Les Européens doivent sortir de la naïveté

The concept of strategic autonomy in Emmanuel Macron's EU and foreign policy

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Tiivistelmä – Abstract

Emmanuel Macron has emerged as a driving force behind the push for strategic autonomy and developing European defense infrastructure, which has been affected by global political events such as Brexit, the Trump presidency and the Russian invasion of Ukraine. The push for strategic autonomy has encountered resistance within the EU, often sparking debates between Europeanist and Transatlanticist perspectives. Nevertheless, strategic autonomy has firmly established itself in the EU's defense discourse, and by 2024, France has successfully risen to become the world's second-largest arms exporter. This thesis explores how Macron has conceptualized and utilized the concept of strategic autonomy in his EU and foreign policy, positioning France as a leader in European defense policy.

The research material of the thesis consists of speeches and interviews by Macron from his first term as the president of France. The study was conducted through the method of rhetorical analysis based on Barry Buzan's theory and concept of identification. Through rhetorical analysis of Macron's speeches and interviews, this study, demonstrates how Macron positioned strategic autonomy as essential for protecting European values and combating common threats. It also shows how he argued for France's leadership role in shaping EU defense policy, based on its historical role as a European power. Macron leveraged this concept to promote a vision of Europe with a shared strategic culture, advancing French interests and strengthening its defense industry. This research highlights the significance of strategic autonomy in Macron's rhetoric and its impact on both French foreign policy and the EU's defense strategy.

Tiivistelmä – Abstract

Emmanuel Macron on esiintynyt strategisen autonomian ja Euroopan puolustusinfrastruktuurin kehittämisen liikkeellepanevana voimana, mihin ovat vaikuttaneet kansainväliset poliittiset tapahtumat, kuten Brexit, Donald Trumpin presidentinkausi ja Venäjän hyökkäys Ukrainaan. Strategisen autonomian edistäminen on kohdannut vastarintaa EU:ssa, mikä on usein tiivistynyt debatiksi Eurooppamyönteisten ja transatlanttiseen yhteistyöhön nojaavien näkökulmien välillä. Strateginen autonomia on kuitenkin vakiinnuttanut asemansa EU:n puolustusdiskurssissa ja vuoteen 2024 mennessä Ranska on onnistunut nousemaan maailman toiseksi suurimmaksi aseviejäksi. Tässä tutkielmassa tarkastellaan, miten Macron on käsitteellistänyt ja hyödyntänyt strategisen autonomian käsitettä hänen EU- ja ulkopolitiikassaan sekä asemoinut Ranskan Euroopan puolustuspolitiikan johtavaksi toimijaksi.

Tutkielman tutkimusaineisto koostuu Macronin puheista ja haastatteluista hänen ensimmäiseltä kaudeltaan Ranskan presidenttinä. Tutkimusmetodina on retoriikka-analyysi, joka perustuu Barry Buzanin teoriaan ja identifikaation käsitteeseen. Macronin puheiden ja haastattelujen analysoimisen kautta tässä tutkimuksessa osoitetaan, miten Macron asemoi strategisen autonomian olennaiseksi eurooppalaisten arvojen suojelemiseksi sekä yhteisten uhkien torjumiseksi. Se osoittaa myös, miten hän perusteli Ranskan johtavaa roolia EU:n puolustuspolitiikan kehittämisessä sen historiallisen roolin perusteella eurooppalaisena suurvaltana. Macron hyödynsi käsitettä ajaakseen eurooppalaisen strategisen kulttuurin kehittämistä edistääkseen Ranskan puolustusteollisuuden vahvistamista. Tässä tutkimuksessa korostetaan strategisen autonomian merkitystä Macronin retoriikassa ja sen vaikutusta sekä Ranskan ulkopolitiikkaan, että EU:n puolustuspolitiikkaan.

Avainsanat – Keywords

Strategic autonomy, rhetoric, EU, defense policy, Macron

CONTENTS

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AUKUS = Trilateral security partnership between Australia, the UK, and the US

CARD = Coordinated Annual Review of Defense

CSDP = Common Security and Defense Policy of the EU

CSFP = Common Security and Foreign Policy of the EU

EDC = European Defense Community

EDF = European Defense Fund

EI2 = European Intervention Initiative

EPC = European Political Community

IR = International relations

JCPOA = The Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action

NAC = North Atlantic Council

PESCO = Permanent Structural Cooperation

WEU = Western European Union

1 INTRODUCTION

The concept of strategic autonomy has become a key element in European political discourse, particularly in the context of defense and security. While the idea dates back over 20 years, first emerging in 1998 with the St. Malo Declaration, it was not until 2013 that The European Council's conclusions on the EU Common Security and Defense Policy (CSDP) formally introduced the concept in the context of developing a European defense industry.

Since 2014, France has emerged as a driving force behind the push for enhanced European defense infrastructure, which has been especially notable during Emmanuel Macron's presidency. The evolving global political landscape has further shaped how strategic autonomy is understood, with significant events such as Brexit, the Trump presidency, and Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine revealing new challenges, including the importance of supply chains and dependence on key energy producers (European Parliament 2022, 1-3).

Trump's questioning of transatlantic defense cooperation accelerated discussions in Europe about the need for greater self-reliance (Martin & Sinkkonen 2022, 100). Brexit further presented France with an opportunity to assert itself as a central player in shaping the EU's defense policy. Russia's aggression in Ukraine in 2022 has forced the EU to reassess its defense strategy, tipping the balance of debate between Europeanist and Transatlanticist perspectives towards a more transatlantic approach. Despite this, France has succeeded in positioning itself as a leader in European defense, and by 2024, had become the world's second-largest arms exporter (SIPRI 2024).

This thesis will explore how the concept of strategic autonomy has risen to prominence in European political discourse, particularly through Macron's use of the term. It will analyze how Macron has conceptualized the notion of strategic autonomy and utilized it in French foreign and EU policy, as well as capitalized on key political events to advance the agenda of European defense industry development and the European integration process. By examining Macron's rhetoric and policies, this thesis seeks to offer insights into how strategic autonomy has become central to both French foreign policy and the broader EU defense strategy.

1.1 Research Question and the Aim of the Thesis

The aim of the thesis is to answer the question: How has Macron framed and conceptualized the notion of strategic autonomy in his rhetoric and constructed France as a leader in the development of the EU's defense policy? The first question contributes to the question of strategic autonomy becoming increasingly relevant concept both in the EU's political discourse and in Macron's foreign policy. The second question seeks to increase understanding of France's EU and foreign policy and explain the significance of sovereignty and autonomy as factors leading to the French position of promoting strategic autonomy in the EU.

I will also consider the factors within French foreign policy that explain France's position, as well as analyze the broader European and global contexts that have influenced this development. This will include an exploration of the circumstances that have enabled France to advance its position in European defense policy.

Finally, the balance between Macron's EU policy and French foreign policy is essential and will be examined in the analysis. This balance was culminated in Macron's statement regarding the loss of AUKUS submarine deal and being overtaken by the UK, where he stated that Europe should stop being naive, which is where the title of the thesis comes from. In this thesis, the emphasis will be on the security dimension of strategic autonomy while still considering the scope of the concept.

1.2 The Structure of the Thesis

In the first part of the thesis, I will establish the conceptual framework that provides a basis for contextualizing France's actions across various levels of global politics. This theoretical foundation will also guide the following analysis. In the third chapter, I will explore the concept of strategic autonomy, tracing its evolution into a significant term in European political discourse.

Additionally, I will examine how strategic autonomy has influenced EU defense policy, as well as its application in this context. The third chapter will also explore the notion of sovereignty in French foreign policy, providing greater insight into President Macron's rhetoric and his stance on strategic autonomy and European integration. Chapter four will present the methodology of the thesis. Finally, the analysis of Macron's rhetoric will be detailed in the fifth chapter, followed by the conclusion.

2 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The conceptual frame of the thesis is based on Barry Buzan's theories and especially on his concepts of international society and international system. Using Buzan's theory as a framework is useful for contextualizing France's actions on different levels in global politics, while presenting a theoretical base for the thesis. Understanding the difference between international society and international system is useful also for understanding the dynamic between France and the EU as political actors in global politics, as well as Macron's position and the continuity of French foreign policy as separate from the foreign policy of the EU.

Key factor is the distinction between global and national positions of France. On one hand, France is a sovereign state functioning among other states in the international system while trying to pursue its own ambitions and goals. On the other hand, it is a part of the EU and its actions in the international society. While France has been active in the development of the European integration process and the EU's defense policy, the motives behind this are not free of the goals of French foreign policy and the balance between French exceptionalism and the European integration is at the core of French foreign policy as well as the rhetoric of Macron.

Having a conceptual frame helps to grasp the scope of the concept of autonomy. This means understanding that the questions of having autonomy from whom, for whom and for what, differ depending on the setting of the international stage of operating. Important for this thesis is to comprehend the dynamic where a political actor can simultaneously pursue goals as a part of a political structure, while having national policies that are in conflict with those of the structure it belongs to. In the context of the EU, this could mean a member state having a foreign policy that is heavily built on strong and autonomous EU, while having national policies that aim to gain more autonomy from the EU.

In this chapter, I will begin by outlining key concepts from international relations theory that are essential for understanding Buzan's framework. Following this, I will present Buzan's theory, with a focus on the concepts of international society and international system, as well as the dynamic between them. These concepts provide a theoretical foundation for the thesis and offer a framework for understanding France's role as an actor in global politics. Additionally, they shed light on Macron's rhetorical choices,

particularly his use of the concept of strategic autonomy in shaping French foreign policy and the defense policy of the EU.

2.1 Relevant concepts of IR and Buzan's theory

<u>State</u>

As the state is at the center of the English school of international relations, it is first important to define the meaning of a state in the context of IR and Buzan's theory (Hurrell 2007, 25). In realist tradition, the idea of a state is based on conflict groups functioning as the main actors in international politics. The role of the state has generally been viewed as the best option for organizing foreign policy in the state of anarchy, making it a key component of maintaining peace in global politics (Hurrell 2007, 27). Critics have argued that the realist view, which portrays a state as acting solely in its own interest and adhering to diplomatic rules only when necessary, is overly simplistic and fails to account for the social dimension in shaping state interests (Wheeler 2000, 24). Another criticism of the English School is its state-centrism, which has been addressed through the development of the concept of world society. This approach shifts the focus away from states as the primary agents in international relations, emphasizing a broader range of actors. (Williams 2005, 20).

Hedley Bull (1977, 8) argues that a state is an independent political community that asserts sovereignty in relation to a certain geographical location as well as to a certain population. For a state to be called a state, it needs to have both internal and external sovereignty. This means that it needs to have supremacy on all the governance internally and to be sovereign of external influence. For Bull, the definition of a state is dependent on the political community's capability to enforce sovereignty both internally and externally. If a political community claims sovereignty but lacks the means to realize or prove this in practice, it doesn't fulfill the requirements of being a state (Bull 1977, 8-9.)

Buzan (2004, 92) broadens the traditional definition and defines a state as "any form of post-kinship, territorially based, politically centralized, self-governing entity capable of creating an inside-outside structure". His definition doesn't put as much emphasis on the sovereignty of the state and intends to be more flexible. Based on this definition, also a political structure such as the EU could be considered to fulfill the requirements of a state and an actor in international society despite its weaker political centralization compared

to a traditional state. Inside-outside structure in this context refers to the state operating on domestic and foreign levels.

Pluralism and solidarism

Buzan (2004, 141-142) describes pluralism as "second-order societies with a loose degree of norms, rules, and institutions among the states, where the focus of the society is on creating a framework for orderly coexistence and competition, or potentially the management of collective problems such as arms control and environmental issues". The basis of pluralism lies in a non-intervention policy and respecting the sovereignty of the states in managing foreign policy and maintaining peace. Essential is that reaching agreement among the different states is viewed as limited, which is why the process of solving problems should be pragmatic and separate from domestic policy.

In a solidarist international society, the states are expected to share a certain level of solidarity and agreement on committing to human rights and international law (Bellamy & McDonald 2004, 313). Buzan (2004) describes solidarism as "international societies with a relatively high degree of shared norms, rules and institutions among the states, where the focus is not only on ordering coexistence and competition, but also on cooperation on wider range of issues, whether in pursuit of joint gains (trade) or realization of shared values (human rights)".

Solidarism can be seen as constructed on the foundation of pluralism but in solidarism, a concept of shared values is added and the factor of enforcing them crosses the non-interventional aspect of pluralism. Main characteristic of solidarism and difference in comparison with pluralism is having a set of values and that being a justification for stepping out of the non-intervention policy when pursuing the shared goals or solving problems. Buzan (2004, 154) doesn't consider pluralism and solidarism to represent two opposites but rather views that they can coexist at the same time.

Hurrell (2007, 143, 160) has argued that pluralists generally view the emphasis on human rights and democracy as the driving factors of foreign policy with suspicion. It is considered as a threat to the sovereignty and security of the states and a potential justification for expansionist policies. Solidarism is viewed as a problematic way of organizing foreign policy since the principle of enforcing human rights would require ideological commitment and consistency from the states regardless of other political factors or motives. Pluralists tend to believe that this isn't likely to happen and that the

states would be interested in human rights only when it suits their political goals (Hurrell 2007, 160.) The risk of allowing humanitarian intervention for pluralists is that especially without a full consensus, the states would be forced to submit to certain external values leading to instability both domestically and externally, which is why pluralists consider the non-intervention principle to be the best way of securing peace in global politics as well as on an individual level (Wheeler 2000, 29).

In a solidarist international society, the belief is that certain human rights should be guaranteed for the individuals and in a case of an extreme violation, other states should have the possibility of intervention as the states have agreed to carry a responsibility of enforcing the shared values across the borders if needed (Wheeler 2000, 12). Bull (1977, 157) has argued that prioritizing individual security over state security should only be done if there is a full consensus on the nature of the threat and the way of responding to it.

For pluralists, reaching a consensus about human rights or values is not a realistic goal, which is why the focus should be on maintaining peace. Many solidarists argue that at least some level of consensus is attainable and has already been reached for example in the case of genocide and the general attitude on it being unacceptable (Williams 2005, 22). Williams (2005, 24) has also criticized the classic pluralism represented by Bull for ignoring globalization that has led to a change in the concepts such as territorial sovereignty and led to a situation where the traditional view of a state isn't enough to represent the reality.

2.1 International Society and International System
<u>**Maintaining order**</u>

The core theoretical question of the English school is defining "international society" and the study about the nature of the international society is often stated as the most important contribution of the English school to international relations. English school has some similarities with realism and has at times been described as a tamer branch of realism by the critics (Dunne 1998, 4-5, 8-10)

Possibly the clearest difference to realism and a defining characteristic of the English school is the idea that the states functioning in international society are not free from morality. State leaders and diplomats are given more agency, meaning that the actions of the state reflect the ethical views of its representants (Dunne 1998, 10.) Another key

factor that separates the English school from realism is the belief that even when acting in their own interests and possibly against the rules of global politics or treaties, states have a responsibility to explain themselves to the international society (Wheeler 2000, 24-25). In realism this wouldn't be a concern for the state as they are expected to act on their own interest anyway.

Bull (1977, 4-5) considers that all societies have certain core values that are preferred in arranging the order in the society. First of these is to have some degree of security against violence. Second is to ensure the value of promises and agreements as being something trustworthy. Third is to ensure the stability of possession of things at least to some degree. These core values are present also when arranging order in global politics among states but can be separated from the rules for maintaining order.

To maintain order, it is crucial to have shared interest. Bull (1977, 53) asserts that for maintaining order in the society, there must be shared interest at least in the core values of social life mentioned before. There are certain goals that can be identified as essential for maintaining order in global politics. According to Bull (1977, 16-19) these are maintaining the system or society of states that functions based on the agreement on states being the main actors in global politics, preserving the sovereignty of the individual states and maintaining peace. In an international society, the states agree upon certain shared values and interests, as well as certain rules that limit their actions in relation to each other. This means usually accepting and respecting the sovereignty of the states and participating in common institutions. (Bull 1977, 13). The shared interest functions as the base but needs to be accompanied with rules that define the actions of people as well as institutions to make the rules efficient (Bull 1977, 65).

International society

International society exists when a number of states agree on a certain set of values and goals and communicate through shared institutions (Bull 1977, 13-14). It is essentially a bond between states based on institutions and shared values at least to a degree. The nature of this bond is disputed in the field of IR, and the conflict usually comes down to a debate between pluralism and solidarism. In solidarism, the belief is that solidarity and convergent values exist between the member states, which has significance in international relations not only on a practical level but potentially as a justification for action or intervention. Pluralists believe that reaching consensus between the members of

the international society is only possible up to a certain point, which is why the focus should be on the necessities such as non-aggression agreements instead of having a requirement of enforcing the shared values. (Buzan 2004.)

The dynamics of an international society may differ depending on the basis on which it is built. Buzan (2004, 159) demonstrates this by presenting a classification for the depth of internalization in the society. In the "shallow" end, there is coercion, which represents the weakest base for an international society and a setting where the interaction is based on abusing the dynamic. In the "deep" end, there is belief, which represents the strongest base for an international society, meaning that there is a shared belief in the society, as well as a consensus among the members about shared values and goals (Buzan 2004, 159.)

One major problem that comes with solidarism is defining the threshold for a violent intervention justified by enforcing the shared values (Buzan 2004, 153). This can be an issue especially in a case where the values aren't shared within the society or among external actors. Regarding this, Bull (1977, 16) has argued that a sufficient cultural connection is usually required for an international society to emerge. Therefore, it is common for international societies to be connected by geographical proximity, even though some exceptions exist.

International system

International system is formed by two or more states that are in contact with each other to an extent where they have to adjust their actions in relation to the others. The sufficient impact on each other's decisions essentially affects the behavior of the states and forms a system. Important is that there is sufficient contact among the states, that can happen for example through international institutions such as the UN (Bull 1977, 9-10.)

International system is a broader concept in the sense that in practice it includes all the states in the world, whereas international society is more likely to be regional. International society can theoretically be global but when approaching this direction, the form of it tends to be very pluralistic, since agreeing on a shared set of values and enforcing them globally is difficult or requires very broad definitions in determining the values. Defining factor of an international society is also the shared interest within its members, while in an international system this isn't required.

International system as a separate level contains more of a realist perception of international relations. The main agents are states that are concerned about their own interest as a priority. For Buzan (2004, xvii), the international system is an entity that shares characteristics with the traditional idea of realism of the English school of IR, where states are actors in an anarchic space, their primary motives being survival and maintaining or increasing power. It doesn't have the unifying characteristics that are included in an international society, which is preconditioned by shared values or at least willingness to solve problems collectively on a practical level.

Compared to the international system, international society as a concept has been more relevant in particular in the English school of IR where defining the nature of an international society has played a central part. Traditionally, the definition of an international society has been focused mainly on the material dimensions, which is something that Buzan (2004, 14) aims to expand to considering the social dimension as well.

In this chapter I have presented the concepts of International society and International system based on the theory of Buzan. The theory of Buzan and particularly its distinction between international society and international system are useful for understanding the nuanced dynamics of states functioning in global politics. By emphasizing the role of shared values, institutions and moral responsibilities among states, the English school moves beyond the traditional realist perspective of self-interested state behavior in an anarchic system. This approach allows for the possibility of order and cooperation based on a degree of consensus, even in a pluralistic world.

Understanding the distinction between international society and international system is crucial for analyzing the relationship between France and the EU as political actors in global politics, as well as President Macron's stance and the continuity of French foreign policy as distinct from that of the EU. A key element is recognizing the difference between France's global and national roles. On one hand, France is a sovereign state operating within the international system, pursuing its own ambitions and objectives. On the other hand, it is an integral part of the EU, contributing to the international society through its participation. While France has been a driving force in the European integration process and the development of the EU's defense policy, its motives are closely tied to its own foreign policy interests. The tension between French

exceptionalism and European integration lies at the heart of France's foreign policy and Macron's rhetoric.

Buzan's theory is also valuable for understanding the distinction between France's role as an independent state in global politics and as a member of the EU, where its policy is shaped by the rules of the EU as a solidarist political entity. In conclusion, Buzan's framework helps to capture the dynamic of France operating on two levels in global politics and illustrates how this dual role influences the pursuit of French foreign policy goals. This conceptualization also provides a foundation for addressing the research question by offering a framework for analyzing Macron's rhetoric and France's foreign policy objectives.

3 STRATEGIC AUTONOMY OF THE EU

3.1 The Concept of Strategic Autonomy

The European Parliament (2022) defines strategic autonomy as "the capacity of the EU to act autonomously without being dependent on other countries in strategically important policy areas." Regardless of the idea being discussed since 1998, the first official document mentioning strategic autonomy is from the European Council conclusions on EU Common Security and Defense Policy (CSDP) of December 2013, where strategic autonomy was mentioned in the context of developing European defense industry (European parliament 2022, 2). A more recent intent to capture the meaning of strategic autonomy has been presented by Niklas Helwig (2021, 21) who defines it as "the political, institutional and material ability of the EU and its member states to manage their interdependence with third parties, with the aim of ensuring the well-being of their citizens and implementing self-determined policy decisions."

From 2013 on, strategic autonomy was still considered mostly a concept of security policy but later the definition has been broadened and other domains such as economy and technology have been attached to the meaning. The global political landscape has also influenced how the concept has been interpreted. Events such as Brexit, the Trump presidency, and the Russian aggression in Ukraine have brought to light different issues regarding the strategic autonomy, such as the importance of supply chains and the dependance on certain producers in the energy sector (European Parliament 2022, 1-3.)

The use of strategic autonomy as a term has varied during the past decade. At times, synonymous terms, including "open strategic autonomy," "strategic sovereignty," "capacity to act" or "resilience," have been used interchangeably with strategic autonomy (European parliament 2022, 1-3). The variety in expressions being used to refer to strategic autonomy is partly due to differing interpretations of the term and its meaning. In the EU, there have been conflicting views about the term "strategic autonomy" as it has been considered to imply the EU moving away from the US, which is a sentiment that many Eastern European countries have not shared. Therefore, alternatives, such as "strategic responsibility," have been offered (Helwig 2020, 6). Although these terms have been used synonymously with strategic autonomy, there are some differences in the contexts in which they have been applied in or from where they emerge. The term "open strategic autonomy" has been used more in the context of trade and as a goal for balancing the interdependencies in global economy. Resilience on the other hand has been used mostly when referring to global supply chains and their stability (Gehrke 2021, 89, 95-100).

In this thesis, the focus will be on the security aspect of strategic autonomy, while still considering the broader scope of the concept. This is because the security dimension is the most relevant for the topic of this thesis but also since most of the different dimensions of strategic autonomy such as technology and economy are often ultimately approached from the perspective of security in a sense that the conversation comes back to being self-sufficient and less dependent on external factors. This was noted also by the High Representative of the EU for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and the Vice-President of the European Commission, Josep Borrell, who wrote in his blog (2020) that the defense dimension of the strategic autonomy remains predominant. In a sense, strategic autonomy can be considered an answer to changing global order where protectionism and realist politics are raising their head. However, its vagueness and varied interpretations in different contexts undermine the concept, making it challenging to reach a consensus on its necessity.

3.2 Strategic Autonomy in the Defense Policy of the EU

The idea of strategic autonomy is over 20 years old and has been mentioned in European political discussion since 1998. During the first decade of its existence, the idea of strategic autonomy revolved mainly around the creation of an EU military and crisis management, which ultimately never gained momentum in the EU as the role of

NATO in European defense policy kept increasing throughout the 2000s (Helwig 2021, 15).

Since then, the debate around strategic autonomy of the EU has come a long way and the concept has been broadened as the global political situation has changed. Its relevance for the defense policy of the EU has been steadily increasing during the past decade, which has led to the creation of CSDP as well as frameworks such as The Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO), initiatives such as the European Intervention Initiative (EI2) and European Defense Fund (EDF) as well as processes such as the Coordinated Annual Review of Defense (CARD).

In this chapter I will first examine the development of European defense policy and the role that autonomy has played in it, eventually leading to strategic autonomy being placed at the core of the geopolitical strategy of the EU. After this I will focus on certain key events that have shaped the discussion surrounding strategic autonomy and made the concept increasingly relevant in European foreign and defense policy. I will also analyze the effect that these events have had on the development of the strategic autonomy in EU and to what kind of actions it has led.

From peacekeeping to a geopolitical strategy

The idea of creating a collective European Defense policy has been around since 1948 when Belgium, France, Luxembourg, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom signed the Treaty of Brussels with an objective of maintaining peace in Europe after the Second World War and the defeat of Germany. The treaty outlines the goal of collaborating on "collective self-defense," which is further detailed in Article IV. This article specifies that in a case of a member state coming under attack, the other members will provide all necessary military aid (Cvce.eu 2015a.)

Increasing European Defense cooperation returned the center of political discussion again in 1950, when the idea of a creating a European military force functioning under a single political command was proposed as a response to the growing fear of the spread of communism. However, this proposition for European Defense Community (EDC) never came to existence as France refused to ratify the proposition regardless of it being accepted by most Western countries. The failure of the EDC did not mark the end of European political integration but left a sense of suspicion in Europe's capability to build a collective defense policy (Cvce.eu 2016.)

The ideas mentioned in the Treaty of Brussels were continued when The Western European Union (WEU) was established in 1954. This meant the end of the occupation of West-Germany as well as its rearmament and accession to NATO. The accession of West-Germany to the Treaty of Brussels was also confirmed along with Italy. WEU was the first European organization focused on the defense policy, but the role of the US remained strong (Cvce.eu 2016b.)

The St. Malo Declaration of 1998, signed by British Prime Minister Tony Blair and French President Jacques Chirac, marks the first official record of the EU's autonomy. The declaration was a response to the EU's perceived failure to prevent or resolve the Kosovo conflict. Until the St Malo Declaration, the efforts in building a European Defense Policy were focused on peacekeeping and capability to respond to crises. The St Malo Declaration was the first instance where the EU's autonomy as a global actor was acknowledged and the need for a collective defense strategy was addressed (Cvce.eu 2015b.)

The declaration calls for the EU to act to its full potential in global politics and to develop a European Defense Policy within the framework of Common Security and Foreign Policy (CSFP). This can be seen as the starting point for the development of CSDP that followed in 1999. Even after the St Malo Declaration, the ambition for developing European Defense cooperation remained quite low as many European countries were content with the role of NATO as a guarantee of European security and were decreasing their defense funding (Cvce.eu 2015b.)

Strategic Autonomy in the defense policy of the EU

Although the idea of strategic autonomy traces back to the St Malo Declaration, official documents did not use the term "strategic autonomy" until 2013 (Helwig 2021, 15-16). The relevance of strategic autonomy in European defense policy has changed during the existence of the EU. In the St. Malo Declaration of 1998, autonomy was defined as the ability to respond to international crises, rather than developing the EU's defensive capabilities (Koenig 2021, 57).

What is relevant about the context of the 1990s is that Russia was still recovering from the collapse of the Soviet Union and was not perceived as a security threat but a potential collaborator and the role of NATO in defending Europe was uncontested. Also, the threat of terrorism had not yet been considered relevant in Europe. During this

period, many European countries decreased their defense funding as the political situation seemed stable and as NATO was in control of the defense; more efforts were put into economic growth instead.

Although the CSDP established some groundwork for European defense cooperation in 1999, the EU's ambition to develop strategic autonomy remained relatively low until 2013, when official documents began to mention strategic autonomy more frequently. Since 2014, France has played a key role in promoting the development of infrastructure for increased European defense cooperation. CSDP has evolved with the creation of frameworks such as PESCO in 2017, the establishment of EDF in 2017, and the launch of the European Intervention Initiative (EI2) in 2018, which aims to build a shared strategic culture to complement defensive frameworks like PESCO. Additionally, efforts to enhance defense cooperation bilaterally within the EU have supported these initiatives.

The Crimean invasion

This increase in the importance of strategic autonomy and the defense cooperation in the EU have not happened in a vacuum and multiple political events have had an influence on this development. First of these is the Crimean invasion by Russia in 2014. The concept of strategic autonomy began to appear in political discussion more frequently since 2013 as the global geopolitical situation was changing due to China's growth and Russia's increasing aggression in EU's neighboring areas (Helwig 2021, 15-16). However, it was the Russian invasion of Crimea in February of 2014 that acted as a waking moment for European leaders as it became clear that the rule-based multilateralism and the European values that are the basis of EU's foreign policy, weren't necessarily shared by others, which has potential security implications (Helwig 2022, 30).

The Crimean invasion showed that Russia was ready to use force in pursuing its geopolitical goals in Europe, which was something that the EU wasn't prepared for, in spite of the fact that Russia's actions had gradually become increasingly aggressive at its borders (Meijer & Brooks 2021, 15). Many European countries had based their energy sector on importing Russian gas and had trust in European political situation remaining stable. Due to Russia's actions in Crimea, the EU was forced to acknowledge that diplomacy and multilateralism needed to be accompanied with the capability to use

hard power, as well as to secure its interest in the global geopolitical situation. The EU lacked understanding about how Russia had changed and was becoming more of a threat to Ukraine, which was accompanied by wishful thinking about the trajectory of Russia and ignoring the authoritarian direction that Russia was moving.

Russia's actions led to EU imposing sanctions on Russia and forced the EU to reconsider its policy on Russia. Regardless of the unequivocal recognition of the invasion as illegal in international legal and political setting, many countries continued to trade with Russia and the relations remained relatively stable until the Russian aggression in Ukraine in 2022. However, the invasion of Ukraine is largely considered as the starting point of a realist turn in EU's defense policy that kept gaining popularity especially since 2016 and has been promoted by politicians such as Macron (Helwig 2022, 28).

The invasion of Crimea and the criticism of the EU's response are a part of a broader discussion regarding strategic autonomy, as the EU's capabilities to act autonomously in its foreign policy have been criticized on other occasions as well. The EU has lacked political will and the capability to reach a consensus regarding its foreign policy, which has made responding to external shocks and international crises slow and insufficient (Zajączkowski 2014, 45). The lack of ability to react rapidly and collectively in face of the Covid-19 pandemic was viewed by many as a sign of insufficient preparation for crisis management and lacking unity. Criticism has also been aimed at EU's insufficient capabilities to enforce human rights and values it represents in relation to its authoritarian global competitors (Helwig 2021, 20).

The EU's position on foreign policy has been viewed as overly reliant on soft power, while lacking the ability to respond effectively to hard power and political pressure. This is emphasized by the fact that global competitors like China, Russia, and the US do not necessarily share the same approach to global politics and are more willing to use hard power to achieve their geopolitical goals. Another example of this was the migration crisis at the Polish border in 2021-2022 created by Belarusian president Aleksander Lukashenko as a retaliation for EU sanctions. The crisis revealed that Lukashenko was willing to use people as a tool for political pressure, placing the EU in a difficult position as it had to balance between addressing the crisis humanely without yielding to the pressure. It demonstrated the EU's lack of preparation for such crises and

exposed a vulnerability in its capacity to act autonomously and decisively, even on its own territory.

Brexit, NATO and Transatlantic relations

The Brexit Referendum held in 2016 was another significant factor in the reframing of the EU, but also in the global influence of the EU. The withdrawal of the UK meant that the EU lost a significant part of its economic and diplomatic power as well as military presence since the UK was the only nuclear power in the EU along with France. Brexit was perceived as a sign of decreased attractiveness of the EU as economic and political framework, since one of the most important members left the EU and was considered to turn to the US in its foreign policy. These events were followed by suspicion towards the EU's economic influence and the diplomatic stance leaning on soft power that was considered lacking the capability to answer to political pressure (Welfens 2020, 566-567).

Later during the same year, the election of Donald Trump in 2016 had a great impact on the relevance of the strategic autonomy in the EU and made European politicians question the stability of the transatlantic alliance. A clear example of the weakening of the transatlantic relations during the Trump presidency was the decision to downgrade the EU embassy in Washington DC from a member state to an international organization in 2018 that happened without notifying the EU about the change (Reuters 2019). While the actual effects at a practical level were not overly grave, it can still be considered a symbolic blow, and a sign of mistrust between the US and the EU as well as a manifestation of how the US perceived EU as a global actor during that time. This along with decisions by the Trump administration to withdraw from international treaties such as the Paris climate treaty and the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) led to increased mistrust in the EU. As the EU's defense policy had been relying heavily on the US presence, it was also forced to reconsider managing its own security. This played a part in strategic autonomy gaining more support in the EU and politicians pushing the importance of strategic autonomy such as Macron having even stronger argument (Helwig 2021, 167-168.)

Before the Russian aggression in Ukraine, the military presence of the US in Europe was decreasing since Donald Trump's election victory and in 2020 the US withdrew 12 000 troops from Germany alone. Regardless of the improvement on the transatlantic

relations during the Biden era, there has been a trend in the US foreign policy that aims to reconstruct the defense policy of Europe and the extent of American involvement in it. Since Germany has acted as the American hub for their operations in Middle East and Africa, the withdrawal of the troops may mean that in the future Europe will have to take more responsibility in these areas as the focus of the US is turning to China (Gotkowska 2020.)

In the US, the idea of strategic autonomy and increasing the defense capabilities of Europe have generally been received positively regardless of the party, even though there has been scepticism about the extent of its actual potential in defending Europe. The trump presidency led to a change in the perception of the EU's defense policy in that NATO presence isn't considered to be enough for securing the stability and security of Europe, which was visible in rhetoric of the political discourse as well as increase in investments in European defense industry and European defense infrastructure with the goal of the EU being the guarantee of its own security in a global political situation shadowed by uncertainty (Borrell 2020). While the state of the transatlantic relations between the EU and the US became better during the term of Joe Biden, the time of Trump administration left a reminder to the EU that there can be shifts in the extent to which the US is willing to support the defensive alliance depending on the political situation.

Russian aggression in Ukraine

Possibly the single most impactful event behind the acceleration of the development of EU's strategic autonomy happened on 24th of February 2022 when Russia invaded Ukraine and escalated the frozen conflict in Donbas to a full-scale war. Considering the former criticism of EU's ability to act unitedly and decisively in a crisis, especially after its hesitant reaction to the Crimean crisis, EU and the West showed ability to act fast and put sanctions on Russia in response to its aggression, which was accompanied with broad humanitarian and military support for Ukraine. The effectiveness of the sanctions on the Russian economy can be debated but the impact of the support for the West on the Ukrainian defensive efforts cannot be underestimated. The escalation of the war changed also the debate around strategic autonomy and a lot of the former criticism was left to the background as the importance of EU's defensive capabilities as well as its independence of energy and crucial supply chains was proven to be a real issue.

The series of events has led to substantial shifts in the European defense landscape, notably marked by German Chancellor Olaf Scholz's announcement of the *Zeitenwende*, meaning a historic turning point in German defense policy. As part of this initiative, Scholz committed to a significant investment of €100 billion aimed at increasing Germany's military spending. However, the reform of the German military is expected to be a gradual process, with the extent of Germany's long-term commitment to this initiative remaining uncertain, particularly given the potential overlap with the country's ambitious energy policy objectives (Giegerich & Schreer 2023, 37-39.)

While the meaning of *Zeitenwende* can be considered as symbolic, it nevertheless reflects a tangible shift in Germany's perception of Russia as a threat to European security. This change has also led Germany to meet NATO's defense spending target of 2% of its GDP for the first time since the end of the Cold War (Reuters 2024). The accession of Finland and Sweden to NATO and them abandoning the policy of armed neutrality has also shifted the geostrategic balance of European security to the North-East and strengthened NATO's position in the Baltic region (Alberque & Schreer 2022).

The actions of the EU, however, didn't happen in total consensus as there was hesitation regarding the removal of Russia from the SWIFT-payment system by Germany, Hungary, Italy, Austria and Cyprus. Especially Hungary's stance on Russia has diverged from the general line of the EU and Victor Orbán's reluctant position on imposing energy sanctions on Russia has created issues within the union (Norman & Walker 2022). Still, the EU's response has shown that the necessary institutions for European defense policy have been sufficient and that the political will of maintaining peace has been broadly shared among the European states.

The war has also created incentives for the European nations to act on strengthening the strategic autonomy and in a way given a mandate for the efforts of Macron to push for increasing European defense cooperation and infrastructure. This has been notable in the efforts to phase out the dependency on Russian natural gas and oil as Germany has already rearranged its goals of becoming coal free from 2050 to 2035, partly as means to be less dependent of Russia. Germany's actions are heavily motivated by environmental reasons as well and the goal of having electricity supply that's composed 100% of renewable sources by 2035 was originally proposed to combat climate change.

Regardless of this, Russia's willingness to use energy as leverage forced Germany to reconsider the geopolitical aspect of achieving this goal. Multiple European nations have also announced that they will increase their national defense budgets, which will also enhance the capabilities of European defense policy, complimenting the transatlantic alliance with the US.

Global influence of the EU and the crisis of multilateralism

While the events mentioned above have had an impact on the strategic autonomy becoming increasingly important concept and a goal that has gained support, this has been partly due to the fact that the EU's response to these crises has been considered a sign of weakness or a lack of capacity to act by other global state actors. Regardless of the sanctions imposed on Russia by the EU, the response of the EU to the Crimean invasion and its lack of capability to prevent it, was considered a sign of weakness by China and the US (Hedlund 2024).

Brexit further exposed the EU's lack of unity and highlighted the significant loss of global influence resulting from the departure of a key member, the UK. EU's lack of capability to maintain an independent defense policy became visible during Donald Trump's presidency as he questioned the efforts of European countries in NATO and defending Europe. This acted as a reality check for European political leaders and showed how dependent on the US and its foreign policy Europe was in managing its defense policy. Another concern was the migration crisis on the borders of Poland and Lithuania in August 2021 caused by Belarus, that showed that the EU wasn't sufficiently prepared for such a crisis and had been overly confident on the European continent remaining stable.

EU's global influence and its way of conducting its defense and foreign policy has been a topic discussed throughout the years that has made the question of strategic autonomy more relevant. Josep Borrell (2020) noted the decrease of EU's global influence in his blog, where he spoke about the global influence of the EU as "shrinking." The first thing he mentions is the EU's decreasing share of the global GDP as countries such as China and India have been growing rapidly in population as well as economically. He refers to forecasts that Europe would represent 11% of the global GDP in 20 years and drop the same level as India, while China is expected to double its stake.

Another concern for Europe is the turn to Asia in American foreign policy, which has forced the EU to consider its security policy in new light. Borrell (2020) claims that this turn began even before Trumps term, during Barack Obama's presidency, and shares the American position that Europe should play a more active role in the transatlantic relations especially regarding the defense policy. The lack of EU's global influence has been visible also in its neighboring areas, especially in Middle East and North Africa, where the presence of European peacekeeping forces has been decreasing, leaving more space for paramilitary groups as well as a possibility for countries like Turkey and Russia to gain influence in these regions. This is a concern since a key part of EU's defense policy is its capability to maintain stability in its neighboring areas. The diminishing influence of the EU has not been ideal for the goal of strategic autonomy and preventing crises from happening on EU's borders.

For Borrell (2020), strategic autonomy represents an answer to these issues as he considers it to be a way of political survival and a crucial factor for being able to maintain global influence and realize sovereign foreign policy. He holds the view that soft power is not sufficient in international relations due to increased use of hard power in global politics. Therefore, the interdependent nature of international relations and globalized economy has led to a situation where these relations are being used as leverage for influence in an increasing manner, which is something the EU should be capable of responding to.

Due to the decrease in the EU's global influence, another concern is its ability to enforce and protect human rights and democracy incorporated formally in the EU's Common Foreign and Security Politicy and its vehicles, such as the European External Action Service. For instance, EU has been criticized for its hesitant response to the human rights issues in China as well as its lack of leverage in its neighboring areas (Helwig 2021, 73). Same criticism applies to the EU's relationship with Russia and the EU's lack of capability to affect the situation of Alexei Navalnyi, as well as the human rights situation in Russia in general (Helwig 2021, 77). However, this is not as crucial for the goal of strategic autonomy as it is most of all about guaranteeing the capability of the EU to act independently and have sovereignty in decision making and diplomacy. The lack of ability to affect the situation in the EU's surrounding areas, however, can be considered a sign of its weakened influence in global politics.

One more issue that the EU faces, is the struggle with multilateralism as global powers such as China and the US have showed willingness to weaponize interdependence. There has also been a decline in trust in some of the main international organizations, such as the IMF and the UN, which the EU has traditionally actively led and used to guide its foreign policy (Welfens 2020, 570). This has left the EU in a challenging position, as it must now navigate an increasingly fragmented global order, where the institutions it once relied upon are either weakened or subject to geopolitical pressures, forcing the bloc to seek new ways of asserting its influence and preserving its values on the world stage.

Criticism of Strategic Autonomy in the EU

Regardless of the increase in use of strategic autonomy in official EU documents and the commitment made by EU members to have it as a strategic goal, the concept remains a contested topic that doesn't necessarily always translate from theory to practice. Different strategic cultures and practices of the member states have turned out to be a factor that is slowing down the development of strategic autonomy and differences in the perception and prioritization of threats have made finding a consensus difficult at times (Koenig 2021, 55).

The differences in threat perception come up even if the threats are agreed to be the same ones for all the member countries, since the differences in prioritization and perceived gravity are significant. The EU is trying to close this gap by developing the CSDP towards shared strategic culture (Borrell 2020).

Another regional factor that plays a part in threat perception is the geographical location of the member states, which has led to difficulties in defining the common strategy (Borrell 2020). Differences in views and the extent of action considered to be required, have been visible in the EU's position on Russia especially since the invasion of Crimea. Many Eastern European countries such as Poland and the Baltic countries have viewed the position of the EU as naive and lacking an understanding of Russia, while criticizing Germany, France and Italy about their softer stances on responding to the Russian aggression. In the same way, countries like Italy and Greece have been critical of the EU as they are the first European countries facing the migration flow from Africa and the MENA region and have at times made complaints about the responsibility for migration policy not being shared equally in the EU.

The geographical location also affects the pursuit of creating a shared strategic culture as depending on the location or the history of a member state, the political circumstances have shaped the strategic policies to be different in many ways, making it difficult to find a shared solution to many problems (Borrell 2020). Another way of identifying the division in the EU on the issue of strategic autonomy is in regard to the issue on whether the EU should have an interventionist- or pacifist-leaning position in its response to crises and conflicts. Traditionally, France and Belgium have held a more interventionist position as countries like Germany and Sweden have emphasized the role of a civil response to conflicts (Koenig 2021, 60).

Transatlanticist vs Europeanist debate

Notable especially in the security dimension of strategic autonomy, is the disconnect between Transatlanticist and Europeanist regarding the concept of autonomy (Helwig 2021, 22). Transatlanticist countries such as Denmark, Netherlands, Poland and the Baltic countries, as well as the UK before Brexit, have traditionally viewed the role of the US as crucial for the defense policy of Europe and have generally been more hesitant about the concept of strategic autonomy and increasing European defense cooperation (Helwig 2021, 18). On the other hand, the Europeanists, traditionally led by France, have viewed increasing defensive cooperation and capabilities as well as sufficient material resources in Europe as essential for being able to act independently in foreign policy and neighboring areas of the EU (Helwig 2021, 18).

Criticism and differences in interpretation of the EU's strategic autonomy were highlighted in a keynote speech by German Defence Minister Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer (2020) on 17 November, in which she called strategic autonomy an "illusion". This was called out to be a "historical misinterpretation" by Macron. It also represents well where the main misconception lies, as the Europeanist side isn't really rallying for a defense policy separate from the US; rather, it advocates that a stronger EU can function as a respectable ally (Helwig 2021, 18.)

The main misconception in this debate seems to be the interpretation by the Transatlanticist-side that increasing the EU's strategic autonomy would mean distancing from the US. France and the Europeanist-side recognize the role of NATO in the defense policy of the EU and Macron himself stated multiple times that the aim of developing the EU's strategic autonomy in the field of defense is to increase the defense

capability of Europe to take more responsibility in defending Europe in cooperation with NATO. Therefore, the efforts by the EU to increase defense cooperation should generally be seen as complimentary to NATO instead of it being an attempt to stray away from the US.

Regardless of the EU-US -relations having been relatively solid during the past decade, the presidency of Donald Trump created some mistrust in transatlantic relations for European countries and brought up the conversation of Europe needing to be defensively independent also from the US, as its willingness to defend Europe was considered uncertain. The distancing undertaken by the US during the term of Trump is an international political factor that swayed the debate in the EU in favor of the Europeanist-side. However, intentions to retain the trust in transatlantic relations during Biden's term have evened out this balance.

Scholars have expressed doubts about the EU's ability to establish itself as a security actor in global politics. Traditionally viewed as a normative and civilian power, the EU's capacity to respond swiftly and effectively to international crises has been questioned (Deschaux-Beaume 2011, 1201; Spaiser 2015, 86). The rise of protectionism and anti-EU sentiment in Europe has also fueled the success of EU-critical parties, posing challenges to the European integration process and raising concerns about whether the EU can muster sufficient economic and human resources to become a global security actor (Rieker 2009, 710; Belin & Reinert 2019). Furthermore, the EU's unique structure, a blend of federation and international organization, complicates the coordination of a cohesive and well-organized foreign policy (Rieker 2009, 717). The relative lack of emphasis on defense policy in the European integration process has also impacted both the perception of and the EU's effectiveness as a global security actor (Babynina 2018).

The criticism stems also from the doubt of the EU being able to act united enough for it to have a competitive enough foreign and security policy and to be able to use hard power when needed (Krotz 2009, 557). The different perceptions about security and foreign policy among the member countries are quite a common criticism of the EU and it has proven to be an undeniable challenge for the EU. However, the unity showed by the EU during the Russian aggression in Ukraine has proven that the EU is able to act at

least in the time of crisis and can be considered a positive sign for the future of integrating the European defense policy.

The support for Common European defense policy among European people has also remained at almost 80%, which is another positive factor (Standard Eurobarometer, 2023). This sentiment has been accelerated by the political movements in the US that have increased the will of Europe to have its own foreign policy separate from the US that represents European values rather than being an extension of the US. However, there are internal issues that the EU must solve in for it to become a functional actor in global foreign policy, such as being able to arrange sufficient funding and solving the rising issue of Anti-Brussels sentiment and the rise of the far right in Europe (Krotz 2009, 559-565.)

Constraints that the EU faces in its attempts at achieving strategic autonomy are both internal and external. On one hand, a member state can block or try to slow down proposals that are presented for increasing the strategic autonomy of the EU. On the other, excessive dependence on certain supply chains or countries in providing materials and production can be a problem if the deliveries stop coming due to political decisions or instability in the area.

Koenig (2021, 58) argues that "political autonomy requires a common understanding of three central questions that the notion of strategic autonomy evokes: autonomy from whom, for what and to do what?" These three questions are essentially the key points that create conflicts about the definition of strategic autonomy in the EU and they remain the core questions that need to be clarified if a consensus and succeeding in creating a shared strategic culture is the goal.

3.3 French foreign policy and European integration

France has a long history of being a great European power. For long time, its foreign policy has been determined by the idea of French exceptionalism, or "grandeur," which remains a defining factor to this day regardless of the global influence of France having fallen from the level of what it was in the beginning of the 20th century (Rieker 2018).

Essentially, the idea of French "grandeur" is based on the historic role of France as a traditional global power as well as on the view that the ideas from the French revolution form the foundation of modern Western democracies, granting France the role of being an ideological leader of the Western world (Rieker 2018, 420-421). There is also a sense

of responsibility for France to defend the liberal order and the 'French idea' due to its role in the development of Western democracy and the values it represents. This interpretation of history explains also how French exceptionalism still defines French foreign policy and sheds light on why Macron presented France as the ideological leader of the "free world" regardless of its global influence having decreased in comparison with the US.

There has been a broad change in the nature of French exceptionalism since the Second World War, where the concept of French exceptionalism has been "Europeanized". This meant adopting the concept of a wider Europe as a community of values united by liberal democracy and reconstructing the role of a divided France by placing it as a protector of the European values. The second world war was a traumatic experience for France and the German occupation left a mark on the French national identity. In the 1950's there were multiple different visions for the future of France varying from the nationalist view of the French Gaullists to the attempts to attach France to the European socialist movement by the French Socialists (Marcussen, Risse, Engelmann-Martin, Knopf & Roscher 2011, 619-620.)

Charles De Gaulle shared the nationalist vision but was more open towards Europe and European cooperation. He was able to unite the polarized country under a new national identity based on the historical role of France, the French revolution and the values of the Enlightenment and democracy. Sovereignty was essential part of this rebranded French identity and acted as a glue between the different political forces, as well as the past and the future. Sovereignty was also one of the main reasons De Gaulle (1966) presented as a justification for the withdrawal of France from the NATO command structure in his letter to the American president Lyndon B. Johnson.

The gradual process of Europeanization didn't start until the 1970's when De Gaulle had already stepped down and accelerated during the term of Francois Mitterand in the 1980's as the rhetoric was starting to change towards considering the future of France to be within the European community. This development didn't happen without contestation but eventually led to France identifying more with the liberal democracies of Europe (Marcussen et al. 2011, 620-621.)

This dynamic of national identity based on sovereignty and French exceptionalism with the Europeanization process characterized by Western European liberal democratic

values remains at the core of French political identity to this day, which can be seen in the presidential debates, as well as in the collisions with the conservative nationalists and liberal Europe-leaning political forces.

While the French exceptionalism still prevails as relevant in French politics, the policies drawn from it often come into conflict. This became clear during the French presidential election in 2017, where two different proposals of 'retaining the past glory of France' collided in debates between Macron and Marine LePen. Macron promoted his liberal internationalist vision where heavily integrated EU led by France and Germany was considered essential for the future growth of France, whereas LePen opposed this by presenting a nationalist and protectionist vision that emphasized the importance of France and its national security as a priority (Gheciu 2020, 30-31). Regardless of the contrasting views, the goal of both remains the same; restoring the global influence of France, indicating that the French grandeur is widely accepted as an argument for political agenda regardless of the position on the political spectrum.

European defense policy and the French position

While DeGaulle's statement to withdraw France from NATO in 1966 can be viewed as an expression of French exceptionalism and France distancing itself from the Western alliance led by the US, the actual effects on European security architecture and French foreign policy weren't necessarily that impactful. While not remaining fully integrated, France continued cooperating with NATO soon after the departure and remained relatively active in participating in its exercises. In his statement, De Gaulle also stated that the intent was to form a new alliance between France and NATO and the withdrawal didn't affect France's commitment to the cooperation with US and Europe.

The influence of NATO in Europe kept increasing and more states were basing their defense policy on NATO while France remained a close ally. In reality, the sovereignty of France was steadily declining even while maintaining more independent stance on defense policy. In this sense it could be argued that the hesitancy of France to be a part of a US-dominated alliance and the cherishing of French sovereignty by De Gaulle were rather symbolic than practical and spoke more to the national identity of France as a great power.

While Nicolas Sarkozy's decision to reintegrate France with the military command structure of NATO and to regain a full membership in 2009 can be considered an

exception from the line of French exceptionalism, the actual impact of the reintegration wasn't as grave. This is because regardless of its withdrawal, France remained in close cooperation with NATO and kept a seat in the North Atlantic Council (NAC) where the most important information was shared (Rieker 2013, 378). Therefore, Sarkozy's decision can be considered more practical, rather than an ideological change in French foreign policy.

Reintegration with NATO wasn't a brand-new idea either and had been intended before by Francois Mitterrand since 1995 and later by Jacques Chiraq (Rieker 2013, 379). The door to NATO was also always kept open by the US and the reintegration was expected to happen at some point in the US (Pesme 2010, 45). In addition, France had also been quite heavily involved in NATO missions including the operations in Bosnia and Kosovo, which made the decision to regain full membership a logical choice (Rieker 2013, 379).

The decision to join NATO military command structure was presented in the "The French White Paper on Defense and National Security" in 2008 that drew the lines of French security policy and its direction for the future. The reintegration of France to NATO was the most remarkable change in the paper but the European ambitions of France are also visible in the paper as making Europe a key player in international security and crisis management is presented as a core goal of French defense policy (Gordon 2009). Regardless of France having maintained close relations with NATO during its time outside the command structure of the alliance, full membership increased the French position in terms of intelligence information and power in global politics as its capability to influence the decisions was limited before joining (Rieker 2013, 380-381).

While NATO has been an important part of the defense policy of France since the reintegration, they have been active in promoting the significance of European defense capabilities and securing the sovereignty of European security. This was especially notable during the first term of Macron and was emphasized by the issues in transatlantic relations during the term of Donald Trump.

France has been at the forefront of emphasizing the strategic autonomy of the EU and has been active in its pursuits of developing the defense capabilities as well as defense infrastructure between the member states. During the past decade it has been a part of

launching many defense policy initiatives mostly in cooperation with Germany. This has become easier after Brexit as the UK was more hesitant on some of the developments to the EU defense policy in comparison to France and Germany (Koenig 2021, 61). Therefore, after Brexit, activating PESCO became possible. Regardless of France and Germany both being the driving forces behind PESCO, there were differences in views about its nature. Germany viewed PESCO as mostly political structure that had its biggest asset in inclusion whereas France was more eager to further develop defense cooperation among the states that were most willing. The perceived stiffness of PESCO is what led to the launch of the French proposed EI2 that consists of 13 member states and aims to having ability to act more rapidly compared to PESCO (Koenig 2021, 61-62.)

Partially due to the lack of trust in the US, France has also put increased attention to its national defense, which can be seen in the military planning law that presented a goal of increasing the annual armed forces budget from 32,2 to 39,6 billion euros by 2023 and the total spending to 198 billion euros by 2025. In 2018, Macron also announced that compulsory military service would be revived after being suspended in 1996 (Gheciu 2019, 33-34.)

Global influence of France

In the field on international relations, the requirements for a country to be considered a great power vary depending on the definition. E.H. Carr (1939) considers that to be a great power, a state must have a sufficient amount of economic, political and military power. Waltz has a more materialist approach where the relative size of a state is viewed to define its interests and actions, whereas Bull emphasizes the meaning of socially constructed roles (Buzan 2011, 5). Regardless of the definition, generally the minimum requirements that are agreed upon are having global influence economically, politically and in military power.

For Buzan (2011, 4), a great power is a polity, whose, military, political, economic and cultural reach extends across more than one region. He separates the definition of a great power from a superpower, which is considered to have a reach that extends across the whole international system. Basically, by this definition, the US would be the only superpower that is accompanied by other great powers.

By Buzan's definition, France could technically be considered a great power as its influence still reaches beyond Europe. It has maintained a strong military presence in the Middle East and is planning to increase its presence in Africa where it has been providing air support since 2017 for the G5 Sahel Force, a West African joint force formed by Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania and Niger (Gheciu 2020, 33). However, it is important to mention that the French influence that extends beyond Europe, is largely a legacy of France's colonial past, and is most visible in Western Africa.

French presence in Africa has become increasingly contested as China has gained footing in the continent through large investments and mercenary groups such as Wagner PMC have replaced French troops in Mali and Central African Republic. The situation in Mali became difficult especially after the coup d'etat in 2021 but also because the Operation Barkhane led by France didn't succeed in maintaining peace in the area as fatalities were steadily growing regardless of the presence of France and the UN peacekeepers in the area (Country report 2021). Growing anti-France movements in the area fueled by Russian disinformation operations also played a part in France's withdrawal, which is another sign of increasing competition in the Sahel region, as well as an indicator of France struggling to maintain its influence in Africa in relation to its former colonies (Duursma & Masuhr 2022, 416).

Internationally, the political power of France is mainly based on multilateralism and strong diplomacy. Post-WW2 power of France is partly due to it being able to maintain its status as a key player in global politics despite its weakness at the time. This can be considered a result of successful diplomacy by De Gaulle as during his term France gained positions in key international organizations, such as the position as a Veto power in the UN security council. Rieker has argued that this position of France having representation in influential international organizations was achieved more due to France's status and reputation as a traditional great power, rather than its actual global power (Rieker 2018, 422-427.)

French language is protected and deliberately exported by France as it is considered a cornerstone of French culture and a symbol of the French global influence. While French soft power in Africa is still very present in the form of language and French is still one of the most spoken languages in the world, the attitudes in Africa towards

France as a colonial power have affected this relation as well. This became visible through Mali's decision to remove French from being the official language and banning non-governmental organisations that were financed or supported by French government (AviYonah 2023 & Devi 2022).

Many have described French soft power and global influence as having decreased since the 19th century. The reasons for this lie mostly in the shift of global politics in the 20th century where the US hegemony took over and globalization along with the rise of countries like China and India affected the share of French influence in the world. Baverez (2007) has argued that poor adaptation to the post-cold war politics and globalization by the post-Gaullist era of French foreign policy are also to blame for delaying the economic development of France when compared to other Western nations and their growth since the second world war.

While the global attractiveness of French art and culture may have decreased from its best days, there are still large industries like the fashion industry and tourism where France remains very successful. It has been the most visited country by tourists for the past 30 years and remains to be an attractive destination for immigrants (UN Tourism 2024). Regardless of this, the soft power of France doesn't necessarily translate to geopolitics and having more leverage in global politics, which is why France is aiming to position itself steadily in the leadership of the EU and is building its foreign policy with the EU being at the core of it.

By Buzan's definition, France could potentially be considered a great power but realistically the most fitting description for France in 2023 would probably be a regional power as France still has a lot of influence in Europe and has possibly the most impact beyond its borders among the EU members. The most significant losses in French global influence have been political as it is increasingly dependent on unified EU and the European project.

This chapter has introduced the concept of strategic autonomy and examined its growing significance in European defense policy. It has also discussed strategic autonomy becoming increasingly relevant term in European defense discourse and highlighted the connection between this development and relevant political events that have accelerated the process, while highlighting the different perceptions within the EU, particularly the divide between Europeanist and Transatlanticist viewpoints.

Furthermore, the chapter has traced the connection between France's foreign policy tradition and Macron's advocacy for strategic autonomy, explaining why Macron has emerged as one of its most prominent promoters. By understanding the evolution of European defense policy, alongside France's stance on defense and the importance of autonomy in its foreign policy, this chapter sets the context for analyzing Macron's rhetoric and his efforts to promote both strategic autonomy and European integration.

4 METHODOLOGY

4.1 Rhetoric and the political

Depending on the interpretation, rhetoric can refer to either persuasion and the ways of achieving it or finding and analyzing what is persuasive (Martin 2013, 2). Traditionally, it has been associated with situations where several policy options are available or where several different arguments can be presented (Kuusisto 1998, 22). The connection between rhetoric and politics has been recognized early on by the sophists of ancient Greece and the dynamic between a political leader and the audience, where the information isn't distributed evenly remains at the core of political rhetoric to this day (Haapanen 1996, 27).

Rhetoric is an essential part of politics as the decision making often happens in uncertainty regarding the future and people's support is required for advancing one's agenda (Martin 2013, 1). It also plays a major part in the process of something becoming political and rising to the center of political discussion, making it an essential part of political communication and politicking (Palonen & Summa 1996, 7-13).

Essential part of rhetoric and succeeding in persuasion is understanding the audience. Aristotle (1997) focuses on this in "Rhetoric" and presents a broad yet useful categorization of three different factors the speaker should consider when appealing to the audience. First of these, Logos refers to the argument itself and appeals to logic and deduction. Logos hasn't as much to do with the impulses of the audience but is necessary for presenting the argument in a form that is solid and convincing.

Ethos refers to authority and the way the rhetor presents themselves to the audience. It contains the factor of the importance of knowing the audience. Understanding the culture, values and the history of the audience is essential when trying to gain support for propositions and has to be taken in consideration when constructing the premises.

Pathos refers to the emotional aspect of the audience. This is where understanding human behavior is important and emphasized by Aristotle. Crucial is understanding different emotional states and how they affect the responsiveness of the audience as well as the importance of collective feelings of a group. I won't go in detail about the interpretations of Aristotle about the relations between certain emotions and action since their assertiveness varies a lot. However, this categorization presented by Aristotle offers an effective description of some of the key factors of classic rhetoric and has been extended by later authors and developed into an important part of political analysis and a precise methodological tool (Wrobel 2015 ,415; Palonen & Summa 1996,7).

A key part for many authors of rhetoric and communication is the audience (Mshvenieradze 2013, 1940). Aristotle considers the capability of the rhetor to know their audience as a crucial part of succeeding in persuading the audience about the superiority of his arguments. This includes the knowledge and understanding of the values held in high regard within the specific audience, which enables identifying the speaker and the issue with the audience. This must be supported by the knowledge of techniques of argumentation as well as an understanding of logical deduction.

Perelman (1996) focuses on the argumentation and expanding rhetoric to be not only something that happens in form of speeches but something that can be analyzed in text also. Burke considers identification to be the most crucial part of persuasion and puts emphasis on knowledge of the symbols and tropes for this process. Regardless of the point of view, the audience remains at the core of rhetoric as the support of the audience is considered essential for being able to promote one's political ideas in the society. Therefore, understanding rhetoric as a combination of techniques and the ability to use them in a way that is the most beneficial for the speaker in a specific situation is how rhetoric is considered in this thesis.

4.2 Kenneth Burke and the New Rhetoric

Kenneth Burke's work or the wave of new rhetoric give a comprehensible and useful conceptualization for analyzing the research material of the thesis. I will utilize especially his concept of identification, which gives a functional framework for a deeper analysis of Macron's rhetoric.

Rhetorical analysis in this thesis is based on the theories of Burke, who belongs to the authors of new rhetoric. New rhetoric isn't separate from classic rhetoric rather than a

branch of rhetoric that has developed the theories of classic rhetors such as Aristotle (Palonen & Summa 1996, 7). Essential is broadening the perception of rhetoric and focusing on the different ways of it occurring in the society beyond just spoken debates. Even within new rhetoric there are differences in the ways of approaching it. Burke considers rhetoric to be something primarily related to situations involving disagreement whereas Chaim Perelman attaches it to achieving consensus (Summa 1996, 67). Essential part of new rhetoric is also the significance of the audience and the pursuit of its approval at the center of rhetoric.

New rhetoric broadens the classic perception of rhetoric from being the art of persuasion to a theoretical framework for understanding and analyzing how language functions as a part of the construction of meaning, the negotiation of identities and the establishment of social relationships (Rutten & Soetaert 2014, 340). Compared to classic rhetoric, the focus in new rhetoric also tends to be more on analyzing the text rather than producing it.

Burke considers all human activity to be performative and therefore rhetorical (Summa 1996, 55). The existence and relevance of rhetoric itself becomes confirmed by the existence of polarization and disagreement. If there was a consensus about everything, there would be no need for debate or to convince the audience of the superiority of one's argument (Burke 1969, 22).

Identification

The division between identification and separation is essentially the starting point of Burke's (1969, 22-23) rhetoric and identification the main way of pursuing the approval of the audience. Identification is also considered a key factor of constructing and maintaining social order and can act as a tool for pointing out the rhetoric in situations where it otherwise wouldn't be recognized (Summa 1996, 57). For Burke, any form of belonging to a group is rhetoric and always requires separation from something (Summa 1996, 59).

Identification happens when a phenomenon or an event is defined as something else, or when a person and his actions or motivations are identified with something such as a group or a broader entity (Summa 1996, 56). A Common way of implementing identification especially in political speeches is the act of a politician identifying themselves with the audience in pursue of seemingly removing the difference in status between the speaker and the audience. This could be for example a politician stating that

he comes from humble beginnings when speaking to a working-class audience. Burke considers the identifications between speaker and audience as crucial for building trust and establishing a basis for audience's willingness to cooperate (Summa 1996, 58). Another form of identification often present in political rhetoric is the division in "us" and "them". In this case, the speaker identifies himself with the audience to something familiar and shared, while building a train of thought that is easily identifiable due to its predictability (Summa 1996, 58.)

Identification can also be based in values or virtues supposedly supported by the audience. Based on his evaluations, the speaker can present arguments and display action that he believes to be appreciated among the audience, while attempting to identify the opposition with factors presumably considered negative (Burke 1969, 55).

The question of what is persuasive has been considered by many among the classics of rhetoric and generally the factors valued by the audience have been a key object of analysis. In his work, Aristotle has defined factors considered to be useful for the rhetor in their intentions of convincing the audience. While always dependent of time and audience, Aristotle (2000) claims that there are some factors that are generally considered to be effective and persuasive among the audience above the individual or cultural setting. Examples of factors generally considered virtuous are courage, justice, self-discipline, honor and wisdom.

When aiming to praise or accuse someone, the speaker should look for features that resemble these general values and present them as identical. For example, when aiming to present a cautious person in a negative light, he should be referred as cold and calculative. Likewise, when defending someone considered simple, the speaker should emphasize his good nature and his big heart. Burke (1969, 55) states that identification is only possible to the extent that the speaker is able to identify himself with the audience and its language, ideas and attitudes.

5 STRATEGIC AUTONOMY IN MACRON'S RHETORIC

5.1 Research Material and The Aim of the Analysis

In this chapter, I will analyze Emmanuel Macron's rhetoric and his conceptualization of strategic autonomy in his speeches. I will focus on his arguments for strengthening defense cooperation in Europe and the role presented for France's in shaping this

strategic direction. I will also explore why Macron has been at the forefront of advocating for European sovereignty, seeking to understand the underlying motives driving this leadership. Additionally, I will consider the cautious responses from other European nations and the reasons behind their hesitancy.

The research material of the thesis consists of speeches and interviews by Emmanuel Macron. To limit the research material, I will be focusing on his first term as the president of France. Therefore, the research material will be from the period between 14th of May 2017 (when Macron took office for his first term) and 7th of May in 2022, when his second term officially began (elysee.fr). The source of the primary research material is mainly the official website of the President of France. Other sources are the website of French Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs and the website of the European parliament. English translations are from the official websites of the French president and French Ministry of Europe and Foreign Affairs, except for the 2022 session of the European parliament, that has been translated by myself. The 2021 source does not have a French original version as it was held in English.

From the research material, I will be looking for direct references to the concept of strategic autonomy that are used for describing the capabilities of the EU to act autonomously in policy areas considered strategically important. I will also look for references to sovereignty and autonomy, as they are often used interchangeably. As the definition of strategic autonomy by the EU is the capacity to act independently and secure the geopolitical interests of the EU, I will also focus on the rhetoric considering this capacity and the sovereignty of the EU as a whole.

Strategic autonomy as a concept has developed to having multiple different dimensions and being used in varying ways in different contexts. I view the security dimension as the most important for the context of this thesis and consider other dimensions as ultimately subordinate to the security dimension which can be considered as the foundation for further development.

5.2 Sovereignty as a symbol

The speech on 26 September in 2017 at the Sorbonne university can be seen as a turning point in Macron's rhetoric on international policy, and possibly the most significant expression of his vision for the future of Europe and the role strategic autonomy should play in this development. The timing of the speech was also relevant since it was the

first time Macron had the opportunity to set the tone of his foreign policy after being elected earlier the same year. At the same time, his presentation of strategic autonomy in his speech can be seen as having contributed to the increasing use of the concept in European political discourse. Since then, strategic autonomy and sovereignty have remained central to his rhetoric in both domestic and international contexts.

Sovereignty and independence are concepts that have been at the heart of French foreign policy since the Second World War and remain essential not only to French foreign policy but also to Macron's vision of how the EU's foreign policy should be developed. In his Sorbonne 2017 speech, Macron presents sovereignty as a symbol that represents the very foundation of any state and that is necessary for the freedom and survival of the culture. It is a motive that should be considered and respected by all sovereign states as well as a justification for action. Sovereignty is used by Macron to gain support for the development of the EU's defense policy but also to state France's position as respecting the sovereignties of all states regardless of the interventions outside of its borders. The traditional role of sovereignty in French foreign policy, Macron's position of embracing multilateral cooperation based on a rules-based order and his realist approach to foreign policy explain the emphasizing of the sovereignty in his rhetoric.

Macron presents sovereignty as the ultimate factor for guaranteeing the security of Europe and states that it is something Europe has been taking for granted. Europe should realize that it cannot remain as a bystander while the geopolitical order is changing and securing the EU's capability to act independently should be just the first step. This was mentioned in a speech on 18 November in 2018 in Berlin at a commemoration ceremony of Armistice Day where Macron argues that Europe should pursue foreign policy that allows it to define the development of global politics based on the values it represents:

"If we want to guarantee our fellow citizens that we are putting ourselves in a position to protect them in the face of new risks and to choose our future, we need to be more sovereign as Europeans."

"Si nous voulons garantir à nos concitoyens que nous nous mettons en situation de les protéger face aux nouveaux risques et de choisir notre avenir, il nous faut être plus souverains en Européens."

Macron 2018d.

This is complemented by stressing the urgency of the situation and presenting the alternative path of no action as a recipe for instability and the rule-based world order becoming under threat. The EU should act now as it still can affect the development of the new global order and if acting rapidly, can secure a position that makes possible representing itself as a counterbalance to other global powers:

"That's why Europe needs to be stronger. That's why Europe needs to be more sovereign, because it won't be able to play its role if it becomes the plaything of the powers that be, if it doesn't take greater responsibility for its own defense and security, and is content to play second fiddle on the world stage."

"C'est pour cela que l'Europe doit être plus forte. C'est pour cela qu'elle doit être plus souveraine parce qu'elle ne pourra jouer son rôle si elle-même devient le jouet des puissances, si elle ne prend pas davantage des responsabilités dans sa défense et sa sécurité et se contente de jouer les seconds rôles sur la scène mondiale."

Macron 2018d.

The sense of urgency and the need for Europe to wake up is a key part of Macron's rhetoric, which he seeks to present as rational and, at times, above the political polarization. Regardless of this, he doesn't hide his idealism regarding his belief in the 'European idea' that is at the core of his justification for accelerating the European integration process at least on a rhetoric level.

The threat of a changing global order and the urgency of the situation is used as a justification for action and increasing efforts to strengthen Europe's defense policy, which can be seen in Macron's speech at the European parliament in Strasbourg on 17 April in 2018, where he spoke about the future of Europe:

"To defend the European idea is not to defend an abstract idea, some sort of dilution of our own individual sovereignty, but it is to act in the faith that faced with such great global changes"

"Défendre l'idée européenne, ce n'est pas défendre une idée abstraite, la dilution en quelque sorte de nos propres souverainetés, non, c'est acter du fait que face à ces grands bouleversements du monde…"

Macron 2018a.

Macron's emphasis on strategic autonomy serves not only to garner political support but also to advance French foreign policy by promoting the European defense industry. France uses the urgency of strategic autonomy to justify accelerating European integration, positioning the EU's coherent action as essential for maintaining global influence. France is prepared to lead and drive the development of EU defense capabilities, strengthening the European defense industry and building infrastructure for future growth.

<u>Realism</u>

Macron's realist views are notable in his speech on 25 April in 2018 at the Congress of the US, where he spoke about the significance of transatlantic cooperation and commitment to international treaties such as JCPOA, that the US had threatened to leave. The use of autonomy or sovereignty as the ultimate goal is in line with Macron's view of foreign policy and his perception of the most effective way of handling international relations that can be described as realist and pluralist. As sovereignty is something he portraits as the ultimate goal, it is also something that is to be respected in foreign policy, therefore limiting the extent of physical intervention. This perception can be seen in his rhetoric about Iran. Macron considers Iran a global threat that shouldn't have nuclear weapons but regardless of this emphasizes the meaning of respecting the states sovereignty regarding solving the issue:

"As for Iran, our objective is clear: Iran shall never possess any nuclear weapons. Not now, not in 5 years, not in 10 years. Never."

"Quant à l'Iran, notre objectif est clair : ce pays ne doit jamais posséder d'arme nucléaire. Pas aujourd'hui, ni dans cinq ans, ni même dans dix ans. Jamais."

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"But this policy should never lead us to war in the Middle East. We must ensure stability, and respect sovereignty of the nations, including that one of Iran, which represents a great civilization. Let us not replicate past mistakes in the region. Let us not be naïve on one side. Let us not create new walls ourselves on the other side."

"Mais cette politique ne doit en aucun cas nous mener à la guerre au Moyen-Orient. Nous devons garantir la stabilité et respecter la souveraineté des nations, y compris de l'Iran, qui est une grande civilisation. Ne répétons pas les erreurs passées commises

dans la région. Ne soyons pas naïfs. Mais ne créons pas non plus nous-mêmes de nouvelles guerres."

Macron 2018b.

His views on the issue have a pluralist tone as he stresses the importance of respecting the sovereignty of states. The firm belief in diplomacy and multilateralism shows as well as he views open dialogue and cooperation based on international institutions, in this case the JCPOA as the most effective ways of dealing with such issue. There is also a realist angle as Macron considers that a non-intervention policy is more likely to be more functional for maintaining stability and peace in the Middle East.

Realism as well as the significance of sovereignty in Macron's foreign policy can be detected also in the context of French foreign policy where the same sense of respecting the choices of sovereign nations is perceived as crucial. This is evident in his speech delivered on August 27, 2018, at the Conference of Ambassadors at the Élysée Palace in Paris, where he addressed new ambassadors and members of parliament about the trajectory and objectives of French foreign policy:

"Is it for France to respond if this or that country chooses a certain direction, or if another sovereign power decides differently from what we believe in? France's responsibility is to make its voice heard and defend its position. Not to speak in the place of others. We therefore need to take new initiatives, build new alliances and engage in debate at the right level if we are to apprehend all today's challenges."

"Est-ce la responsabilité de la France si tel ou tel pays choisit telle sensibilité, si une autre puissance souveraine décide différemment de ce que nous pensons ? La responsabilité de la France est de faire entendre sa voix, de la défendre. Pas de se substituer à la parole des autres. Il nous faudra donc prendre de nouvelles initiatives, construire de nouvelles alliances, porter les débats au bon niveau si nous souhaitons appréhender tous les défis contemporains…"

Macron 2018c.

While this approach might be partly due to the existing opportunities in the foreign policy of France and the EU, it embodies a realist position that aims to adapt rather than to impose the European values on other countries, or at least considers international institutions and multilateralism the most effective way to do so.

Strategic autonomy of the EU is something Macron (2020, 2021) presents as independence to realize European foreign policy in relation to its neighboring powers in Russia and Turkey but also in its strategy on China as well as in dealing with the stability of neighboring areas in Africa, the Balkans and the Mediterranean. His argument for the strategic autonomy of the EU is realist in a sense that it focuses on the EU's capability to realize foreign policy that enforces its values instead of just representing the European idea and European values.

Sovereignty in French foreign policy and Macron's rhetoric

On 10 June in 2021 in a press conference prior to the G7 and NATO Summits Macron uses the concept of sovereignty to justify the French involvement in Africa. He references French operations in Sahel region and the Operation Barkhane that are framed as defending the sovereignty of the sovereign African nations from the threat of Islamist terrorism. Respecting the sovereignty of the states as a priority is mentioned in this context as well, continuing to show Macron's pluralist view on managing international relations and executing cooperative operations:

"The lasting presence of France in the form of overseas operations cannot stand in for the return of the State and government services, political stability and the choices of sovereign States. We cannot secure areas which fall apart because States decide not to shoulder their responsibility. That is impossible, or else endless."

Macron 2021.

Macron's realist views are also at the core of his argumentation for developing the strategic autonomy of the EU. Adapting a more realist approach to EU's foreign policy is something he views as necessary for maintaining the European presence in global politics as well as for preserving the European identity. The necessity for a realist approach in Macron's rhetoric stems from the state of international relations where the traditional values represented by Europe aren't shared by others and where authoritarianism is raising its head in emerging global powers. Therefore, for the EU to maintain its autonomy in global politics, it would be necessary to adapt to the changing state of world order and to not be naïve about the realities of global competition.

Regardless of his views perceived as Europeanist and at times in conflict with the interest of the US, developing the sovereignty of Europe is something that Macron

considers fully complimentary to NATO and a development that is beneficial for the US as well. This is something he has mentioned many times when asked about the role of the transatlantic cooperation for the strategic autonomy of the EU. For Macron, the US is a key ally that represents the same democratic values as Europe does and Europe taking more responsibility in arranging its defense policy has generally received a welcoming attitude in the US. Most tensions regarding his at times provocative criticism towards NATO, most famously describing NATO as braindead has come from European countries that represent the Transatlanticist side of the debate of European defense policy. In Europe, Macron's position has at times been misunderstood as many countries realize the crucial role of the US in Europe's capability to defend itself.

While Macron's view isn't necessarily in conflict with the interests of the US, it is still also in line with the tradition of French grandeur as Europe taking a more active role in its defense policy also creates possibilities for France to increase its influence in the EU. In a sense, the setting is similar to the French departure from NATO's command structure in 1966 that can be described as somewhat symbolic move rather than a sign of France detaching itself from the transatlantic cooperation. Unifying factor between Macron's rhetoric and De Gaulle's decision to withdraw from NATO is also justification of maintaining sovereignty.

A change in the traditional French line of foreign policy has happened in a sense that Macron views the EU as a key for French foreign policy and therefore focuses a lot more on the strategic autonomy of the EU rather than just focusing on the French sovereignty. Macron views the strategic autonomy as beneficial for French sovereignty as well so his strong emphasis on Europe isn't something he considers to conflict with the national interest of France.

In Macron's rhetoric, there is a difference depending on if he is speaking about the French foreign policy in relation to the EU or the foreign policy of the EU. His views on how the EU should be developed can be described as solidaristic as the concept of shared values and goals are at the core of his rhetoric. This is especially visible when speaking about the EU and the European integration process but also, when referring to the West as a political unit. This usually means his rhetoric regarding the US and the shared history of democracy and Western values that Macron views to be the main unifying factor in the transatlantic cooperation. In his rhetoric regarding the US, he

tends to emphasize the shared interests more instead of the requirement of enforcing shared values as he views Europe as a political agent that isn't sufficiently aligned with the US when it comes to the values and political goals.

Regardless of Macron giving sovereignty a mainly positive connotation, he attaches it also to ideologies he views as threatening to Europe. He does this in context of speaking about Europe having taken a backseat and gotten used to the US guaranteeing its security, leading to dangerous ideologies giving solutions to the same question of decreased autonomy:

"So, today, it finds itself weaker, exposed to the squalls of today's globalization and, surely even worse, the ideas which offer themselves up as preferable solutions."

"These ideas have a name: nationalism, identitarianism, protectionism, isolationist sovereignism."

"La voici aujourd'hui plus fragile, exposée aux bourrasques de la mondialisation telle qu'elle va, et même ce qui sans doute est pire, à des idées qui se présentent comme des solutions préférables."

"Ces idées ont un nom : nationalisme, identitarisme, protectionnisme, souverainisme de repli."

Macron 2017a.

Therefore, Macron makes a distinction between himself and the isolationists that focus on sovereignty more on a national level. This represents the relation between France and Europe in Macron's foreign policy as well as the distinction in his views on managing international relations of France and the EU. For Macron, the foreign policy of France cannot be separated from that of the EU and cooperation between the member states is perceived as crucial for the global influence of both France and the EU. The idea of European sovereignty in Macron's rhetoric relies heavily on multilateral cooperation between states in global politics, and developing one's strategic autonomy while maintaining diplomatic and economic relations are not mutually exclusive.

He emphasizes this point also by stating that we as in Europe, need sovereignty that is bigger than our own:

"...we need a sovereignty which is stronger than our own, which works alongside our own and does not replace it, as only this sovereignty can provide the right answers to large-scale migration, global insecurity and economic, social and environmental transformations."

"...nous avons besoin d'une souveraineté plus forte que la nôtre, complémentaire et pas de substitution, qui seule permettra face aux grandes migrations, à l'insécurité planétaire, aux transformations économiques, sociales et environnementales d'apporter les bonnes réponses."

Macron 2018b.

In this statement, he emphasizes that the objective of strategic autonomy of the EU is not in conflict with the national sovereignty of the member states, rather than sovereignty that works as complementary and adds to the strategic autonomy of the member states as well. Not only is the strategic autonomy presented as complementary, but it is also a requirement for maintaining the sovereignty of European states. At the European level, Macron's proposal tends to be further integration process of the EU, which isn't necessary perceived to increase the autonomy of all the states in the same way but rather at times viewed as a way of larger EU members to get their way and gain advance for their industries.

5.3 European idea, liberal world order and values
Uniqueness

The European idea and a united Europe play a crucial role in Macron's rhetoric about developing Europe. It is also essential for his propositions that require a shared vision within the EU as well as for the global influence of France. Therefore, the factor of identifying Europe as a one cultural unit and strengthening the European identity is key in his rhetoric.

The European idea in Macron's rhetoric represents the ideological and cultural entity of Europe shaped by a shared history of conflict as well as shared values and cooperation. This European identity is characterized by democracy, freedom of expression, commitment to a market economy and social justice and the respect of human rights (Macron 2017a, Macron 2017b). At times he also attaches universalism and the liberal welfare system as defining factors (Macron 2022). Rule of law and democracy play a

major part in Macron's European identity, but he also ties the cultural heritage of European countries as something that all Europeans should be equally proud of regardless of the nationality (Macron 2022).

By framing European identity as a "European idea," he underscores the enduring nature of European culture and cooperation, suggesting that it transcends contemporary European politics or institutions like the EU:

"It is our responsibility to bring it to life, make it ever better and stronger, to not stop at the form that historic circumstances have shaped it into. Because this form may change, but the idea remains, and its ambition must be ours."

"A nous de la vivifier, de la rendre toujours plus belle et plus forte, de ne pas nous laisser arrêter par la forme que lui donnent les circonstances historiques. Car cette forme passe, mais l'idée demeure, et son ambition doit être la nôtre."

Macron 2017a.

This perspective emphasizes the deep-rooted and historical significance of European identity beyond its current political manifestations. Regardless of this, the EU remains an important part of Macron's narrative and a demonstration of the successful European cooperation in maintaining peace in the continent as well as bringing prosperity to the continent:

"When what was then known as Eastern Europe, from Poland to Bulgaria, joined this project a generation later, it was this same hope that drove us. We could finally repair the story which started in 1947. For many countries who had lived through the worst oppression, joining the European Union was an unprecedented promise of emancipation."

"Quand ce qu'on appelait alors l'Europe de l'Est, de la Pologne à la Bulgarie, a rejoint ce projet une génération après, c'est ce même souffle d'espoir qui nous animait. C'était réparer une histoire commencée en 1947, enfin. Pour nombre de pays qui avaient connu les pires oppressions, rejoindre l'Union européenne apparaissait comme une promesse inédite d'émancipation."

Macron 2017a.

In his speech to members of French parliament and the new ambassadors, Macron (2017b) describes Europe as *"one of the last havens in which the ideals of the Enlightenment – elective and representative democracy, respect for human beings, religious tolerance and freedom of expression, and belief in progress – are still widely shared, and still nurture a collective vision"*. By emphasizing the uniqueness of Europe in this way, he highlights the idea that Europe and the values of Western world are something exceptional and worth of defending. This acts also as a justification for his rhetoric about the European idea, that France is stated to have the responsibility of defending. By presenting Europe as the unique haven of Western civilization and the birthplace of democracy, Macron is creating the conditions for increasing European defense cooperation as a protective response to the growing threats to its existence (Macron 2022).

EU vs. the US

While viewing the role of the US as important for defending the Western values, Macron makes a distinction between Europe and the US, which is in line with his Europeanist position. On one hand, he presents the historic relationship between Europe and the US as a unifying factor and the transatlantic cooperation as crucial in defending the Western values and responding to the changing global order:

"The United States and Europe have a historical role in this respect, because it is the only way to defend what we believe in, to promote our universal values, to express strongly that human rights, the rights of minorities and shared liberty are the true answer to the disorders of our world."

"Les États-Unis et l'Europe ont un rôle historique à jouer à cet égard. C'est le seul moyen de défendre ce en quoi nous croyons, de promouvoir nos valeurs universelles, d'affirmer avec force que les droits de l'Homme, les droits des minorités et la liberté partagée sont la véritable réponse aux troubles de notre monde."

Macron 2018b.

The transatlantic bond based on shared values plays a crucial role in Macron's foreign policy but the rising suspicions towards the commitment of the US to NATO have amplified his Europeanist position and the sentiment of Europe needing to build a defense policy that can answer to the volatility of US foreign policy. The most visible

example of this is Macron's comment about NATO being 'braindead' in 2019, criticizing the coordination between the US and its NATO allies (France 24).

Emphasizing the distinction between Europe and the US can be interpreted as a way of strengthening the role of France in European politics. The great importance that the US has in European defense policy is acknowledged by Macron, which affects the extent of Europe gaining more autonomy from the US influence. This reality possibly influences Macron's rhetoric as well. While he has been critical of the US and the transatlantic cooperation, he tends to focus on making a distinction between Europe and the US more as a way of strengthening the European identity and highlight the differences in ideology and cultural identity. This narrative fits the objective of European integration as well as the idea of French exceptionalism and the principle of maintaining a sovereign position from the US, even if only symbolically.

Responsibility

The sense of responsibility is a key characteristic of Macron's rhetoric that he utilizes both in international and domestic settings. As Europe is presented as the birthplace of democracy and a unique civilization represented by freedom and solidarity, the European leaders have the responsibility to maintain the successful peace project that is the EU European integration process (Macron 2022). In the context of EU's foreign and defense policy, it is used as a motive for gaining support for the development of strategic autonomy and the European integration. Domestically the European identity is involved as well but there is a heavier emphasis on the French responsibility in leading Europe. The strategic autonomy is framed as a solution for the survival of the European values:

"We cannot blindly entrust what Europe represents, on the other side of the Atlantic or on the edges of Asia. It is our responsibility to defend it and build it within the context of globalization."

"Ce que l'Europe représente, nous ne pouvons pas le confier aveuglement, ni de l'autre côté de l'Atlantique, ni aux confins de l'Asie. C'est à nous de le défendre et de le construire dans cette mondialisation."

Macron 2017a.

The notion of responsibility in Macron's rhetoric acts as a justification for the strong involvement of France in defining the policies and lines of European foreign and defense policy. France is presented as playing a crucial role in Europe's development, with its traditional status giving it the responsibility to lead the process of shaping the EU's ideological and strategic foreign policy:

"All this new responsibility is ours and must encourage us to philosophically and legally define the rules of this new world. Merely limiting it to legal reflection within our borders would be insufficient: we need to lead this battle at European and international level, as pioneers."

"C'est toute cette nouvelle responsabilité qui est la nôtre et qui doit nous conduire à définir philosophiquement et juridiquement les règles de ce nouveau monde, le livrer seulement à l'intérieur de nos frontières à une réflexion juridique serait insuffisant, c'est au niveau européen et international que nous devons mener ce combat, en éclaireurs."

Macron 2017b.

While the role of France is emphasized in Macron's rhetoric, on the European level he is willing to share the responsibility and views especially Germany as a valuable ally in securing the sovereignty of Europe:

"This new Franco-German responsibility involves equipping Europe with the tools of this new invention, the tools of its sovereignty."

"Cette nouvelle responsabilité franco-allemande consiste à doter l'Europe des outils de cette invention nouvelle, des outils de sa souveraineté."

Macron 2018d.

Unity

In terms of defense policy, the lack of shared strategic culture is something Macron presents as one of the most important issues the EU has. There is a consistent effort to build an image of a common Europe that is united by solidarity, shared values and history. On this basis, the aim is to highlight and promote the development of a common defense strategy. Macron's proposals to increase the strategic autonomy of the EU are in many ways not only proposals to increase funding or build infrastructure, but also to

create a shared culture that would serve as a basis for intelligence and defense cooperation in the future.

While some of Macron's views can be seen as realist regarding the foreign policy of the EU, his emphasis on shared values and the necessity for shared culture indicates that he considers a shared set of values and culture as crucial for the unity of the EU and its possibilities to grow and tackle the global issues. When speaking about the challenges and the necessity of adapting to the changing global order, Macron stresses the importance of the EU's solidarist nature for succeeding in this process and being able to act as a counterbalance for rivaling powers:

"And Europe's transformation on the basis of a shared vision is the precondition for a new, more stable world order, defusing power rivalries."

"Et la transformation de l'Europe autour d'une vision partagée est la condition d'un nouvel ordre mondial plus stable, apaisant les rivalités des puissances."

Macron 2017b.

5.4 Threat perception and European integration

Crisis of multilateralism

The state of multilateral cooperation is one of the main concerns presented by Macron and a threat to European influence in global politics that requires urgent actions. Ineffectiveness of the UN security council in condemning the actions of Russia combined with the unanimity principle hindering the EU's capability of united decision making in international institutions are key issues that eat the credibility of these institutions and pose a challenge for the European integration process.

While international cooperation is at the core of Macron's foreign policy, he (2020) views globalization and the changing dynamic of the global order are perceived as a security threat especially for the EU and the Western world. The increasing willingness of global powers to weaponize interdependences is presented as a threat to the global influence of the EU and the law/rule-based order and democracy that are represented by Europe on a global scale:

"While participating actively in traditional multilateralism, China, for its part, is promoting its own world view, its own vision of a reinvented, more hegemonic

multilateralism. Other powers are not really playing the game in multilateral cooperation, and for them, the collapse of this supposedly Western order will not be overly problematic."

"La Chine, tout en participant activement au jeu multilatéral classique, promeut de son côté sa propre vision du monde, sa propre vision d'un multilatéralisme réinventé, plus hégémonique. D'autres puissances ne jouent pas véritablement le jeu de la coopération multilatérale, et l'effondrement de cet ordre supposé occidental ne leur poserait pas tant de difficultés."

Macron 2018c.

Regardless of the growing competition of global influence, Macron stresses the necessity of maintaining influence in international institutions as the visions of other powers such as China or Russia are not as reliant on traditional multilateralism or a strong presence of the West in global politics. This position of acting as a counterbalance is an argument he uses to justify the active involvement of France in international relations and multilateral cooperation.

Macron's concern about the decreased trust in multilateralism isn't limited to rivaling powers as he has criticized the US as well. The instability of transatlantic relations during Trump's presidency affected Macron's perception of the relationship, and France being overtaken by the Five Eyes alliance in the AUKUS submarine deal reinforced his Europeanist stance on European sovereignty even in relation to its allies. The decision by the US to withdraw from the Paris climate agreement in 2017 was another indicator that the trust in global institutions was not shared to a sufficient degree and the act was described as 'aggressive' by Macron.

Regardless of the presented difficulties, Macron's proposals for responding to the challenge are to deepen the multilateral cooperation both globally and especially in relation to the allies and the Western world that is facing an existential threat and has to defend its values:

"The only option then is to strengthen our cooperation. We can build the 21st century world order, based on a new breed of multilateralism. Based on a more effective, accountable, and results-oriented multilateralism. A strong multilateralism."

"This requires more than ever the United States' involvement, as your role was decisive for creating and safeguarding today's free world. The United States invented this multilateralism. You are the one now who has to help to preserve and reinvent it."

"La seule option pour cela est de renforcer notre coopération. Nous pouvons bâtir l'ordre mondial du XXIe siècle sur une nouvelle forme de multilatéralisme. Sur un multilatéralisme plus efficace, plus responsable et axé sur les résultats. Sur un multilatéralisme fort."

"Cela nécessite plus que jamais la participation des États-Unis, car votre rôle a été déterminant dans la création et la sauvegarde du monde libre d'aujourd'hui. Ce sont les États-Unis qui ont inventé le multilatéralisme. Ce sont eux qui doivent maintenant contribuer à le préserver et à le réinventer."

Macron 2018b.

Macron presenting the crisis of multilateralism as a threat to the EU is a way of connecting the French issue of losing influence on a larger scale and identifying it as a problem facing the EU as a whole. This is not to say that the mistrust in multilateralism wasn't an issue for the EU but to recognize that France has its own motive to maintain the validity of the international institutions to which it belongs. As Rieker (2018, 422-427) has argued, France's presence in global institutions is based on its past status, which has allowed it to maintain its influence in key institutions despite the decline of its global powers in other relations. France and Macron are aware of the realities of their opportunities and of the areas where they have the greatest potential to increase their influence, which influences the enthusiasm to promote the European integration and the Western multilateral order in which France has traditionally has a strong representation.

Another occasion that raised suspicion is the failure of the AUKUS submarine deal coming through, which resulted Macron stating that Europe needs to stop 'being naïve'. The loss of the deal can be viewed as a hit for the French identity in global politics defined by French exceptionalism and an accelerating factor for the policy of a European preference in defense policy. Macron identifies the issue as a hit to European security and a sign for Europe to develop its defense capabilities as means to avoid dependance on other powers.

The sense of urgency and presenting a wakeup call for Europe is often present in Macron's rhetoric, which is used to emphasize the urgency for accelerating the European integration process. It is used also with the aim of uniting Europe to establish a united stance on developing its common defense policy that would not rely solely on the commitment of individual member countries:

"Doubtless, we were not sufficiently aware that this much-desired Europe grew up sheltered. Sheltered firstly from the rest of the world. Security was not its business: this was performed by America. Its economy already knew the path to follow: catch up with America. Sheltered from the people, too. In its early stages the European project was a mission carried by a few individuals, sewing a torn continent back together by overcoming populist passions."

"Sans doute alors, ne voyait-on pas assez que cette Europe rêvée grandissait à l'abri. A l'abri du reste du monde d'abord. Sa sécurité n'était pas son affaire : assurée par l'Amérique. Son économie connaissait déjà le chemin à suivre : rattraper l'Amérique. A l'abri des peuples aussi. Le projet européen, naissant, était la mission de quelques-uns, recousant les fils d'un continent déchiré en surmontant les passions populaires."

Macron 2017a.

Polarization in the EU

As Macron considers unity a condition for maintaining Europe's autonomy, another key threat is the rise of far-right movements in European politics accompanied by the rise of nationalism and isolationism. The political polarization and anti-EU views stemming from the rise of the far-right are essentially threatening the very sovereignty of Europe as it puts the law-based order at risk, therefore risking the European project of securing the peace in Europe. This Macron mentioned in 2022 in a session in European parliament, while speaking about the significance of a law based order for Europe:

"But let's not forget that we all have to be part of this rule of law, which is existential for our Europe, whose principles have been built by our history and are the fruit of our common commitments. The end of the rule of law means the reign of the arbitrary. The end of the rule of law means a sign of return to authoritarian regimes, to the stutterings of our history."

"Mais considérons que nous tous avons à nous inscrire dans cet état de droit, qui est existentiel pour notre Europe, dont les principes ont été bâtis par notre histoire et sont le fruit de nos engagements communs. La fin de l'état de droit, c'est le règne de l'arbitraire. La fin de l'état de droit, c'est le signe du retour aux régimes autoritaires, aux bégaiements de notre histoire."

Macron 2022.

While the rise of the far right poses a domestic threat to Macron, the polarization in the EU is something he considers a security threat also in a sense that it creates possibilities for foreign powers to sow division:

"Too many powers today want to erase us from the game, by attacking our public debate, our open democracies, by stirring up our divisions."

"Trop de puissances veulent aujourd'hui nous effacer du jeu, en attaquant notre débat public, nos démocraties ouvertes, en excitant nos divisions."

Macron 2018d.

This goes directly against the European integration process pushed by Macron, so it's understandable that he focuses on it in his rhetoric on threat perception and the requirements for developing the EU's strategic autonomy. These inner divisions are essentially viewed as weaknesses that are exploited by foreign powers and that place the very sovereignty of Europe in danger. Again, to combat this, unity is presented as the only way to maintain influence in global politics:

"In this world we have to face, our strength, our real strength, is our unity; it is not synonymous with unanimity or uniformity."

"Dans ce monde qu'il nous faut regarder en face, notre force, notre vraie force est notre unité ; elle n'est pas synonyme d'unanimité ou d'uniformité."

Macron 2018d.

Essentially, the unity of Europe is portrayed as a condition for the survival of Europe and its sovereignty:

"We will never have a strong, sovereign Europe if it is not united and coherent in itself. If we lose this unity, we risk falling back into our deadly divisions and destructive hegemony."

"Nous n'aurons pas d'Europe forte et souveraine si elle n'est pas unie, tenue en elle-même, cohérente. Perdre cette unité c'est prendre le risque de revenir à nos déchirements mortifères et à l'hégémonie destructrice."

Macron 2017a.

As a strong EU is essential for French foreign policy and French influence, Macron defends the European project against isolationist movements. The nationalist position is presented as self-sabotage for the goal of sovereignty and a lack of understanding the geopolitical trends of the world which can be detected in his speech to the European citizens ahead of the European parliament election in May 2019. It's also a sign of denying the shared history and the European idea based on shared values that Macron claims to be the most important unifying factor for the security and the future of the EU:

"Yet Europe is not just a market. It is a project. A market is useful, but it should not detract from the need for borders that protect and values that unite. The nationalists are misguided when they claim to defend our identity by withdrawing from Europe, because it is the European civilisation that unites, frees and protects us."

"Or l'Europe n'est pas qu'un marché, elle est un projet. Un marché est utile, mais il ne doit pas faire oublier la nécessité de frontières qui protègent et de valeurs qui unissent. Les nationalistes se trompent quand ils prétendent défendre notre identité dans le retrait de l'Europe ; car c'est la civilisation européenne qui nous réunit, nous libère et nous protège."

Macron 2019.

Geopolitical tensions

Macron (2017b) views defense policy as the base for developing strategic autonomy and security as crucial both for the sovereignty of France and Europe

The rising geopolitical tensions in global politics act as a justification for increasing the defense capabilities of the EU and investing in the European defense industry as means to decrease dependance on external suppliers. His emphasis is on increasing the efforts

to strengthening European defense capabilities but on a strategic level, his position on how to secure peace in Europe is cooperation and dialogue between European powers, including Russia. Macron frames the rebuilding European security architecture as something that needs to be solved within Europe:

"Europe must finally build a collective security order on our continent. The security of our continent requires a strategic rearmament of our Europe as a power of peace and balance, particularly in the dialogue with Russia. I have been advocating this dialogue for many years. It is not an option, because both our history and our geography are stubborn. Both for ourselves and for Russia, for the security of our indivisible continent, we need this dialogue. We Europeans must collectively set out our own demands and ensure that they are respected. A frank, demanding dialogue in the face of destabilization, interference and manipulation."

"L'Europe doit enfin construire un ordre de sécurité collective sur notre continent. La sécurité de notre continent nécessite un réarmement stratégique de notre Europe comme puissance de paix et d'équilibre, en particulier dans le dialogue avec la Russie. Ce dialogue, je le défends depuis plusieurs années. Il n'est pas une option parce que tout à la fois notre histoire et notre géographie sont têtues. À la fois pour nous-mêmes comme pour la Russie, pour la sécurité de notre continent qui est indivisible, nous avons besoin de ce dialogue. Nous devons, nous Européens, poser collectivement nos propres exigences et nous mettre en mesure de les faire respecter. Un dialogue franc, exigeant face aux déstabilisations, aux ingérences, aux manipulations."

Macron 2022.

This can be interpreted as a way of securing a more significant role for France and the EU in the negotiations as separate from the US. However, this position fits with his strong belief in multilateralism and the objective of securing France as a diplomatic power that is respected and capable of negotiating peace deals globally. While Macron emphasizes the significance of developing the EU's strategic capabilities and a defense industry that's more independent and effective, his position of including Russia in the European security architecture based on its historic role as a culturally European state is in a conflict with the position of many EU members that consider Russia as the main threat for their sovereignty and have a national identity based on remaining free of Russian influence.

His rhetoric on Russia has become less optimistic during his presidency and while the emphasis in the beginning of his first term used to be terrorism and combating extremist movements in Europe, Russia has become more visible part of his rhetoric especially since the Russian aggression in Ukraine. Still, in January 2022 he had faith in integrating Russia to the European security order:

"What we need to build is a European order founded on principles and rules that we have embraced and agreed upon, not against, nor without, but with Russia 30 years ago, and which I would like to reiterate here: the rejection of the use of force, threats and coercion; the free choice of States to participate in the organizations, alliances and security arrangements of their choice; the inviolability of borders; the territorial integrity of States; the rejection of spheres of influence."

"Ce qu'il nous faut bâtir, c'est un ordre européen fondé sur des principes et des règles auxquels nous nous sommes rangés et que nous avons actés, non pas contre, ni sans, mais avec la Russie il y a maintenant 30 ans et que je veux ici rappeler: le rejet du recours à la force, à la menace, à la coercition, le choix libre pour les États de participer aux organisations, aux alliances, aux arrangements de sécurité de leur choix, l'inviolabilité des frontières, l'intégrité territoriale des États, le rejet des sphères d'influence."

Macron 2022.

The European turn and defense industry

Macron uses strategic autonomy as a justification to increase efforts in European defense policy and industrial capability. In general, his argument tends to be securing the strategic competence of the EU in global politics, rather than focusing on building a unified defense against Russia. The EU should not only be able to defend itself, but to define the security architecture of Europe and its neighboring areas:

"Finally, in terms of defense, we cannot be satisfied with reacting to international crises. We need to be able to anticipate and organize the security of our environment..."

"En matière de défense, enfin, nous ne pouvons pas nous satisfaire d'être en réaction aux crises internationales. Il nous faut une puissance d'anticipation qui organise la sécurité de notre environnement."

Macron 2022.

This is also tied to the objective of increasing the global influence of France and being able to affect the changing global order. Macron (2017b) views the capability of intervening and securing the stability in global context as important for French foreign policy. Strong French presence in regional stability is a clear goal:

"I want a France that provides solutions and initiatives when new crises loom, and a France capable of both making itself heard globally and intervening with regional organizations, as we've done, for example, in the Sahel. Ensuring our fellow citizens' security makes the fight against Islamist terrorism the top priority of our foreign policy."

"Je veux une France porteuse de solutions et d'initiatives lorsque se profilent des crises nouvelles et une France capable aussi bien de se faire entendre au niveau mondial que d'intervenir auprès des organisations régionales, comme nous l'avons fait par exemple au Sahel. Assurer la sécurité de nos concitoyens fait de la lutte contre le terrorisme islamiste la première priorité de notre politique étrangère."

Macron 2017b.

The creation of a strategically strong position is something that can only be achieved with a sufficient level of technological sovereignty and a capable defense industry. Along with developing a shared strategic culture, investing into European defense industry is one of his key arguments:

"Over the next six months, we will have to take note of several significant advances, with the adoption of the strategic compass, launched under the German Presidency; with the definition of our own security doctrine, in complementarity with NATO; and also with a genuine strategy in terms of defense industry and technological independence, without which this Europe of defense has no meaning or reality."

"Durant ce semestre, nous aurons à acter de plusieurs progrès considérables, avec l'adoption de la boussole stratégique, lancée sous la présidence allemande, avec la définition de notre doctrine de sécurité propre, en complémentarité avec l'OTAN, avec aussi une véritable stratégie en matière d'industrie de défense et d'indépendance technologique, sans laquelle cette Europe de la défense n'a pas de sens ni de réalité."

Macron 2022.

Unity is presented as a condition for not only the sovereignty of Europe, but for the European integration process and for achieving a sovereign position in global

competition. As an answer to the increasing economic isolationism and the disregard of the rules of competition, Macron proposes adopting a policy of a European preference:

"We cannot suffer in silence. We need to reform our competition policy and reshape our trade policy with penalties or a ban in Europe on businesses that compromise our strategic interests and fundamental values such as environmental standards, data protection and fair payment of taxes; and the adoption of European preference in strategic industries and our public procurement, as our American and Chinese competitors do."

"Nous ne pouvons pas subir sans rien dire. Nous devons réformer notre politique de concurrence, refonder notre politique commerciale : sanctionner ou interdire en Europe les entreprises qui portent atteinte à nos intérêts stratégiques et nos valeurs essentielles, comme les normes environnementales, la protection des données et le juste paiement de l'impôt ; et assumer, dans les industries stratégiques et nos marchés publics, une préférence européenne comme le font nos concurrents américains ou chinois."

Macron 2019.

Strategic autonomy is used to justify further integrating the defense policy and again unity presented as the only solution to the external threats that ultimately put the sovereignty of the EU at risk:

"And in the face of this return of tragedy to history, Europe must arm itself, not out of defiance of other powers, no, but to ensure its independence in this world of violence, so as not to be subject to the choices of others, to be free."

"Et face à ce retour du tragique dans l'histoire, l'Europe doit s'armer, non pas par défiance vis-à-vis des autres puissances, non, mais pour assurer son indépendance dans ce monde de violence, pour ne pas subir le choix des autres, pour être libre."

Macron 2022.

This is in line with the strategy of French foreign policy of pushing for the integration policy especially in the field of defense industry. Macron emphasizes that in its efforts to actualize a more sovereign defense policy, the EU should focus on investing in its own defense industry and prioritizing the European market for developing its defense capability. For France, this would ideally mean further integrating economies of the

member states and loosening the regulation of state aid in the EU. This is presented as a way of creating circumstances for the EU to support companies with a strategic relevance and compete globally with Chinese and American companies that benefit from the lack of global regulation on state aid policy.

Another component of securing the strategic autonomy and the security of the EU for Macron is the enlargement policy of the EU. To combat the rising tensions and the geopolitical influencing in the EU's neighbouring areas, Macron views the EU's accession policy to be important and integrating Eastern Europe and the Western Balkans a key goal for maintaining peace and securing the stability of Europe. This includes making the process clearer and establishing guidelines for accelerating the integration of EU's neighbouring countries under the EU's umbrella. This is also since Macron identifies Eastern Europe and the Western Balkans with the European identity binded by common history and the shared vision of future. (Macron 2022.) His vision of a European identity that reaches beyond its borders comes clear in his comments in…:

"Finally, I mentioned the promise of peace. Today, our Europe is confronted with escalating tensions, particularly in our neighborhood, a disrupted world, and a return, as I said earlier, of tragedy and war. Our model, which extends beyond our borders and cultivates a universal vocation in the tradition of our founding fathers, now has a responsibility to rethink some of these neighborhood policies and to rethink our place in the world in order to build a true balancing power, because I believe that this is the vocation of our Europe."

"Enfin, j'évoquais la promesse de paix. Notre Europe, aujourd'hui, est confrontée à une escalade des tensions, en particulier dans notre voisinage, à un dérèglement du monde, à un retour, je le disais tout à l'heure, du tragique, de la guerre. Or notre modèle, qui déborde nos frontières et cultive dans la tradition de nos pères fondateurs une vocation universelle, a aujourd'hui une responsabilité qui est de repenser quelques-unes de ces politiques de voisinage et de repenser cette place dans le monde pour bâtir une véritable puissance d'équilibre, car je crois que c'est la vocation de notre Europe."

Macron 2022.

While this can be viewed as strategically beneficial for the EU, accepting new members with a sped-up schedule has its own issues for the objective of increasing French

influence in the EU as it could affect the political dynamic and shift power to Eastern Europe.

5.5 Discussion

Macron's rhetoric has been relatively successful in a sense that the concept of strategic autonomy has become a broadly accepted term in European political discourse. The term itself has been broadened a lot which has made its use somewhat vague. Strategic autonomy has also become a justification that is being used in many different contexts for pushing agenda, whether in defense, digital, economic or energy policy. This has resulted in many different variations referring to the idea of European sovereignty.

The concept of strategic autonomy has been at times misinterpreted in European political discourse which has slowed down the development of a united defense policy of the EU especially before the Russian aggression against Ukraine in 2022. This was notable in German Defense Minister Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer's (2020) comments about the goal of strategic autonomy being an illusion if it meant the EU being capable of guaranteeing the security of Europe without the US. In response to French President Emmanuel Macron's interview with Politico, where Macron expressed concerns about the EU becoming overly dependent on the United States, Polish Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki countered by advocating for stronger transatlantic ties instead of pursuing strategic autonomy at the expense of transatlantic cooperation (Politico 2023).

Criticism of Macron's concept of strategic autonomy has been particularly pronounced among Central and Eastern European countries that hold a firm Transatlanticist position. Macron's rhetoric has failed to persuade these nations of the potential of France in leading the development of European defense and the prevailing view in the region is that France would need to significantly increase its efforts to compensate for the role of the US in defending Europe against the Russian threat (Politico 2023b.)

The differing interpretations largely stem from the perception that Macron seeks to distance Europe from the United States in matters of defense. However, Macron envisions a more capable Europe as complementing, rather than replacing, transatlantic cooperation. Nevertheless, some of the criticism is justified, as Morawiecki's remarks also addressed Macron's concerns about Europe's reliance on the United States for arms purchases (Politico 2023). Strengthening the EU's strategic autonomy is a policy from

which France aims to benefit, aligning with its broader efforts to advance its domestic arms industry under the framework of strategic autonomy.

On a policy level, the efforts on developing strategic autonomy have remained moderate even from the position of France. The most beneficial potential in developing the European integration process for French foreign policy lies in defense industry, in which it has a strong position already. The further development of EU's defense industry and directing more investments into EU's defense industry along with loosening the rules of state intervention, are clear motives for France, as is the strengthening of the the position of its defense companies. The 'European turn' in European arms trade has been an important part of Macron's narrative and France has been active in promoting bilateral arms deals in Europe. This includes efforts by France to affect the EDF policies and regulations on third party countries. Macron's promotion of French defense industry and French foreign policy of advocating for a European turn can be considered successful as in 2024 France has become the second largest arms exporter, surpassing Russia (SIPRI 2024).

6 CONCLUSION

Macron's motives of pushing the agenda of strategic autonomy have roots in French exceptionalism and the identity of being a global power, which is based in the traditional status of France in global politics. The decline in global influence of France has made the objective of retaining its glory dependent on the strong and united EU, which explains why pushing the agenda of strategic autonomy is beneficial for France. The strong role in the development of the strategic autonomy of the EU is justified by the responsibility of France as a traditional defender of the European liberal democracy and the shared values of Western civilization.

Sovereignty and European values

In Macron's rhetoric, sovereignty was used to justify actions and ambitions of French foreign policy as well as to defend French actions in global politics. It is partly a rhetoric choice by Macron but also in line with the tradition of French foreign policy that holds sovereignty in a high value. This idea was used by Macron to push for increase in European integration process as well as in developing the strategic autonomy of the EU and its defense policy. These are goals that line up with the goals of French foreign policy

and are clearly beneficial to France and its defense industry as well as for the global influence of France as a state and in the EU.

In his speeches, Macron created a narrative of a united Europe and used the 'European idea' to justify the development of strategic autonomy. These European values were portrayed as unique and something worth defending and used in a similar way to present a cause for deepening defense cooperation and investments in European defense industry.

The effectiveness of this rhetorical strategy can be debated, as the idea of European shared values hasn't resonated with all of the EU. Regardless of the solidaristic nature of the EU, the extent of this solidarization is something that Macron has been forced to face and try to convince. This has been especially visible with countries such as Poland and Hungary under conservative leaderships that have been vocal about prioritizing national sovereignty over the EU's sovereignty. As the creation of shared strategic culture has been an initiative based on French strategic culture, resistance against it among other member states has been one of key reasons why Macron's rhetoric on strategic autonomy has remained relatively unsignificant and ineffectual.

Threat perception

The changing global order and the rising geopolitical tensions were presented as a wakeup call for Europe and a sign of needing to accelerate the European integration process and develop a common foreign and defense strategy for combating these challenges. Europe should realize that its sovereignty is guaranteed by Europe only and not adapting a more realist approach to its foreign and defense policy would pose an existential threat for the future of the EU and the values it represents. The rising polarization in the EU is one of the biggest challenges in developing the strategic autonomy and works against Europe's benefit.

Increased willingness of leveraging the interdependences combined with the significant governmental support from China and the US would need a united response and the further integration process is presented as the only answer to these threats. This includes further developing European defense infrastructure and developing frameworks for more flexible cooperation.

The effectiveness of Macron's rhetoric and identification of a common threat can partly be credited for initiatives such as EI2 in EU's defense policy, but the correlation between Macron's efforts and reality can be debated. Until the Russian aggression in Ukraine in 2022, it can be argued that regardless of Macron's rhetoric and his efforts, the EU was not united in its views on defense policy and some member countries were hesitant to develop a common defense strategy. Therefore, while in hindsight it seems that Macron was correct to advocate increasing European defense cooperation, significant unifying efforts, except the launch of EDF and EI2, had not happened until the Russian aggression against Ukraine in 2022 as the largest conflict in Europe since WW2 led to European countries re-evaluating and reframing their defense policies and the geopolitical realities of European security. Since the Russian invasion of Ukraine, it could also be argued that Macron's efforts for France to be a leader of European defense policy were somewhat overshadowed by the initiative of other European countries such as Poland or Germany.

In this sense, Macron's status as a political leader especially in foreign policy benefitted from the reluctancy among other EU members that gave him space take the lead and define the direction in developing EU's defense policy, as well as the European integration process. On top of this, he was able to utilize the space opened in the EU due to Brexit along with identifying events such as the mistrust in NATO during the Trump presidency and the rising geopolitical tensions to his advance. Regardless of the eventual effect of Macron's rhetoric on the shift in European defense policy, it can be considered a direction that is beneficial for French foreign and defense policy.

However, the comparative significant shift to consensus in developing a united European defense policy can affect the possibilities of France to define the outlines for this development as countries such as Poland are investing massively in developing their defensive capabilities. Also, the accession of Finland and Sweden to NATO, along with the increased decisiveness in Eastern European countries has made the role of NATO even more crucial. While Macron has not been reluctant to cooperate with the US, the Eastern European countries have traditionally represented the Transatlanticist position in European defense discourse and since the Russian aggression in Ukraine the balance of the conversation has tipped in favour of the Transatlanticist views instead of the Europeanist position traditionally represented by France. Regardless of this, the suspicions that surfaced during the Trump presidency in the commitment of the US to NATO have not diminished and his possible re-election forces the EU to invest in

European defense capabilities instead of relying to NATO to the same degree as before the Russian invasion.

Regardless of Macron's rhetoric about Europe needing to wake up and the necessity of taking a more realist approach to EU's foreign policy, the role of France has remained as more of a diplomatic peacekeeper rather than a strong leader in economic and military assistance since the escalation of the war in Ukraine. France has been left as an ideological leader that's impact has been overshadowed by the remilitarization of Germany and large efforts by the UK and Eastern European NATO-countries in providing aid to Ukraine.

<u>European integration</u>

The lack of unity in the EU is a key issue for Macron and a factor that puts the sovereignty of the EU under a threat as unity is presented as the only answer to the challenges of globalization and geopolitical tensions. The unity of EU was presented as crucial also for securing the EU's borders and being able to answer to the challenges of immigration and terrorism both in EU and in its neighboring areas (2018b). This is why forwarding the European integration process would be crucial and developing a common defense strategy while having a competitive defense industry a condition for the credibility of the EU. Europe's sovereignty being threatened acts as a justification for developing the EU's defense and foreign policy and positioning France in the lead of defining the strategic culture and direction of this development.

Essentially the necessity for strategic autonomy was used to forward the European integration process while attempting to place France in a position to define the conditions. The sense of urgency in Macron's rhetoric as well as the eagerness of France in leading the integration process create a situation where France is able to define the direction of this development. This is reflected in France's efforts to create a shared strategic culture in defense policy, in which there is a motive for France to position itself in the lead and define the outlines of this strategic culture to suit their own interests. Similarly, the European turn in arms trade promoted by France is another case in which the development of European defense cooperation was used as a justification for increasing the role of France in European defense policy and promoting French defense industry.

The view of France as the leader of the democratic Western world was used in the analyzed speeches as a justification for maintaining distance from the US as well as for the French involvement in the development of the European defense policy. In regard to domestic policy, it has also been a common justification for ambitious foreign policy and treasuring French language and culture globally. While not deviating from the tradition of 'French grandeur', the ambition of strengthening France and restoring its global influence has been especially notable in Macron's rhetoric and the policies he pursued and sought to justify through his political speeches.

The aim of this thesis is not to claim that the sole reason behind Macron's use of strategic autonomy in his rhetoric was to boost the position of France in the EU; rather, the key objective has been to show how the selected speeches evidence and substantiate, at a rhetorical level, identifiable motives and strategies for the increase of France's global influence. The need for strategic autonomy is a political trend that Macron's speeches identified and attempted to utilize by placing it at the core of the guidelines for the future defense strategy of the EU, therefore cementing the influence of French strategic culture in the European defense policy, as well as strengthening the position of French defense industry in Europe. It has also been used as a justification for accelerating the European integration process that would be a desirable direction for Macron's foreign policy.

I have argued in this thesis that the use of strategic autonomy in Macron's rhetoric is a deliberate strategy to increase French influence both globally and especially in the EU. The 'French grandeur' still plays a key role in French foreign politics which and is one of the motives behind this strategy and many of the justifications for the role of France in the development of the EU's strategic autonomy. The 'European idea' was presented as a unique and exceptional project in history and the only place in the world where such values are still powerful. Therefore, the responsibility of Europeans is to fight for maintaining this European idea and the values that it represents. Macron's rhetoric captures how, in this process, France as a traditional great power has the responsibility to step to the mission and take the lead in a difficult time where the European way of life is threatened by the rise of polarizing ideologies of isolationism and nationalism accompanied by the rise of the far-right movements in Europe. The changing world order is another threat that Europe should note and adapt to by creating a strategy of increasing its strategic autonomy and securing its capability of actualizing politics that

represents Europe while being less dependent on the rivaling powers that don't share the same belief in multilateral cooperation.

As I have shown in my analysis, in his speeches Macron has recurrently made the point that in order to succeed at achieving a status of global power, Europe needs to be united and increase the cooperation in its strategic fields, especially in different sectors of defense policy. Macron's rhetoric placed France at the forefront of these developments as it identifies France as historically and culturally one of the main 'creators' of what is considered the Western world.

In this thesis, I have shown that, when viewed from a rhetorical perspective, the above points constitute the recurring themes forming a reasoning upon which the French foreign policy ambitions are based. Macron realizes that France's possibilities of increasing its global influence are limited and the best option for France is to be a part of a strong and united EU that would be more capable of competing in global politics and therefore also represent French interests. By positioning France as the eager leader of these strategic developments of the EU, Macron sought to justify France's role in defining the guidelines of European foreign and security policy and thus maintaining an influental position in global politics.

Lastly, it is important to acknowledge the limitations of this thesis. While it aims to present how Macron has conceptualized the term "strategic autonomy," understanding the underlying motives behind his rhetoric and policies remains always speculative. Establishing a direct link between Macron's rhetoric and subsequent political actions or events is inherently challenging. Additionally, language poses another limitation, as my non-native proficiency in French may result in missing certain nuances in the rhetorical analysis.

However, despite these constraints, this thesis provides valuable insight into how Macron has employed the concept of strategic autonomy in his rhetoric. It also opens up opportunities for future research, particularly in examining how Macron's use of the term evolved during his second term and in the context of the shifting European defense policy discourse following Russia's aggression.

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