deepening of the maritime policies.¹⁵²

In line with increasing priority on maritime policies and security, in 2020, the EU released the Indo-Pacific Strategy, a comprehensive strategy guiding EU external action in the region, which includes Mayotte and Réunion. The strategy for this region is key for the EU's role as a global actor as the Indo-Pacific is situated at the center of increasing geopolitical competition in trade, as well as in technology and security.¹⁵³ The EU approach to the Indo-Pacific has a strong focus on maritime security, emphasizing the importance of securing sea routes and increasing collaboration with partners in the region. The strategy is known to be highly motivated by France, who “has important strategic assets in the region”,¹⁵⁴ and has been one of the drivers of EU efforts to coordinate the Indo-Pacific strategy.¹⁵⁵ France includes many of its overseas territories, including the ORs of Mayotte and Réunion.¹⁵⁶ Because of their strategic location, the size and resources of their maritime domain, their involvement in ecological transition, and the presence of a vast network of agencies and research institutes, these French islands play a critical role in regional cooperation.¹⁵⁷

¹⁵² Thierry Tardy, Operation Sophia: Tackling the refugee crisis with military means, September 2015,

https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/193999/Brief_30_Operation_Sophia.pdf.

Eva Pejsova, “The EU as a Maritime Security Provider,” Publications Office of the EU, 2019,

<https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/a852af1c-3d8f-11ea-ba6e-01aa75ed71a1/language-en>.

¹⁵³ “EU Indo-Pacific Strategy,” EEAS - European External Action Service, January 2024,

<https://www.eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/documents/2024/EU%20Indo-pacific%20FS-01-24-V3.pdf>.

¹⁵⁴ Gesine Weber, “Why French Leadership in the Indo-Pacific Will Be a Real Asset for the EU – CEPS,” CEPS, November 14, 2022,

<https://www.ceps.eu/why-french-leadership-in-the-indo-pacific-will-be-a-real-asset-for-the-eu/>.

¹⁵⁵ Manisha Reuter and Frédéric Grare, “La Vision Européenne de l’Indopacifique,” ECFR, December 28, 2021, <https://ecfr.eu/paris/publication/la-vision-europeenne-de-lindopacifique/>.

¹⁵⁶ Gesine Weber, “Why French Leadership in the Indo-Pacific Will Be a Real Asset for the EU – CEPS,” CEPS, November 14, 2022,

<https://www.ceps.eu/why-french-leadership-in-the-indo-pacific-will-be-a-real-asset-for-the-eu/>.

¹⁵⁷ “France’s Indo-Pacific Strategy Summary,” Ministère de l’Europe et des Affaires étrangères, July 2021, https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/IMG/pdf/en_a4_indopacifique_synthese_rvb_cle068e51.pdf.

Overall, this strategy emphasizes the EU's intensified activity in the Indo-Pacific region, leveraging its ORs, Réunion and Mayotte, as valuable strategic assets. The EU seeks to strengthen its maritime surveillance and enhance naval capabilities in these regions in order to project power and safeguard the security of maritime areas from growing threats. Hence, in 2023, the EU updated its maritime policy into the European Maritime Security Strategy (EUMSS) and states that “The Strategy will be implemented by the EU and its Member States, in line with their respective competences”.¹⁵⁸ In this aspect, it is crucial to acknowledge that EU member states possess varying maritime capabilities and assets, but also have differing interests depending on the region. Here, France stands out as the member state with the most extensive naval capabilities, with access to numerous oceans and seas outside the coasts of continental Europe, and with a strong national interest in the Indo-Pacific. As a result, France conducts the majority of the geopolitical activities in the region in line with the EU's goals and objectives for maritime security while leveraging its regions overseas, which include Réunion and Mayotte.¹⁵⁹

5.3.3. Réunion’s and Mayotte’s role in maritime security

Although France has historically been a maritime power, it is in the mid-2000s that the island of Réunion and Mayotte (to a lesser extent) have grown in geopolitical significance for maritime security in the area. Réunion’s role in maritime surveillance began in 2004, when France appointed Réunion as one of seven of its Regional Operating Surveillance and Rescue Centers (CROSS). The aim of CROSS is to manage and organize marine security and survey operations. Since 2005, the Commanders of maritime zones

¹⁵⁸ “Maritime Security: EU Updates Strategy to Safeguard Maritime Domain against New Threats,” European Commission, March 10, 2023, https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_23_1483.

¹⁵⁹ Gesine Weber, “Why French Leadership in the Indo-Pacific Will Be a Real Asset for the EU – CEPS,” CEPS, November 14, 2022, <https://www.ceps.eu/why-french-leadership-in-the-indo-pacific-will-be-a-real-asset-for-the-eu/>.

(CZM)¹⁶⁰ began assisting the Prefect of the Réunion, appointed as the Delegate of the Government for State Action at Sea, giving Réunion a big role in French maritime security. France has deployed approximately 1,650 soldiers to its primary territorial assets, namely La Réunion, Mayotte, and Îles Éparses. These have been under the administration of La Réunion since 2005. Therefore, Réunion hosts France's largest overseas military installation, where the French Navy conducts surveillance operations.¹⁶¹ Since 2007, the CZM contributes to the French and European security.¹⁶²

As mentioned earlier in the research, Operation Atalanta, also known as EU NAVFOR Somalia, is an EU military operation focused on countering piracy off the coast of Somalia and protecting vulnerable shippings in the Indian Ocean. Mayotte and Réunion host French naval assets that are part of the EU NAVFOR operations, such as the Floreal class Frigate Nivose (Frégate de Surveillance) in Réunion. The French Frégate Nivose has had several successful operations such as in 2009, when 11 suspected Somali pirates were apprehended in the Indian Ocean off the coast of Kenya.¹⁶³ In 2014, the Frégate Nivose conducted a large-scale aero-maritime action that allowed to intercept five Malaysian vessels in illegal fishing, near the French island of Juan de Nova.¹⁶⁴ The naval forces engage in the activities of patrolling, safeguarding merchant vessels, and addressing piracy incidents. Moreover, with aerial surveillance playing a crucial role in the operation, Réunion regularly has aircrafts stationed to conduct surveillance missions in the Indian

¹⁶⁰ Commandants de zone maritime

¹⁶¹ Liselotte, Odgaard, "European Engagement in the Indo-Pacific: The Interplay between Institutional and State-Level Naval Diplomacy.", *Asia Policy* 14, no. 4 (2019): 129–60, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26867620>.

¹⁶² "OCÉAN INDIEN - La France, Puissance de Stabilité," Ministère des Armées, May 2021, <https://www.cheminsdememoire.gouv.fr/sites/default/files/2021-07/France%20oc%C3%A9an%20Indien.pdf>.

¹⁶³ "French Navy Captures Suspected Somali Pirates," France 24, May 4, 2009, <https://www.france24.com/en/20090504-french-navy-captures-suspected-somali-pirates->.

¹⁶⁴ "FAZSOI : Le Nivôse Intercepte Des Pêcheurs Illégaux," Archives.defense.gouv.fr, April 9, 2014, <https://archives.defense.gouv.fr/operations/territoire-national/forces-de-souverainete/forces-armees-dans-la-z-one-sud-de-l-ocean-indien/breves/fazsoi-le-nivose-intercepte-des-pecheurs-illegaux.html>.

Ocean with the aim to provide real time information to detect and discourage piracy operations.

They also provide logistical assistance with Réunion which serves as a central operational center for EU NAVFOR, offering essential assistance for prolonged missions, such as resupply operations, manpower rotations, and medical facilities.¹⁶⁵ Mayotte, located in the Mozambique Channel, enables the monitoring and regulation of maritime traffic that traverses this critical route, which is essential for counter-piracy efforts. Additionally, it serves as a close operating base to ensure prompt and efficient reaction to situations taking place in the Mozambique Channel and its adjacent regions. Indeed, the military forces of the southern Indian Ocean Zone (FAZSOI) ensure the safeguarding of the national territory and promote regional collaboration, starting from Réunion in the late 1990s, and since 2016, in Mayotte as well. They serve as the primary force in the Indian Ocean region to address local challenges, such as piracy or illegal immigration, oversee the exclusive economic zones of all the islands in the area, and uphold a fast reaction capability in the region. The naval forces are stationed in two locations, Réunion, where the naval facility at Port des Galets is situated, and Mayotte, where Dzaoudzi is located.¹⁶⁶

Further evolution supporting the significant of ORs as geopolitical assets in maritime security is the establishment of the Réunion-Mayotte Defense Base Support Group (GSBdD) on January 1, 2011. They provide support and overall management operations for the Armed Forces of the Southern Indian Ocean.¹⁶⁷ Cooperation with

¹⁶⁵ Liselotte, Odgaard, “European Engagement in the Indo-Pacific: The Interplay between Institutional and State-Level Naval Diplomacy,” *Asia Policy* 14, no. 4 (2019): 129–60, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26867620>.

¹⁶⁶ “Forces Armées Dans La Zone-Sud de l’océan Indien,” Ministère des Armées, June 2023, <https://www.defense.gouv.fr/operations/forces-prepositionnees/forces-souverainete/forces-armees-zone-sud-l-ocean-indien>.

¹⁶⁷ “Les Groupements de Soutien de Base de Défense / GSBdD,” Ministère des Armées, accessed July 2024, <https://www.defense.gouv.fr/commissariat/mieux-nous-connaître/implantation/groupements-soutien-base-defense-gsbdd>.

regional partners, especially India, is a crucial part of France's and the EU's goals in the region. Therefore, in March 2018, India and France entered into a strategic agreement, granting access to their naval bases for each other's warships in the Indian Ocean. Consequently, France has the advantage of having a series of naval installations located in Djibouti, Abu Dhabi, the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, Réunion, and Mayotte, extending all the way to Singapore and the South China Sea. The naval facility of Héron in Djibouti, belonging to France, is linked to its military presence in Mayotte, Réunion, and the Îles Éparses. These locations are strategically utilized to maintain control over the Mozambique Channel, Madagascar, and Comoros.¹⁶⁸

In 2020, during the Covid-19 crisis, in order to protect the welfare of crews and ensure safe navigation, the EU and France have advocated for a regulated resumption of land traffic for seafarers of all nationalities. From the beginning of 2020, Port Réunion in the Indian Ocean played a crucial role for Europe and France by implementing a sanitary corridor that allowed sailors to immediately reach the port or airport on the same day.¹⁶⁹ In 2022, Réunion became the meeting point for a French and Indian joint maritime surveillance mission in Mozambique. As part of a coordinated mission, maritime patrol aircraft stationed on Réunion, such as the French Navy's Falcon 50, along with Indian Navy's P-81 Poseidon routinely carry out surveillance flights over areas with a high level of risk in the Réunion's exclusive economic zone.¹⁷⁰ Maritime patrol aircraft based in Réunion, such as the French Navy's Falcon 50, conduct regular surveillance flights over

¹⁶⁸ Liselotte, Odgaard, "European Engagement in the Indo-Pacific: The Interplay between Institutional and State-Level Naval Diplomacy.", *Asia Policy* 14, no. 4 (2019): 129–60, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26867620>.

¹⁶⁹ "La Gestion Des Situations de Crise En Mer," Les services de l'État à La Réunion, accessed July 2024, <https://www.reunion.gouv.fr/index.php/Actions-de-l-Etat/Mer-littoral-et-securite-maritime/Securite-maritime/La-gestion-des-situations-de-crise-en-mer>.

¹⁷⁰ "India and France Conduct Joint Surveillance in Indian Ocean," The Maritime Executive, November 18, 2022, <https://maritime-executive.com/article/india-and-france-conduct-joint-surveillance-in-indian-ocean>.

high-risk areas. These missions gather vital intelligence that informs naval operations and helps protect shipping lanes.¹⁷¹

Recently, France has been intensifying its surveillance of the important maritime routes in the region, specifically focusing on Réunion and the Mozambique Channel. As an EU member, France, specifically its Regional Operational Centre for Surveillance and Rescue (CROSS) in Réunion, makes use of the services provided by the European Maritime Safety Agency (EMSA). These services include Copernicus, which is used for overall surveillance of the area. The Réunion Commissioner, the government's envoy for maritime affairs, with assistance from the Maritime Zone Commander, leads the coordinated efforts of all of its services and the military's strong presence to facilitate this participation. The current focus lies in combating illicit activity in maritime domains, safeguarding natural resources, and effectively handling maritime incidents.¹⁷²

Because the EU's leverage is limited in involvement in maritime security chokepoints, France, with its ORs, has a significant role in maintaining maritime security in the southern Indian Ocean with its civilian-military capabilities in Réunion and Mayotte, which helps position Europe as a significant participant and transatlantic ally in the Indo-Pacific region, demonstrating tangible actions rather than just rhetoric.¹⁷³ France and other European allies are currently intensifying their efforts to reduce the maritime challenges in the Indo-Pacific regions.¹⁷⁴ Nevertheless, establishing a long-lasting presence

¹⁷¹ "FRANCE AND SECURITY IN THE INDO-PACIFIC," France in the US, May 2019, https://franceintheus.org/IMG/pdf/France_and_Security_in_the_Indo-Pacific_-_2019.pdf.

¹⁷² "Maritime Security: Building the Future Together," Commission Ocean Indien, June 2019, <https://www.commissionoceanindien.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/MASE-Magazine-complete-Eng-Digital.pdf>.

¹⁷³ Eva Pejsova, "The EU as a Maritime Security Provider," Publications Office of the EU, 2019, <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/a852af1c-3d8f-11ea-ba6e-01aa75ed71a1/language-en>.

¹⁷⁴ "Maritime Security: Building the Future Together," Commission Ocean Indien, June 2019.

of EU may remain a tricky task, due to differing national interests of member states.¹⁷⁵

Today, Réunion is home to France's largest overseas base, where the French Navy operates a center dedicated to monitoring and integrating intelligence.¹⁷⁶ The EU provides funding for the research and development of the island, including for maritime intelligence and surveillance.¹⁷⁷

5.3.4. Double membership - Indian Ocean Commission (IOC)

Réunion has another important geopolitical role in the region, that of its membership in the Indian Ocean Commission (IOC). This intergovernmental organization comprises five member states: France representing Réunion, the Union of Comoros, Madagascar, Mauritius and the Seychelles.¹⁷⁸ Mayotte is not a member of the IOC, particularly due to tensions between Mayotte and the Union Of Comoros. In 2014, France has formally requested membership for Mayotte.¹⁷⁹ The IOC was established in 1984, through the General Agreement on Cooperation, also referred to as the 'Victoria Agreement'. This is the only regional organization in Africa comprised solely of islands. It advocates for the distinct characteristics of its member states in both continental and international arenas. The IOC effectively promotes regional solidarity by collaborating with twelve international partners on various cooperation projects. These projects involve a diverse range of sectors, including ecosystem preservation, sustainable natural resource

¹⁷⁵ Nick Childs, "New EU Maritime Security Strategy: Adjusting the Compass?," International Institute for Strategic Studies, March 30, 2023, <https://www.iiss.org/en/online-analysis/military-balance/2023/04/new-eu-maritime-security-strategy-adjusting-the-compass/>.

¹⁷⁶ Liselotte, Odgaard, "European Engagement in the Indo-Pacific: The Interplay between Institutional and State-Level Naval Diplomacy.," *Asia Policy* 14, no. 4 (2019): 129–60, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26867620>.

¹⁷⁷ Eva Pejsova, "The EU as a Maritime Security Provider," Publications Office of the EU, 2019, <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/a852af1c-3d8f-11ea-ba6e-01aa75ed71a1/language-en>.

¹⁷⁸ "IOC Presentation," Commission de l'océan Indien, March 24, 2023, <https://www.commissionoceanindien.org/en/ioc-presentation/>.

¹⁷⁹ Frédéric Banc, "Commission de l'Océan Indien: La France Plaide Pour l'intégration de Mayotte," *Le Quotidien*, May 18, 2024, <https://www.lequotidien.re/category/actualites/ocean-indien/mayotte/>.

management, maritime safety, entrepreneurship, public health, renewable energy, and culture.¹⁸⁰

As a member of the IOC, France benefits from a structure that facilitates ongoing communication with the countries in the region, and has the opportunity to collaborate with other islands in the region. This also allows Reunion to become part of regional collaboration in the southwestern region of the Indian Ocean. France is a member of the IOC, which is the sole regional African organization it is a member of. The IOC's expertise in various areas of initiatives that strengthen regional integration of the islands has been recognized since its establishment. The IOC has obtained funding from the EU or the French Agency for Development for regional projects.¹⁸¹ In fact, the EU is the IOC's first financial partner.¹⁸²

Under the co-presidency of the IOC, the CRIMARIO and MASE programs, which are supported by the EU have the objective of improving marine security and situational awareness in the Western Indian Ocean. CRIMARIO, established in 2015 with a funding of €5.5 million, is dedicated to enhancing maritime situational awareness by integrating data, facilitating information exchange, and fostering capacity development among nations such as Comoros, Kenya, Madagascar, Mauritius, and Seychelles.¹⁸³ MASE, which received €37.5 million EU funding from 2013 to 2020, aims to enhance marine safety and security. As part of its efforts, MASE has successfully created the Regional marine Information

¹⁸⁰ "IOC Presentation," Commission de l'océan Indien, March 24, 2023, <https://www.commissionoceanindien.org/en/ioc-presentation/>.

¹⁸¹ "La France et La Commission de l'océan Indien," France Diplomatie - Ministère de l'Europe et des Affaires étrangères, accessed July 2024, https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/fr/dossiers-pays/strategies-regionales/indopacifique/les-organisations-regionales-de-l-indopacifique/article/la-france-et-la-commission-de-l-ocean-indien#sommaire_3.

¹⁸² "Maritime Security: Building the Future Together," Commission Ocean Indien, June 2019, <https://www.commissionoceanindien.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/MASE-Magazine-complete-Eng-Digital.pdf>.

¹⁸³ "Maritime Security: Building the Future Together," Commission Ocean Indien, June 2019.

Fusion Centre in Madagascar and the Regional Coordination Centre for Maritime Operations in the Seychelles. Réunion is crucial to this collaboration as it serves as a strategic center. The island's sophisticated infrastructure, which includes the Indian Ocean marine Security Centre (CRFIM), aids these endeavors by improving marine monitoring, promoting regional collaboration, and simplifying the exchange of information. The participation of Réunion guarantees the successful execution of CRIMARIO and MASE goals, thereby playing a crucial role in strengthening marine security in the region and enhancing the EU's influence in the Indian Ocean.

5.3.5. Conclusions on Indian Ocean ORs as geopolitical assets

As discussed in the chapter on the evolution of discourse, the shift in perception of the ORs from solely challenged and insular regions, to strategic geopolitical assets occurred in the mid-2000s. This shift is apparent in the policies that have been put into effect in Réunion and Mayotte, the Indian Ocean ORs. Historically important for France's naval capabilities, their strategic importance expanded significantly in 2004 when Réunion was designated as a Regional Operating Surveillance and Rescue Center (CROSS). Starting in 2005, the CZM started providing support to the Prefect of Réunion, thereby strengthening its involvement in maritime security. At this period, the strategic military reinforcement of these territories was emphasized by the deployment of soldiers to Réunion, Mayotte, and Îles Éparses. By 2007, the CZM's responsibility expanded to include protecting national interests in maritime areas, in accordance with the changing geopolitical discussions. The responsibility given to Réunion for maritime security in the region laid the foundations for further involvement of Réunion in the area.

The roles of the ORs at the European level were strengthened as a result of their participation in EU Operation Atalanta (EU NAVFOR Somalia) since 2008, with French naval assets in these areas playing crucial roles in counter-piracy operations. This directly linked the two islands to European security. The creation of the Réunion-Mayotte Defense Base Support Group in 2011 strengthened collaborative efforts in the Southern Indian Ocean, aligning with the strategic objective of bolstering regional military coordination. In 2018, the establishment of a strategic relationship with India allowed for reciprocal access to naval bases, highlighting the increasing significance of these overseas regions in maintaining regional security. In 2020, while the COVID-19 epidemic, the strategic significance of Port Réunion was underscored by the development of a sanitary corridor. Two years later, Réunion assumed a crucial position in a French-Indian maritime surveillance mission in Mozambique.

The inclusion of Réunion in the IOC amplifies its geopolitical importance. As the delegate of France in this intergovernmental body, which comprises Comoros, Madagascar, Mauritius, and Seychelles, Réunion actively participates in regional cooperation. CRIMARIO and MASE, projects backed by the EU, have the specific objective of enhancing maritime security and situational awareness in the Western Indian Ocean. Réunion, because to its infrastructure and regional significance, holds a crucial position in these efforts.

Today, with two French frigate, patrol aircrafts, and patrol boats stationed on Réunion, the OR proves to be of great strategic importance for French and EU goals. Mayotte also holds strategic importance in maritime security with its position in the Mozambique Chanel, but is not leveraged as much as Réunion in these matters, and is not a member of the IOC yet. This is partly due to the unstable situation in Mayotte, its rather

recent status as an OR, a high flux of illegal migration from the Comores, but also Mayotte's smaller size. Nonetheless, Mayotte and Réunion both play a crucial role in the success of Operation Atalanta by offering strategic positions, naval and aerial resources, and logistical assistance that strengthen the EU's capacity to carry out efficient counter-piracy missions in the Indian Ocean. Their participation highlights their significance as geopolitical resources in the EU's wider geopolitical agenda in the Indo-Pacific region.

5.4. Case study 3 - Caribbean ORs (Guadeloupe, Martinique and Saint-Martin)

5.4.1. Caribbean ORs

Guadeloupe is an archipelago with an estimated population of around 400,000 inhabitants.¹⁸⁴ It has an abundant cultural heritage, diverse range of species, and advantageous position within the Lesser Antilles. Its primary islands, Grande-Terre and Basse-Terre, holds the centers for both economic and administrative activities of Guadeloupe.¹⁸⁵ Martinique is an island, also located in the Lesser Antilles, with a population of approximately 380,000 inhabitants.¹⁸⁶ It has a rich cultural past and considerably contributes to tourism, agriculture, and industry in the Lesser Antilles. Saint-Martin is distinctive among its counterparts due to its division between two nations on one territory, the northern section, Saint-Martin, French OR, while the southern section, Sint Maarten, which is a constituent country of the Kingdom of the Netherlands.¹⁸⁷ The

¹⁸⁴ "Régions Ultrapériphériques (RUP)," European Parliament, March 2023, https://www.europarl.europa.eu/erpl-app-public/factsheets/pdf/fr/FTU_3.1.7.pdf.

¹⁸⁵ "Guadeloupe," Ministère de l'Intérieur et des Outre-mer, March 11, 2022, <https://www.outre-mer.gouv.fr/territoires/guadeloupe>.

¹⁸⁶ "Régions Ultrapériphériques (RUP)," European Parliament, March 2023.

¹⁸⁷ Marie Redon, "Saint-Martin/Sint-Maarten, Une Petite Île Divisée Pour de Grands Enjeux," *Cahiers d'Outre-Mer* 59, no. 234 (April 1, 2006): 233–66, <https://doi.org/10.4000/com.73>.

French side of the island has a population of approximately 35,000 and is renowned for its economy that relies heavily on tourism and its diverse cultural atmosphere. This makes Saint-Martin the smallest French OR.¹⁸⁸

The EU has recognized the potential of its ORs in the Caribbean to strengthen its ties with Latin American and Caribbean (LAC) countries. By enhancing bilateral and regional frameworks, the EU has aimed to upgrade political, trade, and cooperation agreements with almost all LAC countries.¹⁸⁹ Nonetheless, despite their strategic locations, the Caribbean ORs have a less pronounced geopolitical impact compared to the other, previously presented, French ORs. Their geopolitical involvement is translated into various, less prominent actions across various policy areas.

5.4.2. Disaster response and humanitarian assistance

The involvement of the EU in humanitarian aid through PIRAC and other initiatives also contributes to regional stability, which is a key geopolitical interest. The creation of the Regional Intervention Platform for the Americas and the Caribbean (PIRAC) in 2006, under the management of the French Red Cross, demonstrates the proactive actions undertaken by Guadeloupe, and Martinique. PIRAC is co-financed by the EU and the French Agency for Development, PIRAC's emergency intervention stockpiles, including tents, survival kits, medications, water treatment units, field hospitals, generators, and tanks, are strategically positioned to guarantee swift reaction to natural calamities in the

¹⁸⁸ “Régions Ultrapériphériques (RUP),” European Parliament, March 2023.

¹⁸⁹ “JOINT COMMUNICATION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND THE COUNCIL - A New Agenda for Relations between the EU and Latin America and the Caribbean,” European Commission, June 7, 2023, https://international-partnerships.ec.europa.eu/document/download/989b8b5f-c4ca-4352-bd8a-036f8b0f8f87_en?filename=JOIN_2023_17_1_EN_ACT_part1_v7.pdf.

Caribbean.¹⁹⁰ Providing humanitarian relief can bolster a country or region's influence and reputation in the international stage. In addition to meeting urgent humanitarian needs, this can improve diplomatic relations and promotes the union's or country's reputation as a trustworthy crisis partner.¹⁹¹

5.4.3. Participation in Regional Organizations

The ORs of the EU in the Caribbean have strategically aligned themselves with different regional organizations to strengthen their geopolitical power and promote regional collaboration. The ORs of the EU in the Caribbean have strategically aligned themselves with different regional organizations to strengthen their geopolitical power and promote regional collaboration. Starting from 2012, Guadeloupe, Martinique, and French Guiana have been considered as potential associate members of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM). This gave them only limited status and say in CARICOM.¹⁹² After more than 10 years, in September 2023, Martinique was approved as associate member of CARICOM, while Guadeloupe's candidacy as such remains on hold.¹⁹³ The EU's presence through these ORs facilitates regional trade agreements and economic alliances, like the Economic Partnership Agreements (EPA) with CARIFORUM. With the associate member status, Martinique can put forwards interests, propose programmes and benefit from

¹⁹⁰ "Supporting Activities Led by the Regional Intervention Platform for the Americas and the Caribbean (PIRAC)," AFD, 2019, <https://www.afd.fr/en/carte-des-projets/supporting-activities-led-regional-intervention-platform-americas-and-caribbean-pirac>.

¹⁹¹ Goran Bandov and Gabrijela Gošović, "Humanitarian Aid Policies Within the EU External Action," *Journal of Liberty and International Affairs, Institute for Research and European Studies - Bitola* 8, no. 3 (November 12, 2018): 25–39, <https://doi.org/10.47305/jlia2283>.

¹⁹² Dale Alexander and Carlyle Corbin, "Évaluation Des Possibilités d'une Meilleure Intégration Des Membres Associés de La Commission Économique Pour l'Amérique Latine et Les Caraïbes," Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, June 2017, <https://repositorio.cepal.org/server/api/core/bitstreams/3bd4d3be-3848-4125-925d-fe7dd986699a/content>.

¹⁹³ Dale Alexander and Carlyle Corbin, "Évaluation Des Possibilités d'une Meilleure Intégration Des Membres Associés de La Commission Économique Pour l'Amérique Latine et Les Caraïbes," Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, June 2017.

initiatives already put in place.¹⁹⁴ These accords, which encompass financial assistance from the EU, seek to enhance the global trade influence of Caribbean nations. This helps to integrate regional markets and offers the EU an advantageous entry point to these growing markets.

In 2014, Martinique and Guadeloupe joined the Association of Caribbean States (ACS) as associate members, signifying a notable advancement in their participation in regional development and political discourse. This membership enables these regions to actively engage in the formation of regional policies and initiatives, so contributing to the development of a more unified Caribbean community. Furthermore, Guadeloupe's status as an associate member of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (CEPALC) enables its participation in regional economic planning and development plans, reinforcing regional cooperation. Nevertheless, its integration as associate member in CEPALC means that Guadeloupe does not have a vote in the Commission.¹⁹⁵ In 2019, Guadeloupe joined the Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS) as a full member, while Saint Martin requested observer status.¹⁹⁶ The memberships highlight the dedication of the Caribbean ORs to fostering stronger economic and political connections within their geographical region.

¹⁹⁴ Caroline Popovic, "La Martinique Au Sein de La Caricom : Quels Inconvénients et Quels Avantages ?," France Info: Martinique la 1ère, July 10, 2023, <https://la1ere.francetvinfo.fr/martinique/la-martinique-au-sein-de-la-caricom-quels-inconvenients-et-quels-avantages-1412957.html>.

¹⁹⁵ Dale Alexander and Carlyle Corbin, "Évaluation Des Possibilités d'une Meilleure Intégration Des Membres Associés de La Commission Économique Pour l'Amérique Latine et Les Caraïbes," Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, June 2017.

¹⁹⁶ "Guadeloupe Formally Joins the Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States," The Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States, March 15, 2019, <https://pressroom.oecs.int/guadeloupe-formally-joins-the-organisation-of-eastern-caribbean-states>.

5.4.4. Strategic investment - Developing the Grand Port Maritime in Guadeloupe

In the early 2010s, there was a strong push to acknowledge the strategic importance of Guadeloupe's location, leading to the establishment of the Grand Port Maritime (GPM). As a result, in the past decade, the GPM has undergone significant expansion, solidifying its position as key hub for transshipment in the area. Supporting the EU's maritime policy and aspirations for international trade requires this transition. The early 2010s saw the growing realization of the necessity for a strong regional maritime infrastructure, which served as the catalyst for these initiatives. As part of acknowledging Guadeloupe's strategic location, the EU, French, and local authorities launched a series of initiatives meant to modernize and enlarge the port's infrastructure.¹⁹⁷

The notable increase in maritime traffic across the Caribbean in 2016 following the opening of new locks in the Panama Canal indicates that Guadeloupe has the potential to play a significant role as a transshipment hub. A detailed development strategy was implemented in order to take advantage of this opportunity. In order to update its infrastructure, the GPM had acquired investment of 135 million euros by 2018. In order to assist the EU's decarbonization ambitions, these modifications included the implementation of cutting-edge environmental measures. To establish the port as a key hub in the maritime logistics network serving the Caribbean, it was intended to enable it to handle bigger vessels.¹⁹⁸

¹⁹⁷ “Un plus Grand Port Pour Améliorer La Compétitivité de La Guadeloupe,” AFD - Agence Française de Développement, accessed July 2024, <https://www.afd.fr/fr/carte-des-projets/un-plus-grand-port-pour-ameliorer-la-competitivite-de-la-guadeloupe>.

¹⁹⁸ M. Bastide and R. Defrance, “Le Grand Port Maritime Pose Les Jalons de Son Avenir,” France Info: Guadeloupe la 1ère, January 23, 2024, <https://la1ere.francetvinfo.fr/guadeloupe/le-grand-port-maritime-pose-les-jalons-de-son-avenir-1459496.html>.

In addition to helping the local economy, the conversion of Guadeloupe's Grand Port marine into a regional transshipment hub is a calculated step that complements the EU's larger maritime strategy. The port's infrastructural improvements are expected to be fully finished by August 2025, allowing it to accommodate larger vessels and more traffic. This project helps the EU achieve its goals of international trade by acting as a crucial link in the supply chain that connects Europe, the Americas, and other regions. Due to its strategic position at the intersection of major east-west and north-south shipping routes, the port serves as an ideal hub for transferring goods, hence improving the productivity of global trade networks.¹⁹⁹

5.4.5. Limitations of Caribbean ORs

One of the reasons for the lack of leverage of the Caribbean ORs in the earlier 2000s - 2010s is the fact that the EU has been emerging as a strategic partner for Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) on the international global stage since the mid 2010s. Both EU and LAC regions, despite their distinct tendencies and geo-political changes, share convergences in global agendas and dynamics, offering opportunities for a bi-regional focus and deepening inter-regionalism, despite their distinct differences.²⁰⁰ Recently, in 2023, the European Commission released a joint communication for 'A New Agenda for Relations between the EU and Latin America and the Caribbean' in which the Commission states that "the EU-LAC relationship warrants a renewal".²⁰¹ This document

¹⁹⁹ M. Bastide and R. Defrance, "Le Grand Port Maritime Pose Les Jalons de Son Avenir," France Info: Guadeloupe la 1ère, January 23, 2024, <https://la1ere.francetvinfo.fr/guadeloupe/le-grand-port-maritime-pose-les-jalons-de-son-avenir-1459496.html>.

²⁰⁰ Andres Serbin, "Why Should the European Union Have Any Relevance for Latin America and the Caribbean?," EU LAC Foundation, April 20, 2019, <https://eulacfoundation.org/system/files/why-should-eu-relevance-lac-en-web.pdf>.

²⁰¹ "JOINT COMMUNICATION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND THE COUNCIL - A New Agenda for Relations between the EU and Latin America and the Caribbean," European Commission, June 7, 2023.

argues for a strengthening of relations, dialogue and cooperation between the EU-LAC countries and states that “EU presence in LAC through four outermost regions as well as the Overseas Countries and Territories is an asset to this partnership.”²⁰². This could potentially result into increased leverage of Caribbean ORs as geopolitical assets to this partnership in the future. There are other limits to the geopolitical influence that the EU exercises through its most Caribbean ORs, even in the face of notable advancements in the Grand Port Maritime of Guadeloupe and the strong humanitarian efforts spearheaded by the Regional Intervention Platform for the Americas and the Caribbean (PIRAC). A major limitation is that, despite their effectiveness, these programs are not directly proposed and implemented by the EU, but rather by, regional councils or France itself. Because of this decentralization, the EU may be seen as having less influence, which makes it more difficult to perceive them as coherent and unified geopolitical strategies.

Despite participation in several regional organizations, Guadeloupe’s and Martinique’s integration in the region remains limited, hence hindering their potential as geopolitical and strategic assets in practice. Indeed, its belonging to France has limited their regional integration. First, France has to approve their candidacies and memberships into each organization.²⁰³ This sometimes comes with tensions as both islands with several uprisings in the last decade due to socio-economic circumstances. Moreover, trade is an exclusive competence of the EU and with the euro as currency, it limits the ORs in decision-making and cooperation with neighbouring islands or countries.²⁰⁴ Finally, the

²⁰² Ibid.

²⁰³ “Guadeloupe, Martinique, Saint-Barthélemy et Saint-Martin : 4 Territoires de La République Dans La Caraïbe ,” Sénat, July 2023, <https://www.senat.fr/rap/r22-878/r22-8788.html>.

²⁰⁴ Ludvine Guiolet-Oulac, Kelly Pujar, and Yasmina Yacou, “Sans La Guadeloupe et La Martinique Toujours Candidates, Les Dirigeants de La Caraïbe Célèbrent Les 50 Ans de La Caricom,” France Info - Guadeloupe la 1ère, July 6, 2023, <https://la1ere.francetvinfo.fr/guadeloupe/sans-la-guadeloupe-et-la-martinique-toujours-candidates-les-dirigeants-de-la-caraibe-celebrent-les-50-ans-de-la-caricom-1411829.html>.

lack of regional integration between the islands and countries of the Greater and Lesser Antilles is also a major obstacle to leveraging the Caribbean ORs potential. There exist numerous obstacles to achieving integration in the region. The colonial history has given rise to diverse cultures and languages. The original development processes have been formed as a result of the level of development, significant foreign influences, particularly from historic metropolises, and the unequal distribution of natural wealth. Insularity serves as an extra factor of isolation for the Caribbean islands.²⁰⁵

5.4.6. Conclusions on Caribbean ORs as geopolitical assets

The European Union now views the Caribbean's Overseas Regions as strategic assets that can strengthen relationships with Latin American and Caribbean (LAC) countries. This recognition aligns with the broader change in EU discussion starting in the mid-2000s, highlighting the crucial importance of these regions. Though the EU's rhetoric started to recognize the importance of ORs earlier, concrete steps to capitalize on the geopolitical potential of the Caribbean ORs have been slower to start and have only recently gained momentum. However, it is important to note that this research has not observed prominent geopolitical action in Saint-Martin. Because of its small size and population, along with its divided territory and lack of participation in regional integration, Saint-Martin may be seen as a lesser geopolitical advantage for the EU.

In contrast to the Indian Ocean and French Guiana, the Caribbean ORs have had a weaker geopolitical influence over time, even with strategic investments and active involvement in regional organizations. For instance, while PIRAC's humanitarian

²⁰⁵ “COOPÉRATION AVEC LA CARAÏBE,” Region Guadeloupe, accessed July 2024, https://www.regionguadeloupe.fr/ma-region-un-territoire/la-region-ouverte-sur-le-monde/cooperation-avec-la-caraibe/#_.

endeavors and Guadeloupe's development as a center for transshipment in the region are significant, they are primarily driven by French initiatives and local government rather than direct involvement from the EU. The complex regional dynamics and decentralized structure of the Caribbean make it difficult for the EU to utilize these ORs to present a unified geopolitical agenda. In conclusion, the ORs of the EU in the Caribbean have started to play a more active role in regional integration and economic growth, but structural limitations and geographic fragmentation continue to limit their geopolitical influence. While the changing roles of these ORs demonstrate progress towards aligning actions with the EU's rhetoric, they also underscore the challenges in fully maximizing their potential as strategic assets in the global stage.

6. Findings

Changes in how the EU's ORs are perceived and leveraged in EU geopolitics have been noted through the evolution of discourse. At first, the ORs were mostly considered as distant regions with few economic prospects, resulting in cohesion policies and strategies aimed at alleviating economic hardships through assistance and funding. During the late 1990s and early 2000s, there were talks and debates focusing on economic and social issues, without any acknowledgment of the ORs as geopolitical advantages. In a 2000 speech, Michel Barnier highlighted the need for sustainable agricultural development and decreased unemployment in certain regions, failing to acknowledge their strategic significance. The viewpoint began shifting gradually due to wider geopolitical changes and the EU's growing awareness of the ORs' unique potential.

Gradually, the conversation has come to recognize the ORs as significant geopolitical resources. The 2008 Commission policy paper "The Outermost Regions – an Asset for Europe" brought attention to a significant change. It highlighted the crucial role of the ORs in the EU's external efforts and their part in creating a comprehensive neighborhood strategy. EU officials recognized the importance of ORs in enhancing the EU's worldwide impact, maritime safety, and cooperation within the region, resulting in the implementation of a more strategic approach. Important figures, such as Jean-Claude Juncker and Emmanuel Macron, emphasized the strategic significance of the ORs in their speeches. They emphasized the importance of the ORs in enhancing the EU's global maritime power and geopolitical aspirations. The updated 2022 Strategy for the ORs demonstrates this shift in conversation by highlighting the importance of working together regionally and leveraging the strategic locations of the ORs to advance EU values and interests on a global scale. This change highlights a growing alignment between the EU's rhetoric and practical steps, showing a more uniform and deliberate approach in leveraging the unique advantages of the ORs to reach EU geopolitical objectives.

The EU's acknowledgment of its ORs as significant geopolitical assets has developed gradually, with distinct variations in the actions and consequences of these areas in the Caribbean, Indian Ocean, and French Guiana. The findings from the three case studies are presented in this section, with a focus on how French Guiana, the Indian Ocean, and the Caribbean ORs have influenced EU geopolitical policy and whether or not the discourse has changed to reflect the practical applications of French ORs as geopolitical assets. Due in large part to its advantageous position and the presence of the GSC, the EU has long regarded French Guiana as a vital geopolitical asset. Before the EU began to

emphasize the strategic importance of its ORs in the mid-2000s, French Guiana already played a major role in space exploration. Europe's independent launch into space, which lessened its dependency on the US and Russia, began in 1980 with the founding of the GSC and the launch of Ariane 1. The subsequent space missions and advancements, such as the 2003 launch of Ariane 5, significantly enhanced the European Union's space capabilities and cemented French Guiana's role as a pivotal element of European space policy. This had even more strategic relevance in the mid-2000s, about the same time that the discourse of the EU began to shift more broadly. Key events such as the launch of GIOVE-A for the Galileo Satellite Navigation System in 2005 and the introduction of the Soyuz spacecraft in 2011 demonstrated the geopolitical importance of French Guiana. Its position was further reinforced in 2012 with the development of the Vega launch vehicle and the cooperation with Roscosmos. The EU's increasing financial support for the ESA emphasizes French Guiana's continued strategic importance in the EU's geopolitical framework.

The geopolitical roles of the Indian Ocean ORs, specifically Réunion and Mayotte, have become increasingly closely aligned with the changing rhetoric of the EU since the mid-2000s. The designation of Réunion as a Regional Operating Surveillance and Rescue Center (CROSS) in 2004, together with the expansion of its marine security responsibilities in 2005, signaled the start of its increased strategic importance. Since 2008, the involvement in EU Operation Atalanta has enhanced the integration of these ORs into European security operations, emphasizing their significance in piracy-countering activities. The establishment of the Réunion-Mayotte Defense Base Support Group in 2011 along with the formation of a strategic alliance with India in 2018 are important events that

demonstrate the increasing geopolitical importance of these ORs. Réunion's membership in the IOC and its active participation in EU-supported initiatives such as CRIMARIO and MASE highlight its significant strategic value. Currently, the presence of significant naval resources in Réunion highlights the vital contribution of the ORs to the EU's wider geopolitical plans in the Indo-Pacific area. Although Mayotte is not as prominent as Réunion, it plays a key role in ensuring marine security in the Mozambique Channel.

The Caribbean ORs are now being utilized as valuable geopolitical assets. Although the EU discourse in the mid-2000s acknowledged the strategic significance of ORs, there has been a delay in implementing specific measures to fully utilize the geopolitical opportunities presented by the Caribbean ORs, especially Saint-Martin. When compared to French Guiana and the Indian Ocean ORs, this delayed alignment has historically demonstrated a significant lack of geopolitical leverage. However, advancements and initiatives suggest an increasing acknowledgment of their abilities. The move towards a more active geopolitical role is evident in efforts like PIRAC's humanitarian missions, the growth of the GPM in Guadeloupe, and increased participation in regional organizations like CARICOM, ACS, and CEPALC. The geopolitical strategy of the Caribbean OR continues to be decentralized, with local authorities and French efforts taking a more prominent role in carrying out initiatives instead of direct EU participation.

When it comes to specific and concrete geopolitical outcomes, the Indian Ocean ORs and French Guiana outperform the Caribbean ORs. Participation in Operation Atalanta highlights the importance of the Indian Ocean ORs in safeguarding maritime security. Due to its European Spaceport, French Guiana is leading the way in technical innovation and space exploration. In contrast, the Caribbean Overseas Regions play a significant role in

regional trade, economic integration, and disaster relief, yet they do not specialize in any one area that provides significant geopolitical influence. Their importance lies in their ability to advance the EU's regional alliances and economic objectives, instead of being focused in a single strategic domain. Overall, compared to their counterparts in the Indian Ocean and South America, their position allows less specialized areas of geopolitical leverage, which leads to a less tangible geopolitical impact.

The primary focus of the Caribbean ORs is on regional economic integration, commerce, and disaster preparedness, rather than on specialized and high-profile sectors. Despite being crucial, these contributions are not as prominent in the worldwide political landscape. Substantial funding has been allocated towards enhancing marine security infrastructure and operations in the Indian Ocean ORs, such as Operation Atalanta. These investments provide clear and immediate geopolitical benefits by protecting vital sea routes. The European Spaceport in French Guiana is a substantial and specialized infrastructure project that has distinct and measurable geopolitical ramifications in terms of scientific progress and capability for space exploration. The Indian Ocean region is closer to major maritime security risks, such as piracy around the coast of Somalia and critical chokepoints like the Strait of Hormuz. The close proximity of Réunion and Mayotte necessitates a strong and effective security presence, heightening the strategic importance of these neighboring regions. The position of French Guiana on the equator makes it an excellent spot for satellite launches, providing a unique advantage for space exploration. This geographic characteristic immediately amplifies its worldwide importance. The Caribbean ORs are located in a region that, although significant for regional trade and disaster response, does not encounter the same magnitude of global strategic challenges or

opportunities. Their geographical position does not offer the same immediate geopolitical advantage as the Indian Ocean ORs or French Guiana.

Ultimately, serve various but crucial roles in its geopolitical strategy. The strategic importance of French Guiana has been well recognized, primarily because of its significant contributions to the field of space exploration. The Indian Ocean's ORs strategic roles in maritime security matches with the shifting debate in the EU. The Caribbean ORs, despite their growing significance as strategic assets in recent years, face unique challenges that limit their geopolitical influence. Overall, the findings emphasize the varied and evolving roles of the EU's ORs in its wider geopolitical strategy.

Conclusions:

This dissertation aimed to answer the research question: “How has the EU approached the French ORS geopolitically?” Through a qualitative analysis of EU discourse and case studies focusing on French ORs in the Indian Ocean (Mayotte and Réunion), the Caribbean (Guadeloupe, Martinique, and Saint-Martin), and South America (French Guiana), this research explored the evolution of the EU's geopolitical strategy that focused on these regions. The research addressed two subquestions, the evolution of the EU's discourse on its ORs and the specific policies and actions implemented that reflect the EU's geopolitical strategy.

The findings demonstrate significant shifts in the EU's understanding and leveraging of its French ORs. Originally viewed as peripheral regions of lesser significance, the ORs have gradually been acknowledged to be essential strategic assets. The transition may be clearly observed in the changing EU language and the strategic

initiatives that have been adopted gradually. During the early 2000s, the EU's discussions mostly revolved around tackling economic and social issues in the ORs, with little attention given to their geopolitical importance. Nevertheless, the mid-2000s marked a significant shift, as seen by the 2008 Commission policy document titled "The Outermost Regions – an Asset for Europe," which emphasized the strategic significance of the ORs. The shift in discourse was supported by concrete actions that included the ORs into the EU's wider geopolitical structure, highlighting their involvement in maritime security, space exploration, and regional collaboration.

The case studies carried out demonstrated varied geopolitical roles for different French ORs. The Guiana Space Center in French Guiana has been an essential asset for a long time, greatly improving the space and technological capabilities of the EU. Significant occurrences, like the introduction of the Ariane 5 and collaborations with Roscosmos, demonstrate its importance in terms of strategy. The EU's ongoing and increased funding of the ESA highlights French Guiana's significance to the EU's strategic geopolitical plan. The Indian Ocean's Réunion and Mayotte have gained more importance in maritime security. Their significance is defined by the creation of the Regional Operating Surveillance and Rescue Center and their involvement in EU Operation Atalanta. Additionally, Réunion's participation in the IOC and programs such as CRIMARIO and MASE strengthen its geopolitical importance. Despite being less noticeable, Mayotte still plays a vital role in maritime security due to its position in the Mozambique Channel.

The Indian Ocean ORs are important actors in ensuring maritime security, as seen by their involvement in Operation Atalanta while French Guiana is a leading center for technical innovation and space exploration, thanks to its European Spaceport. On the other

hand, the geopolitical significance of the Caribbean ORs has been recognized in more recent years. Their influence goes beyond specific areas and has a broader scope, with particular emphasis on regional trade, economic cohesion, and assistance for natural disasters. They lack a specific field of competence that provides them with major geopolitical influence. In comparison to their counterparts in the Indian Ocean and South America, their geographical position has been less geopolitically central to the EU. The EU's focus on the Caribbean and LAC countries is more recent than that in the Indian Ocean, as observed in the relevant EU external action communications. Overall, the French ORs of the EU play various but crucial roles in its geopolitical approach. Depending on their location and regional importance, the ORs can be significant assets in different policy areas of geopolitical significance. The findings highlight the diverse and evolving roles of the EU's French ORs in its broader geopolitical ambitions.

This research faced several limitations. First, the findings are not applicable to all EU ORs because Spanish and Portuguese ORs were excluded. These areas have different levels of independence and are situated in diverse locations, providing a more comprehensive perspective. Moreover, variations in data accessibility and comparability across areas could affect the trustworthiness of the findings. Thirdly, the limited access to specific EU and other documents could have affected the depth of the analysis and conclusions. Third, restricted access to certain EU and other documents may have impacted the depth of the analysis and findings. Finally, with the EU not being a state and having exclusive competence over certain policy areas, particularly external action, it is important to keep in mind that the EU is not able to act like a state and therefore is limited

in the decisions and implementation of policies in the ORs unlike France, which many of the actions are undertaken by or motivated by in the mentioned ORs.

Future research could expand on the scope of analysis to Spanish and Portuguese ORs in the Atlantic Ocean, as they have a different neighbourhood and therefore, differing geopolitical focus. This would allow for a more complete and comprehensive understanding of the ORs as geopolitical assets. Moreover, an in-depth analysis of the relationship between EU and member state policies, specifically focusing on how France's influence impacts the EU's attitude and interests toward its ORs, would provide a clearer understanding of the complex dynamics of EU geopolitics. Lastly, analysis of the impact of emerging powers such as China and India on the EU's policies in the Indian Ocean and Caribbean could offer a comprehensive insight into the EU's approaches in dealing with external actors.

Summary:

Tato práce zkoumá vyvíjející se geopolitickou strategii Evropské unie (EU) týkající se nejvzdálenějších regionů Francie (OR). Tyto regiony, které zahrnují území v Karibiku, Indickém oceánu a Jižní Americe, jsou stále více uznávány pro svůj strategický význam. Tyto nejvzdálenější regiony, které byly historicky považovány za okrajové, jsou nyní považovány za životně důležité díky své jedinečné kombinaci kulturní rozmanitosti, strategických poloh, bohatých zdrojů a bohaté biologické rozmanitosti. Hrají zásadní roli v mezinárodních obchodních trasách, průzkumu vesmíru a námořní bezpečnosti a významně přispívají ke globálnímu vlivu EU. Jsou prozkoumány dvě dílčí otázky; změny v diskursu EU o nejvzdálenějších regionech a konkrétních politikách odrážejících tuto strategii. Tento výzkum využívá metody k analýze posunů v diskursu EU a případových studií o vybraných nejvzdálenějších regionech. Tato studie využívá kvalitativní přístup, analyzuje vývoj diskursu EU a provádí případové studie o konkrétních nejvzdálenějších regionech.

Zjištění odhalují významný posun ve vnímání a využívání nejvzdálenějších regionů v EU. Zpočátku byly považovány za oblasti vyžadující pomoc, nyní jsou strategicky uznávány jako aktiva. Tato změna je patrná v dokumentech a projevech od poloviny roku 2000. Vývoj je ukázán na příkladech, od Francouzské Guyany, území Indického oceánu Réunion a Mayotte až po karibská území Guadeloupe, Martinik a Svatý Martin. Význam Francouzské Guyany při průzkumu vesmíru, úsilí na území Indického oceánu v oblasti bezpečnosti a zapojení území do regionální hospodářské spolupráce podtrhují různorodé, ale zásadní role, které tyto regiony hrají v geopolitické agendě EU. Navzdory těmto pokrokům výzkum uznává omezení, včetně vyloučení španělských a portugalských nejvzdálenějších regionů a variability v dostupnosti údajů. Tato omezení naznačují potřebu

dalšího výzkumu, který by poskytl komplexnější pochopení geopolitického přístupu EU ke všem jejím nejvzdálenějším regionům. Na závěr tato práce poskytuje analýzu toho, jak se vyvíjel přístup EU k francouzským nejvzdálenějším regionům, což odráží širší a strategičtější využití těchto regionů k posílení pozice EU jako globálního aktéra. Zjištění naznačují potřebu dalšího výzkumu s cílem prozkoumat plný potenciál a důsledky geopolitických strategií EU v jejích nejvzdálenějších regionech.

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