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Finding a Place in the World: European Identity and the Civilizational State

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Abstract

The rise of ambitious countries identifying themselves as ‘civilizational states’ and questioning the international liberal order has in recent years been the subject of increased debate in international relations. In this context, the European Union has taken to employing civilizational rhetoric as well, with official references to a ‘European way of life’ as a separate policy area and ‘systemic rivals’ as a label for powerful states which undermine the human-rights based system promoted by the EU. This has occurred alongside calls for European strategic autonomy and the declaration of a ‘geopolitical’ European Commission. This thesis argues that the construction of a civilizational narrative for the European Union serves the goal of fostering a foreign and security policy more independent from the United States, the delineation of boundaries with countries identified as threats to the EU’s values on an international scale, such as China, and of pushing back against the narrative promoted by Vladimir Putin’s Russia over Ukraine.

Key words: Civilizational States, Identity, Strategic Autonomy, European Union, International Relations, Geopolitics

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Introduction

While the purpose and limits of European integration may be much debated, it is widely agreed upon that the EU is united by the values its member states share in common. Article 2 of the Treaty on European Union (TEU), otherwise known as the Maastricht Treaty, lists the founding values of the EU as being “respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities”. These values are taken to be reflective of a society in which “pluralism, non-discrimination, tolerance, justice, solidarity and equality between women and men prevail”. In the context of the EU, these principles are often grouped under the expression of ‘European values’ and are considered central to the activities and existence of the Union. The quasi-constitutional status of values such as human rights in the EU’s internal architecture is reflected in both its founding treaties and the rhetoric employed by its institutions and leadership.

Particularly in the parts of the world belonging to the West, such values are widely believed to hold universal validity. In this cultural region, the idea of universally valid norms is taken for granted when these concepts are used as the basis of laws, societies, and ethical frameworks. ‘The West’ is used here to refer to societies descended from or profoundly shaped by European political systems due to historical reasons, which adhere to the liberal values that arose from the Enlightenment of the 18th century.

The world order led by the United States, which was solidified by the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the resulting end of the Cold War in the late 20th century, is widely considered to be in decline.¹ At the same time, rising powers outside the West increasingly assert spheres of influence while promoting the unique nature of their political and social systems. Political leadership in ambitious countries outside of the West have in recent years increasingly taken to considering their states as representing distinctive civilizations in their own right. From this point of view, Western hegemony, with its promotion of liberal, ‘universal’ values has illegitimately encroached upon

¹ Christopher Coker, *The Rise Of The Civilizational State* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2019), pp. vi-xiii; Amitav Acharya, "The Myth Of The “Civilization State”: Rising Powers And The Cultural Challenge To World Order", *Ethics & International Affairs* 34, no. 2 (2020): p. 141

countries ‘with their own unique cultural values and political institutions’.² In doing so, it is believed to have threatened the cultural independence and political autonomy of the countries in question.³ This phenomenon of states which claim to represent unique cultural and social systems with their own distinct values, which they promote above all others, has been termed as the rise of the ‘Civilizational State’. The main countries most widely considered to be civilizational states include China, Russia, India, and Turkey.⁴

It has been noted by academics and observers that, in recent years, EU institutions and leadership have increasingly taken to using the language of civilization in their rhetoric. In doing so, they have promoted the idea that a unique European identity is under threat and must be defended against other, rival systems. This is most notably reflected in the official use of the phrase ‘Promoting our European way of life’ by the European Commission. The phenomenon extends to the EU’s foreign relations as well, as seen in the ‘battle of narratives’ it wages with Russia over Ukraine’s future, and the Commission’s labelling of China as a ‘systemic rival promoting alternative models of governance’. These developments have led to the suggestion that the European Union may be in the process of adopting its own kind of civilizational identity akin to those countries which consider themselves civilizational states.

The use of such rhetoric has occurred in tandem with a move towards greater EU independence and assertiveness in foreign policy, which this paper argues is the purpose behind the ongoing construction of an EU civilizational identity. For the purposes of the analysis, the historical starting point for this ‘geopolitical turn’ is taken to be the publication of the ‘Global Strategy’ report of the European External Action Service (EEAS) in June 2016. This document was the first to make use of the term ‘European strategic autonomy’, which has since then become central to discussions of EU foreign, defence, and security policy. It is a concept which advocates for a greater ability of the European Union to act autonomously in situations in which it should prove necessary. In doing so, it implicitly calls for increased independence from the United States, which has acted as Europe’s guardian since the latter half of the twentieth century. This necessity for the EU to be

² Adrian Pabst, “China, Russia and the return of the civilisational state”, *The New Statesman*, 2019.

³ Coker, *The Rise Of The Civilizational State*, p. xi.

⁴ Acharya, "The Myth Of The “Civilization State”, p. 141.

able to act autonomously on the global stage was most when the Trump administration brought into question the United States' continued reliability as a globally responsible actor and European ally. The intention for the EU to increasingly step up as a global actor in its own right is reflected in the fact that the current European Commission, under President Ursula von der Leyen, from the outset declared itself a "geopolitical Commission".⁵ The promotion of these policies represents an EU response to the changing reality of global politics, and the transition into a more flexible and proactive European foreign policy.

This thesis holds that the European Union's increasing tendency toward adopting a civilizational identity since the late 2010's is indicative of a shift towards a more autonomous foreign policy and geopolitically proactive EU, capable of defending and upholding Europe's interests in the world. This entails a move towards greater strategic independence from the United States as well as an identification of 'systemic rivals' perceived as posing a threat to EU values. The European Union's adaptation to a changing international environment has required a shift in policy, which in turn has necessitated the adoption of a new narrative with which to justify and contextualize its actions.

Theoretical Background

This paper is grounded in the academic debate around 'civilizations' as a unit of analysis in international relations. This field was initiated in its current form by Samuel Huntington in 1996, with the publication of his book 'The Clash of Civilizations'. Within it, he theorized that cultural identity would be the primary source of conflict in the post-Cold War world. This idea was revisited by Christopher Coker, Professor of International Relations at the London School of Economics and Political Science, in his 2019 book 'The Rise of the Civilizational State', which has become the main point of reference for the current discourse of the topic. Within this book, Coker argues that while Huntington was correct in proclaiming civilizations as the future currency of international politics, what he did not foresee was that states would not merely identify with

⁵ Ursula von der Leyen, *Speech by President-elect von der Leyen in the European Parliament Plenary on the occasion of the presentation of her College of Commissioners and their programme*. Strasbourg, 27 November 2019.

certain civilizations, but claim to *embody* them in the form of ‘civilizational states’. He further argues that this phenomenon poses a threat to ‘the dream of liberal civilization’.⁶

This latter position, namely that the rise non-Western civilization states poses a threat to the international order based on universal liberal values, is one which is shared by most Western commentators on the matter. Gideon Rachman, chief foreign affairs editor for the Financial Times, for example, describes the notion of the civilizational state as being exclusionary and carrying “distinctly illiberal implications”. To him, the idea implies that attempts to define universal human rights and democratic standards are misguided, and encourages all civilizations to reflect their own unique culture in their political institutions.⁷ The civilizational state is most often portrayed as inherently anti-liberal and opposed to the idea of universal values. This viewpoint is criticized by Amitav Acharya, Distinguished Professor of International Relations at the American University, who holds that ‘civilization state and universal humanistic norms are not mutually exclusive’. To back up this argument, he provides examples of intellectuals in India, China, and the Muslim world who use their own civilizations’ histories to advocate values which can be considered universally valid, such as tolerance, humane authority, and peaceful change.⁸

While there may be disagreement about the possibility of universal values in a world dominated by civilizational states, there is a consensus on the fact that this phenomenon has arisen primarily as a challenge to Western hegemony.⁹ Andrew Glencross, Deputy Director in International Relations at the Catholic University of Lille, considers the notion of the civilizational state to be ‘vital for charting the contemporary rise of states’ which promote a world view that challenges the global hegemony of the West.¹⁰ Acharya also disagrees with the idea that non-Western countries are more likely to adopt a civilizational identity, instead arguing that Western nations are equally susceptible to ‘civilization-state syndrome’. He points out that emerging nations states in all parts

⁶ Coker, *The Rise Of The Civilizational State*, p. xiii.

⁷ Gideon Rachman, "China, India And The Rise Of The ‘Civilisation State’", *Financial Times*, 2019.

⁸ Acharya, "The Myth Of The ‘Civilization State’", pp. 149-150.

⁹ *Ibid*, p. 141.

¹⁰ Andrew Glencross, "The EU And The Temptation To Become A Civilizational State", *European Foreign Affairs Review* 26, no. 2 (2021): p. 337.

of the world have frequently invoked their cultural distinctiveness to justify their independence and build national unity.¹¹

It is true that non-Western states do not have a monopoly on civilizational politics. The administration of former U.S. President Donald Trump oftentimes promoted a civilizational worldview, describing its relationship with China as ‘a fight with a really different civilization’.¹² Trump himself stated at a 2017 speech in Warsaw that “the fundamental question of our time is whether the West has the will to survive”. He then went on to declare that “our civilization will triumph”.¹³ This is consistent with the tendency of the United States’ leadership to place their country at the head of the ‘free world’ and identify it as the champion of Western civilization. Rachman suggests that, ironically, Trump’s embrace of a civilizational worldview is symptomatic of the decline of Western hegemony. Unlike his predecessors, he no longer declared the universal validity and ultimate triumph of Western values, instead portraying the West in a defensive stance, threatened by its rivals.¹⁴

The United States is not the only Western political union with a notable turn towards a civilizational narrative in recent years. The international waning of liberal ideas, argues Glencross, has also affected the accepted justifications for European integration.¹⁵ Following the various economic, political, and social crises of the early 2010’s, including the Eurozone crisis, the traditional reasons of the peace and prosperity provided by the Union were no longer sufficient. As anti-EU national populism proved more successful at mobilizing voters than cosmopolitanism, a shift in the legitimizing narrative of integration became necessary.¹⁶ European Union leadership thus began to promote more ‘Eurocentric’ arguments in favour of integration, focusing on the ‘unique tools’ it provides to protect citizens from external and internal threats. In this sense, Glencross particularly emphasizes the EU Commission’s official use of the phrase ‘our European

¹¹ Acharya, "The Myth Of The “Civilization State”, p. 141.

¹² Ankit Panda, "A Civilizational Clash Isn't The Way To Frame US Competition With China", *The Diplomat*, 2019.

¹³ Donald Trump, *Warsaw Speech*. Warsaw, 6 July 2017.

¹⁴ Rachman, "China, India And The Rise Of The ‘Civilisation State’".

¹⁵ Glencross, “The EU And The Temptation To Become A Civilizational State”, p. 332.

¹⁶ *Ibid*, p. 335.

way of life'. He considers 'the pivot to justifying the EU as an organization that protects a certain way of life' to be 'a remarkable ideological shift'.¹⁷

This latter characterization is consistent with Bruno Macaes' definition of civilizational states as those which 'promote and defend one way of life against all alternatives'.¹⁸ In the view of Macaes, a former Minister of European Affairs of Portugal, the European Union is already in the process of being reconfigured as a civilization-state. He argues that the idea of a universal civilization has failed, with the result that non-Western countries are now legitimately pursuing the construction of societies based on their own values. Europe should therefore accept that the universal civilization it purported to build was merely its own civilization all along. By doing so, he states, European liberalism will become free to focus on developing "the concrete possibilities contained within itself".¹⁹ Rosa Balfour, the director of Carnegie Europe, on the other hand, sees such a course of action as resulting in "a devastating fragmentation" of the EU's membership, and as undercutting efforts to reckon with Europe's past of colonialism, migration, and multiculturalism.²⁰ She believes that the European Union is bound to fail "if it embraces civilizational justifications for European integration", arguing that it would be a mistake capable of undermining the EU's "global clout and soft power".²¹

In contrast to this view, Glencross considers the move to define the EU through a civilizational narrative to represent a major increase in its external engagement, bringing with it significant international repercussions.²² He sees it as a method of pushing back against the narratives of rival powers such as Russia and China, who during the early COVID-19 pandemic sought to undermine EU cohesion and put European solidarity into question. The 'battle of narratives' which took place at this time, argues Glencross, offers "a glimpse of what might be in store if the EU succumbs to the temptation to become a civilizational state".²³

¹⁷ Ibid, p. 336.

¹⁸ Bruno Macaes, "The Attack Of The Civilization-State", *Noema Magazine*, 2022.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Rosa Balfour, "Against A European Civilization: Narratives About The European Union", *Carnegie Europe*, 2021.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Glencross, "The EU And The Temptation To Become A Civilizational State", p. 346.

²³ Ibid.

This thesis uses the above-described ‘civilizational states’ framework, which developed out of Huntington’s ‘clash of civilizations’ thesis, in order to analyse the ways in which the leadership of the European Union is increasingly promoting a civilizational identity for the EU. This is placed in the context of the shifting international order, while considering the geopolitical objectives the EU pursues in following this path. It contributes to the debate around the phenomenon of civilizational states in that it considers the impact of the Russia-Ukraine war in the EU’s ‘geopolitical turn’, as well as in its examination of the competing civilizational narratives of Russia and the EU. It further innovates in connecting Europe’s search for a civilizational identity to an ambition for increased independence in its defence and foreign policy, particularly from the United States. The current paper examines the concepts of the ‘European way of life’, strategic autonomy, and the geopolitical Commission in the context of the EU’s civilizational turn, as well as the particular role of the European Commission in promoting a civilizational narrative for the EU, in greater depth than previous literature. This is done through the use of discourse analysis and the in-depth consultation of official EU documents as well as speeches and publications by EU officials and national leaders. It thus fills gaps in the literature mainly in terms of considering the EU’s foreign relations and geopolitical situation within the given theoretical framework, and in the extent to which it examines the relevant primary sources.

Methodological Framework

The investigation will use as its timeframe the latter half of the 2010’s, extending into the present day. Primary sources will be found based on the presence of keywords, selected with regard to their relevance to the main themes of the paper, and will subsequently be analysed through the method of discourse analysis. Secondary sources will be selected based on their relevance to the paper’s theoretical framework and the historiographical debate it is situated in.

Historical timeframe

The main primary sources consulted will be situated between the years 2016 and the first half of 2022. This is the time period in which the debate around civilizations in international relations was reinvigorated with the introduction of the ‘civilizational states’ concept, and in which non-Western

powers began increasingly acting in defiance of the Western-led international order. This has led to friction between Western and non-Western powers, such as in the U.S.-China trade war or Russian isolation from the West over its incursion into Ukraine.

The late 2010's is also the time in which one can identify the start of the so-called 'civilizational turn' in EU identity promoted by national and institutional leadership. The election of Emmanuel Macron as French President during this time was seen by many as a rejuvenation of the European project due to his outspoken enthusiasm for European unity. President Macron has actively promoted the idea of 'a united European civilization based on humanism' and related policy concepts such as strategic autonomy. He has at times directly advocated for Europe's distancing from the United States in defence matters, famously declaring the 'brain death' of NATO during the Presidency of Donald Trump.²⁴ This timeframe saw the beginning of the 'geopolitical' European Commission, which for the first time introduced the 'Promotion of our European way of life' as a separate policy area. Significantly, this has occurred alongside the pursuit of a more autonomous foreign and security policy for the European Union, beginning with the introduction of the concept of 'European Strategic Autonomy' in the 2016 Global Strategy report of the European External Action Service.

Outside of this timeframe, sources will be used to investigate the historical background of certain concepts, such as the initial use of 'civilization' as an official justification for European integration with the Copenhagen Declaration on European Identity of 1973. The consultation of such earlier sources will be necessary in order to understand the context behind the developments discussed in this paper.

Source selection

The primary sources on which the analysis will be based are official EU documents and publications such as speeches, articles, and press releases. Due to its role as the EU's executive branch, the official EU documents will primarily come from the European Commission. The

²⁴ Emmanuel Macron, *Emmanuel Macron warns Europe: NATO is becoming brain-dead*. The Economist, November 2019.

articles consulted as primary sources will mostly include those published by the EEAS. This body is closely tied to the European Commission, with the EU High Representative for Foreign and Security Policy (hereafter ‘High Representative’) holding the position of Vice President of the Commission *ex officio*. Having been written in whole or in part by High Representative Josep Borrell, these articles are highly relevant in that they represent the views of the main official in charge of EU foreign policy. Another type of primary source consulted in the paper will be speeches and articles by French President Emmanuel Macron. These provide much rhetorical material regarding his views on European identity, its civilization and values, and Europe’s place in the world. What makes said speeches particularly interesting is that they represent the personal opinions of the leader of one of the most influential countries within the European Union, rather than the policy line of institutions such as the European Commission or External Action Service.

These official documents, publications, and speeches will be found on the basis of key words, such as ‘European civilization’, ‘European identity’, ‘European way of life’, ‘geopolitical Commission’, and ‘strategic autonomy’. These terms will be entered into search engines and databases of primary sources, and the most relevant sources will be chosen based on their relevance to: 1. The idea of the European Union representing a particular civilization, or ‘way of life’, which is to be preserved or defended, and 2. The necessity of a greater role for the EU on the world stage and increased EU autonomy

The secondary sources will be selected based on their relevance to the academic discussion around civilizational states in general, and to the discussion of the European Union as a civilizational state in particular. Some literature providing additional context, such as on EU external politics and Europe’s relation to the idea of universal values, will also be included.

Discourse analysis

The method of discourse analysis will be employed as the primary methodological lens of this paper. This will be done in order to determine how, and to what effect, the main concepts under investigation are used rhetorically by EU institutional and national leadership. In this way, it will be possible to examine and understand the narrative that is being built in regard to European

identity and Europe's place in the world. The paper will focus on the state level of analysis, as this is the level at which official narratives surrounding a political entity's identity are formulated.

Chapter 1: The Enlightenment and the Idea of Civilization

The origin of the ethical framework referred to as ‘universal values’ can be traced back to the Enlightenment, following which these ideas were spread around the world, often forcefully, through Europe’s global presence and imperialism. Eventually, universal values saw their global codification in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Closer examination of this progression makes it possible to place the phenomenon in its historical context. It also enables an understanding of why these ideas hold such a central place in Western thought, and why they may be seen with mistrust in nations which fall outside of the Western cultural sphere. The idea of *universal* values refers to values that claim, or are said to claim, jurisdiction over the entirety of humanity regardless of culture or legal system.

The latter section looks at the concept of ‘civilization’ in its historical context, as well as in regard to the connotations it has developed in regard to Europe and its relationship with the world. This then leads into the origins of the civilization-state phenomenon, as well as the identity politics involved in motivating political leadership to construct a civilizational narrative for their country. The terms ‘universal’, ‘enlightenment’ and ‘liberal’, in reference to values, can be used largely interchangeably due to the great overlap in the history of these concepts.

A Genealogy of (Universal) Values

Europe has a long history of referring to humanitarian principles in both domestic and international politics.²⁵ This tradition began with the intellectual developments of the Enlightenment in the 17th and 18th centuries in Europe, which created the groundwork for the philosophies of liberalism and humanism. The Enlightenment birthed the notion that all humans hold inherent value, which brings with it inalienable rights, due to the mere fact of their being human. These ideas came to be considered as applying to all of humanity, as they were not bound to concepts of any particular religion, nationality, or people group. Therefore, given their claim to universal validity, the values of the Enlightenment are often referred to as ‘universal values’. The developments of the

²⁵ Patrick Pasture, "The EC/EU Between The Art Of Forgetting And The Palimpsest Of Empire", *European Review* 26, no. 3 (2018): p. 555.

Enlightenment have fundamentally shaped all aspects of modern human knowledge and activity, including the scientific method, religion, philosophy, the law, and the political organization of people groups.

In Europe, the concept of universal values saw its earliest formal expression through the 'Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen'. The ideas within this declaration, which resulted from the French Revolution, went on to shape the political and legal systems of almost all European states.²⁶ Perhaps paradoxically, these values espousing the inherent value of human life would be spread across the world through the forceful conquest and cultural influence which the European great powers and their settler colonies, most prominently the United States, engaged in. During this era of European imperialism, argues Patrick Pasture, Professor of European and Global History at the Catholic University of Leuven, universal rights were invoked and enforced selectively so that in practice they benefitted only European interests. This was done by legitimizing interventions outside of Europe, such as for the 'protection of Christians', but not the other way around.²⁷ In this sense, Balfour argues that the primacy of Enlightenment ideas played a dual role in Europe's global ascendance. On the one hand, these ideas sustained a political economy which allowed first Europe and then the West 'to dominate the rest of the World through colonization and empire'.²⁸ On the other hand, they 'inspired revolution, self-determination, the birth of democracy in Europe and the Americas, and self-critique'.²⁹ Liberal philosophy allowed "third-world" independence movements to use the language of human rights and the rule of law against their European colonizers.³⁰

Following the victory over fascism in the Second World War, the victorious liberal and socialist powers established the United Nations as an organisation which would be capable of regulating international relations. Both victorious ideologies of this century-defining conflict are products of the Enlightenment, recognizing the value of the human as an individual, and proclaiming themselves to hold universal validity. This made them receptive to humanism, an ethical stance

²⁶ Coker, *The Rise Of The Civilizational State*, p. 2.

²⁷ Pasture, "The EC/EU Between The Art Of Forgetting And The Palimpsest Of Empire", pp. 555-556.

²⁸ Balfour, "Against A European Civilization: Narratives About The European Union".

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Macaes, "The Attack Of The Civilization-State".

which fascism rejected. Through the framework of the United Nations, the victorious powers would achieve the global codification of Enlightenment values in the form of the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Of course, it would not be long before the alliance disintegrated, leading to the global Cold War between the United States and the USSR. The dominance of these two superpowers created a bipolar world in which both states used the promotion of their own political philosophies as a tool of influence, promoting regime change and civil conflict across the world.

With the disintegration of the Soviet Union in 1991, the United States emerged as the world's sole superpower and hegemon, wielding unprecedented influence in international relations. This period was marked by continued U.S.-led military interventions across the world, including in Serbia, Iraq, Afghanistan, and Libya, with overwhelmingly destabilizing consequences. These actions generally occurred alongside universalist ideological justifications, such as the prevention of genocide, the protection of 'freedom', or the war against terrorism. The fallout from these interventions caused mistrust and resentment against the perceived ability of the West to act with impunity and impose its political system in any place at any moment. At the same time, the United States continued enjoying unchallenged global cultural dominance, with its societal ideas spreading across the globe through mass media, entertainment, and the proliferation of English as the global lingua franca. Western nations remain the foremost promoters of universal values in the international system.

The most significant political manifestation of universal values today can be found in the concept of human rights. This idea is derived from the lineage of those ideals that were declared as universally valid following the French revolution: That all humans enjoy certain inherent rights solely due to the fact that they are human. Therefore, when one speaks of human rights one speaks of a concept in the Enlightenment tradition of universal values. Despite the often presumed global consensus on the validity of universal human rights, the concept has been seeing increased questioning by Western-sceptic nations in recent years.

Criticism of Universal Values

Like all major ideas, the concept of universal values carries historical baggage and political connotations other than those which would seem immediately apparent. Awareness of this context makes it possible to understand the objections raised against these norms by governments which take a critical stance towards the promotion of supposedly universally valid liberal values.

In a speech before the UN General Assembly in 2018, French President Macron warned that ‘cultural, historical, and religious relativism’ was calling into question the universality of the Declaration of Human Rights.³¹ The premise of the “cultural relativism” argument is that human rights are expressive of Western values and norms, and may therefore not be applicable to cultures which do not ‘emulate the conditions and values of Western societies’. Since they originated in the West, they are said to reflect Western interests and to therefore be, at best, a ‘weapon of cultural hegemony’, or, at worst, representative of a ‘new form of imperialism’.³² As an ideology originating in Europe, it is susceptible to European and Western influence, serving as a tool of soft power for the United States and the EU to involve themselves in the internal matters of other states. Although the United Nations exists as an international protector of universal values, in practice the Western powers often portray themselves as the global arbiters of human rights and democracy. Civilizational thinkers therefore accuse Western political ideas of masking their origin under the ‘under the veneer of supposedly neutral principles’, and some critics refer to human rights as ‘the last refuge of Eurocentrism’.³³

Proponents of the civilization-state model hold that, rather than continuing to search for universal values, we must accept that we all speak only for ourselves and our own societies.³⁴ Viewed from a non-Western perspective, this position might appear justifiable. While it is true that Western thinking has been deeply influenced by non-Western sources, it is also a fact that the concept of

³¹ Emmanuel Macron, *United Nations General Assembly: Speech by President Emmanuel Macron*. New York, 25 September 2018.

³² Ahmed Shaheed and Rose Parris Richter, "Is “Human Rights” A Western Concept?", *The Global Observatory*, 2022.

³³ Macaes, "The Attack Of The Civilization-State"; Pasture, "The EC/EU Between The Art Of Forgetting And The Palimpsest Of Empire", p. 564.

³⁴ Macaes, "The Attack Of The Civilization-State".

universal values has its origins in Europe and overwhelmingly saw its global spread as a result of the continent's dominance. One might argue, as does Macaes, that Europe should accept these developments as a 'liberation from its commitment to the universal framework it created for the whole planet' and instead focus on the development of its own political potential. "The core of a modern, secular European civilization", he states, "will remain valid even if the world takes a different path".³⁵ Westerners could thus encourage the upholding of liberal values by people around the world, while discarding the notion that it is possible for any system of values to be universally valid. The downside to this approach would be that these ideas would lose their essence, and perhaps the trait that made them so appealing in the first place.

Some argue that it remains possible to reconcile the existence of universally valid norms with the relative nature of different cultures. Balfour, for example, argues that the Haitian Revolution 'shows that the ideas originating in the Enlightenment can be appropriated by non-Europeans and adapted to a different cultural context'.³⁶ While this thought is compelling, it risks discounting the level of cultural influence Haiti was subjected to as a colony of France, combined with the forced separation the enslaved people of Saint-Domingue suffered from their native culture. This caused them to become alienated from their ancestral forms of political organization. French philosopher Étienne Balibar provides an alternative in suggesting that Europe must cease teaching others 'what it means to be universalistic', and instead 'cultivate an understanding of alternative interpretations of the human', which can then become generalized. In doing so, it would retain its 'singular relationship to universality', but become merely 'a province of the universal'.³⁷ In other words, rather than giving up the search for universal norms, Europe should contribute to fostering a concept of *truly* universal values, which takes other cultures into account and serves the interests of not just one particular tradition or civilization, but of common humanity.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Balfour, "Against A European Civilization: Narratives About The European Union".

³⁷ Étienne Balibar, "Ideas Of Europe: Civilization And Constitution", *Iris. European Journal Of Philosophy And Public Debate* 1, no. 1 (2009): p. 10.

Arriving at the Civilizational State

‘Civilization’, far from being the neutral term it may once have been, is today a rather contested concept.³⁸ For many, it brings to mind the civilizing mission - the colonialist idea that the ‘principal European countries’ had a moral responsibility to export their values to the rest of the world, a notion that served as the central and legitimating principle of European imperialism.³⁹ Its official use by European institutions has also not gone uncontested. Pasture has criticized the European Community’s early reference to a common civilizational basis as one of the foundations of its unity as an ‘essentially colonial concept.’⁴⁰

Despite the strong opinions different people may have regarding ‘civilization’, the concept is not one which is straightforwardly defined. Coker points out that the idea of ‘civilization’ can give rise to many different definitions, ranging from ‘an organic structure’, to a discourse, a value system, and ‘all or none of the above’.⁴¹ In its narrower definition, as employed by politicians, it refers to either a ‘political community’, or ‘a belief system that is coterminous with a state’. The former description is identified with the West, while the latter is said to apply to China and Russia.⁴² Working off these definitions makes it possible to approach the phenomenon of civilizational states with a clearer idea of what is being talked about when the otherwise often opaque concept of ‘civilization’ is referenced.

Samuel Huntington’s thesis on the ‘clash of civilizations’ was developed in 1996, shortly after the end of the Cold War. At this time, it appeared as though culture, rather than ideology, would form the new basis for global conflict among world powers. Since this time however, three major developments have changed the global context and thus the way in which the question of civilizations in international relations is discussed.⁴³ The first of these developments is the crisis of the Western-dominated world order. Far from being anticipated at the time at which Huntington wrote, the end of the Soviet Union was perceived as the ultimate victory of an ever-ascending

³⁸ Coker, *The Rise Of The Civilizational State*, p. 15.

³⁹ Coker, *The Rise Of The Civilizational State*, p. 45.

⁴⁰ Pasture, "The EC/EU Between The Art Of Forgetting And The Palimpsest Of Empire", p. 560.

⁴¹ Coker, *The Rise Of The Civilizational State*, p. 92.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Acharya, "The Myth Of The “Civilization State”, p. 140.

liberal order.⁴⁴ This optimism is what led U.S. political theorist Francis Fukuyama in 1986 to infamously proclaim the ‘end of history’ and the impending universalization of liberal democracy. The second significant development is the growth of populist movements across the world, which often rest on claims of defending civilizational identity.⁴⁵ In the third place, there is the fact that large Asian countries such as China and India have become more influential and assertive on the world stage than they were in the 1990’s. The foreign policies of these states, as well of that of Turkey, now emphasize their respective civilizational identities more strongly than they did in the past.⁴⁶

Huntington’s analysis, while blurring ‘the relationship between civilization and state’ remained an essentially ‘state-centric’ one. The civilization-state discourse however, in the words of Acharya, “has the virtue of removing that ambiguity by hyphenating the two concepts, making them one”.⁴⁷ This has led to the current situation, in which the academic debate has moved on from examining the nature and interactions of ‘civilizations’ as such, to the way in which governments promote the idea of their own countries embodying unique civilizations in their own right.

The Identity Politics of the Civilizational State

The adoption of a civilizational identity is tied to the promotion of a country’s domestic or international political interests. This is often accompanied by an opposition to the prevailing international order upon which the United Nations system is based. A world composed of rival civilizational states espousing incommensurable norms is, states Glencross, ‘fundamentally at odds with the idea of a liberal international order resting on international law and multilateral institutions’.⁴⁸

While international politics has not reached the point at which it is conceived of mostly in terms of rival civilization states, some ambitious countries promote the idea of competing civilizations

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Acharya, "The Myth Of The “Civilization State”, p. 140.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Acharya, "The Myth Of The “Civilization State”, pp. 140-141.

⁴⁸ Glencross, “The EU And The Temptation To Become A Civilizational State”, pp. 340-341.

in order to shape political narratives in their favour. Looking at the ways in which different states engage in such narrative-building can provide reference points for Europe's own potential 'civilizational turn'. To this end, the civilizational narratives of the EU's main political counterparts will be considered, namely Russia, China, and the United States. It is worth noting at this point that a country's identification as a civilizational state is tied to the ideology of the ruling party of the day, and should therefore not be taken for granted as a permanent phenomenon.⁴⁹

In 2013, Vladimir Putin declared that Russia has always been a 'state-civilization', which is reinforced by the Russian people and language, but willing to accommodate 'the ethnic and religious specificity of particular territories'.⁵⁰ Putin's government considers Russia to represent a 'distinct Eurasian civilization', which has absorbed both east and west and thus fostered a 'hybrid mentality and intercontinental territory'.⁵¹ This has entailed a rejection of the West in favour of the concept of a 'Russian world' which reaches beyond the Russian Federation, of which Belarus and Ukraine represent integral parts.⁵² This viewpoint has led to a clash in the geopolitical interests of the Russia and the European Union, which will be discussed in more detail at a later stage.

China is the primary country associated with the idea of a nation representing a continuous civilization in itself. This idea was most famously expressed in U.S. sinologist Lucian Pye's statement that "China is a civilization pretending to be a state".⁵³ While this idea may not have been formulated in the country itself, its official sanctioning has been interpreted as a signal that China would be treading its own special path, leaving behind 'the myth that China is destined to be assimilated into a Western model of political society'.⁵⁴ Chinese politicians have drawn from various sources in their country's history to build its civilizational narrative, such as through the promotion of Confucianism as reflective of Chinese social values. The Confucian concept of a 'harmonious society' has thus been expanded to emphasize China's desire for a more harmonious world in which an accommodation of different cultures take the place of the current international

⁴⁹ Acharya, "The Myth Of The "Civilization State", p. 144.

⁵⁰ Vladimir Putin, *Putin at Meeting of the Valdai International Discussion Club*. Novgorod Region, 20 September 2013.

⁵¹ Rachman, "China, India And The Rise Of The 'Civilisation State'".

⁵² Coker, *The Rise Of The Civilizational State*, p. 122.

⁵³ Lucian W. Pye, "China: Erratic State, Frustrated Society", *Foreign Affairs* 69, no. 4 (1990): p. 58.

⁵⁴ Macaes, "The Attack Of The Civilization-State".

order with its ‘top-down stratification’.⁵⁵ In keeping with cultural relativism, China has been a proponent of ‘Asian values’ as an alternative to universal human rights.⁵⁶ These are advanced with the argument that such values would be a no less legitimate basis for organizing international society than Western-originated universal values, and may in fact be more compatible with the cultural reality of Asian nations.⁵⁷ This has the effect of fostering a pan-Asian identity which would be inclined to look to China for leadership, given its status as the largest economy on the continent.

During the Presidency of Donald Trump, the White House oftentimes engaged in civilizational rhetoric which placed the West in a conflict against powers threatening its values and its very existence.⁵⁸ For this reason, the United States was at that time widely included in discussions about the adoption of civilizational identities by international powers. An expression of the United States’ civilizational narrative can be seen in a speech given by the former President in Poland in 2017, in which he called for the defence and preservation of “our civilization”, in reference to the West. This speech saw Trump referring to shared liberal values as “the ties that bind us together as nations, as allies, and as a civilization”.⁵⁹ He also thanked the Polish people for welcoming U.S. soldiers into their country, stating that they are “symbols of America’s commitment to your security and your place in a strong and democratic Europe.”⁶⁰ This emphasis on the United States’ civilizational unity with Europe serves the interest of maintaining and strengthening image of the United States as the security guarantor of liberal Europe, as which it has acted since the beginning of the Cold War. By visiting Poland as the leader of the strongest military in NATO, and warning that the civilization Europe and the U.S. have in common is in danger, he suggests a need for the latter to continue acting as the guardian of the ‘Old Continent’. This perpetuates the projection of U.S. power in the region and thus Europe’s continued subjection to ‘American’ foreign policy interests.

Ultimately, the central message of Trump’s Warsaw speech is one of civilizational survival. He declares that “the fundamental question of our time is whether the West has the will to survive ...

⁵⁵ Coker, *The Rise Of The Civilizational State*, p. 105.

⁵⁶ Balfour, “Against A European Civilization: Narratives About The European Union”.

⁵⁷ Shaheed and Richter, "Is “Human Rights” A Western Concept?”.

⁵⁸ Acharya, "The Myth Of The “Civilization State”, p. 139.

⁵⁹ Trump, *Warsaw Speech*.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

in the face of those who would subvert and destroy it.”⁶¹ It can be said that the conflictive tone of this perspective is caused precisely by the threat to global U.S. hegemony the rise of such a worldview represents.⁶² The U.S. executive’s promotion of an overt civilizational narrative appears to have been a trait of the Trump administration which has not been revived by that of his successor. Such rhetoric could return with the next Republican President, or prove to have been a one-time phenomenon with no remaining weight in U.S. foreign policy debates. In either case, it may be the best example for the idea that civilizational ideology is only as long-lived as the regimes that promote it.

Not all agree with the conflictive view of inter-civilizational relations held by the former U.S. administration. Acharya argues that the way in which Western ‘liberal universal values’ are generally contrasted with ‘the parochialism of non-Western civilizations’ in this debate wrongly contributes to a “West versus the rest” view of the world.⁶³ Rather than highlighting the incompatible aspects of different cultures and stoking conflict between them, he points to those values held in common by most cultures, which show that ‘civilization state and universal humanistic norms are not mutually exclusive’.⁶⁴

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Rachman, "China, India And The Rise Of The ‘Civilisation State’".

⁶³ Acharya, "The Myth Of The “Civilization State”, p. 150.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

Chapter 2: “Civilization” as a Tool of Identity Formation

The following chapter investigates the extent to which civilizational discourse currently exists within the European Union’s institutional level. In doing so, it focuses on the official rhetoric of the European Commission - the EU institution most closely associated with the promotion of European identity, by virtue of its role as the executive branch of the Union. Initially however, the first section takes a look at the earliest official declaration of a common European identity, which already made mention of the civilization shared in common by its members. This serves to draw attention to the fact that an EU adoption of a civilizational identity is not a new phenomenon, but reflects tendencies present in official rhetoric regarding European integration from the earliest days of the Community.

The latter section examines the ideas of Emmanuel Macron in relation to the concept of a European civilizational state and the role such an entity should play in the world, as expressed in official speeches and articles. Since his election in 2017, the current President of France has become the foremost advocate of such pan-European ideas, advocating for a greater role of a United Europe in the world as well as for an embrace of its unique identity and values.

Identity and Civilization within the European Union

The construction of a European identity has been an active process in which European leadership and institutions have been closely involved since the beginning of this regional political project. It should be noted at this point that the European Union was created in 1993, and incorporated the European Communities. As such, when referring to the European Community or the European Union, the same historical entity is spoken of. A shared civilizational identity was acknowledged early on as a unifying factor early by the combined leadership of the European Community’s member states.

Recent years, however, have seen the term ‘civilization’ fall out of use in the European institutions, being replaced by newly coined alternatives - prominently the concept of ‘our European way of life’. This expression, as well as others which encourages the view that Europe is home to a certain

way of life which must be preserved and promoted, can be seen as analogous to traditional ‘civilizational’ rhetoric.

Civilization and Values within the Copenhagen Declaration on European Identity

The Declaration on European Identity, signed in Copenhagen in 1973, laid out ‘the core values that form the basis of European integration’.⁶⁵ This joint declaration of the leaders of the European Community’s member states can be considered a predecessor of similar declarations by the EU Council. Since the national leaders, through this declaration, acted in their collective role as heads of the Community’s member states, rather than solely on behalf of their national government, this gathering will be considered equivalent to an EU institution for the purposes of this analysis. Part of the intention behind this Declaration was to ‘define the place of the European Communities in world affairs’, a fact which reflects the integral connection that exists between identity and geopolitics.⁶⁶ The fact that the document contains the term ‘civilization’ two times within its three pages is an indication of the prominent place this factor held as a justification for European integration at the time.

At the top of the Declaration, the members of the Community proclaim that “unity is a basic European necessity to ensure the survival of the civilization which they have in common”.⁶⁷ This is significant, as it presents European unity not as primarily a matter of peace or prosperity, but of *civilizational survival*. This is a degree of civilizational rhetoric which would be hardly imaginable today. At the time, such language was arguably warranted by the international context of the Cold War, in which the global confrontation between the United States-dominated West and the Russian-dominated communist bloc created the fear of a uniquely European identity being drowned out. This passage shows just how essential European unity, through integration, was considered to be for the future of European civilization by the Community’s national leadership in 1973.

⁶⁵ Antonio Moreno Juste, "The European Economic Community And The End Of The Franco Regime: The September 1975 Crisis", *Cahiers De La Méditerranée*, no. 90 (2015): p. 3.

⁶⁶ European Community. *Declaration On European Identity*. Copenhagen, 1973, preamble.

⁶⁷ *Ibid*, section 1(1).

The document goes on to list representative democracy, the rule of law, social justice, and respect for human rights as being ‘fundamental elements of the European identity’.⁶⁸ These principles, which would later come to be widely referred to as ‘European values’, were already then considered a central aspect of European identity by the Community’s members. The text then states that “the diversity of cultures within the framework of a common European civilization” and “the attachment to common values and principles”, are what give the European identity its originality.⁶⁹ The common values of the participating countries and their shared civilization are here presented as equally important fundamental pillars of a *unique* European identity.

The Declaration concludes by addressing the role of identity in the formulation of foreign policy. In the last article, the parties commit themselves to “progressively undertake the definition of their identity in relation to other countries”, stating that in doing so they will “contribute to the framing of a genuinely European foreign policy”.⁷⁰ This passage not only acknowledges the fact that identity is dynamic and that its construction is a continuous process, but emphasizes its important role in formulating policy with regard to other countries. The requirement of this foreign policy being ‘genuinely European’ suggests a desire to free the Community’s external relations from excessive influence by outside powers.

As shown above, the first official document expressing the parameters of Community identity considered both a shared civilization and common values to provide the basis for European unity. The emphasis on these two aspects in particular bears a striking parallel to the contemporary discourse around an EU civilizational identity. It also shows that a ‘civilizational’ justification for European integration is not completely ahistorical, or at least not incompatible with the intentions of its early national leadership.

⁶⁸ Ibid, section 1(1).

⁶⁹ Ibid, 1(3).

⁷⁰ Ibid, section 3(22).

The European Commission and ‘Our European Way of Life’

The most noteworthy recent development in terms of civilizational identity promotion within the EU institutions occurred in 2019, with the publication of the European Commission cabinet under President von der Leyen. The creation of a proposed Commissioner for ‘Protecting Our European way of Life’ caused controversy, particularly due to the fact that this official was to be put in charge of migration and asylum policy, amongst other areas. This was criticized as insensitive and exclusionary due to its implication that a ‘European way of life’ was being threatened by migrants and asylum seekers and required protection from them.⁷¹ Following the backlash, the title was altered to ‘Promoting our European way of life’.⁷² While this change toned down the exclusionary implications of the position, the ‘European way of life’ phrasing was maintained.

An idea of how the current European Commission intends to protect, or “promote”, the ‘European way of life’ can be grasped from its published Political Guidelines. Within this document, six political priorities are formulated, two of which are particularly interesting for the purposes of this paper - namely those of ‘Protecting our European way of life’ and ‘A stronger Europe in the world’.⁷³ The section on the former priority contains three focal points: ‘Upholding the rule of law’, ‘strong borders and a fresh start on migration’, and ‘internal security’.⁷⁴ This paints a picture of a Union which protects its citizen’s way of life internally, through ensuring internal security, as well as externally, through strong borders and regulated migration. This protection in turn occurs through the framework of the rule of law, which is referred to as ‘Europe’s hallmark’.⁷⁵ The section on ‘A stronger Europe in the world’ states that the EU should act to ‘uphold and update the rules-based global order’, while being ‘ambitious, strategic, and assertive’ in the way it acts in the world. Trade is referred to as ‘not an end in itself’ but rather ‘a means to deliver prosperity at home and *export our values in the world*’ (emphasis added).⁷⁶ This clearly shows an intention to act in a

⁷¹ Matina Stevis-Gridneff, “‘Protecting Our European Way Of Life’? Outrage Follows New E.U. Role”, *New York Times*, 12 September 2019.

⁷² The Brussels Times, “‘European Way Of Life’ Portfolio To Undergo Name Change”, 13 November 2022.

⁷³ European Commission, *Political Guidelines For The Next European Commission 2019-2024* (Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2019), p. 4.

⁷⁴ *Ibid*, pp. 14-19.

⁷⁵ *Ibid*, p. 14.

⁷⁶ *Ibid*, p. 17.

geopolitically proactive manner, not just as a disinterested actor, but one which actively seeks to shape the global order and is ready to use all the tools at its disposal to do so.

The understanding of these two related concepts can be complemented by consulting the mission letters addressed to the respective Commissioners. In the letter to the Commissioner for Promoting our European way of life, President von der Leyen describes this concept as being built around ‘solidarity, peace of mind and security’, as well as on ‘the principle of human dignity and respect for different beliefs, religions and cultures’.⁷⁷ From this characterization, it would seem as though the ‘European way of life’ consists of an adherence to ‘European values’, as well as an emphasis on security. This security is in turn provided by ensuring a stronger Europe in the world. This is reflected in the corresponding mission letter, addressed to High Representative for Foreign and Security Policy Josep Borrell. The Commission President instructs him to ‘strengthen the Union’s capacity to act autonomously and promote its values and interests around the world’. It also refers to the Union’s need to “take decisions in a faster and more efficient way” by “overcoming unanimity constraints that hamper our foreign policy”.⁷⁸ The objective of a ‘stronger Europe in the world’ is thus complementary to and in service of the ‘European way of life’. This shows how the EU’s turn towards a civilizational identity is inherently intertwined with the move towards a greater EU role in geopolitics.

The formal use of the ‘European way of life’ concept by the European Commission is the most widely cited example for the argument that a civilizational identity is being promoted at the EU institutional level.⁷⁹ Glencross refers to the idea as the ‘keystone of the EU’s civilizational claim’.⁸⁰ Significantly, the idea of a ‘European way of life’ closely aligns with Macaes’ definition of a civilizational state as one which ‘promotes and defends one way of life against all alternatives’.⁸¹ Balfour argues that the phrase contains the idea that ‘there is something specifically European that underpins the European Union’.⁸² The adoption of ‘Promoting our European way of life’ as a

⁷⁷ European Commission, *Mission Letter To The Vice-President For Promoting Our European Way Of Life* (Brussels, 2019), p. 4.

⁷⁸ European Commission, *Mission Letter To The High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy/Vice-President of the European Commission* (Brussels, 2019), p. 5.

⁷⁹ Balfour, “Against A European Civilization: Narratives About The European Union”.

⁸⁰ Glencross, “The EU And The Temptation To Become A Civilizational State”, p. 342.

⁸¹ Macaes, “The Attack Of The Civilization-State”.

⁸² Balfour, “Against A European Civilization: Narratives About The European Union”.

separate policy area by the European Commission therefore represents a considerable step towards identifying the European Union as an entity which not only embodies, but protects and promotes a particular *European way of life* both in Europe and towards the outside world.

The European Ideology - Macron's Ideas

The current President of France, Emmanuel Macron, was first elected to office in 2017 on an enthusiastically pro-European platform, arguing for a rejuvenation of the European project as well as an expansion in the scope and ambition of EU integration. This occurred at a time at which the Union was facing an unprecedented existential challenge as a result of the British decision to withdraw from the bloc. Macron's election was taken as a sign that France, the most influential country in the EU alongside Germany, rejected the wave of Euroscepticism coursing through the continent and would maintain its investment in European unity. In the course of his Presidency, Macron has emerged as a proponent of the 'revival of a European civilization' to aid the EU in asserting itself as a more influential power on the global stage.

The French President has made use of rhetoric to this end in speeches and publications, explicitly referring to the concept of civilization-states and using it as a narrative framework when sharing his ideas on the EU's place in the world and its relation to other global powers. The two sources analysed in order to illustrate Emmanuel Macron's views on the civilization, values, and future of Europe are the "Ambassador's conference" speech delivered in August 2019, and his article entitled "For European Renewal" (hereafter 'article on Renewal'), published in March 2019. The latter source, a relatively short article, will be used to complement the analysis of the significantly longer speech. The speech to the Ambassador's conference was held in the wake of France's hosting of the yearly G7 Summit in August of 2019, while the article on Renewal was published shortly prior to that year's European Parliament elections in March of 2019.

Macron begins his speech to the gathering of ambassadors by pointing to the ongoing changes in the international order. He explains that the world is undergoing "a transformation, a geopolitical and strategic reconfiguration", and that as a result we are "probably in the process of experiencing

the end of Western hegemony over the world”. In his view, the West is used to an international order that has been based on its hegemony since the 18th century:

“Probably French hegemony in the 18th century, inspired by the Enlightenment; probably British hegemony in the 19th century thanks to the Industrial Revolution, and American hegemony in the 20th century thanks to two major conflicts and the economic and political domination of that power.”⁸³

He thus sets the context for current developments, outlining his view on the evolution of Western hegemony since its outset. It is noteworthy that Macron refers to the Enlightenment as the event that ‘inspired’ the beginning of Western global dominance - while the claim is debatable, it is consistent with his promotion of ‘humanism’ as the philosophy that should underpin Europe’s actions on the world stage.

According to Macron, these upheavals are in part the consequence of mistakes committed by the West but also due to “the emergence of new powers” whose impact has been “underestimated for far too long”. In this regard, he names “China first and foremost, as well as Russia’s strategy” which he says has been “pursued with greater success over the last few years”. By his account, these countries have not only disrupted “our” international order and assumed a key role in the economic order, but also “very forcefully reshaped the political order and the political thinking that goes with it”.⁸⁴ He refers to these countries, including India, as those that “consider themselves genuine civilization states”, noting that they have “a lot more political inspiration than Europeans today” as well as a “genuine philosophy”. The reference to civilizational states here is significant, especially since it occurs in a context in which these countries are portrayed as rising powers which are succeeding in the reshaping of the international order to their advantage. In contrasting the ‘genuine philosophy’ of the EU’s competitors with Europe’s lack of political inspiration, Macron suggests a need to remedy this lack. He then proceeds to offer a solution to this problem.

⁸³ Emmanuel Macron, *Ambassadors’ conference: Speech by M. Emmanuel Macron, President of the Republic*. Paris, 27 August 2019.

⁸⁴ Macron, *Ambassadors’ conference: Speech*.

The French President believes that “we are at a pivotal moment for our continent” in which “we need to politically and culturally reinvent the shape of our civilization in a changing world”.⁸⁵ He describes the coming world as one which will be centered around China and the United States as its two focal points. Given this situation, Europe has the choice of either becoming “junior allies of one party or the other”, or instead choosing to “become part of the game and exert our influence”. In order to ensure its continued relevance on the world stage, he advises that Europe must rebuild “a collective narrative and a collective imagination”. This is to be accomplished by the restoration of “what is essentially European civilization”, which should be the EU’s goal “at home, in our European strategy, and internationally.” Furthermore, this restoration must occur on the basis of ‘true humanism’ - “the thing that has always characterized Europe”. This entails a focus on the defence of human rights, democracy, and European values.⁸⁶ However, as he states in the article on Renewal, such ideals cannot be ensured by “business as usual and wishful thinking” - instead, “European humanism demands action”.⁸⁷ Macron states that humanism must be upheld by “championing this European civilization”, and “working to promote it at home and abroad”.⁸⁸

These passages clearly lay out the central aspects of Macron’s belief in regard to the EU’s identity. He holds that what Europe lacks in comparison to its rivals is a collective vision capable of inspiring its external action, to give it confidence in asserting its values and interests on the world stage. This renewed identity should be applied not only the EU’s foreign policy, but internally as well - bringing to mind the symbiotic dichotomy of the ‘European way of life’ and ‘A stronger Europe in the world’. The civilizational narrative Macron promotes takes the Enlightenment as its starting point and the humanism born from it as its ethical foundation.

Macron’s highly ideological views on this matter clearly reflect a ‘civilization-state’ narrative from a European perspective, invoking the changing international order and the end of western hegemony, the rise of countries which consider themselves civilization-states, the role of the Enlightenment, and the promotion of humanism. As opposed to the current European Commission,

⁸⁵ Emmanuel Macron, *For European Renewal*. Elysée, March 2019.

⁸⁶ Macron, *Ambassadors’ conference: Speech*.

⁸⁷ Macron, *For European Renewal*.

⁸⁸ Macron, *Ambassadors’ conference: Speech*.

the French President makes use of the of the term ‘civilization’ outright, which can be explained by his role as an individual representing a nation and expressing his personal opinion, rather than an institution which formulates policy based on carefully constructed compromise and complex deliberation. Macron’s re-election to the French Presidency in April 2022 ensures that, for the foreseeable future, the EU will continue to be influenced by the ideas of a prominent national leader who outspokenly believes in the necessity of Europe adopting a civilizational identity in both its internal and external action.

Chapter 3: The EU's Geopolitical Turn

This final chapter examines the European Union's recent turn towards a more autonomous and geopolitically engaged foreign policy, first announced in its 2016 Global Strategy report and put into practice with the establishment of the von der Leyen Commission in 2019. This increased strategic engagement constitutes the implementation of the above-outlined civilizational narrative which has been promoted by both the European Commission and the President of France. This section examines the impact of the EU's geopolitical turn, accompanied by a civilizational identity, on its relationship with its main competitors on the international stage: Russia, China, and the United States. Finally, it considers how currently debated changes to the European Union's treaties and institutional architecture may affect its future geopolitical action and the consolidation of a European civilizational identity.

Strategic Autonomy and the Geopolitical Commission

Speaking to a gathering of her party members in Munich in May 2017, former German Chancellor Angela Merkel announced that “The times when we could completely depend on others are, to a certain extent, over... We Europeans truly have to take fate into our own hands”. Coker describes this as a ‘watershed’ moment, in which the Chancellor expressed the widely held belief that ‘the Europeans might no longer be able to rely on their principal ally’.⁸⁹ The statement followed a series of summits, which had seen the recently elected Donald Trump criticize European allies for their supposedly insufficient spending on defence and came after months of his questioning the relevance of the Atlantic alliance.⁹⁰ This was a main driver behind increasing calls for European self-reliance. In a November 2019 interview with the Economist, Emmanuel Macron expressed his view that, with the U.S. turning its back on it, Europe was standing “at the edge of a precipice” and that it therefore needed to “wake up” and “start thinking of itself strategically as a geopolitical power”. If it failed to do this, it would no longer be in control of its own destiny and risked ‘disappearing geopolitically’ in the long run.⁹¹ The view that the EU needed to become more

⁸⁹ Coker, *The Rise Of The Civilizational State*, p. 56.

⁹⁰ Matthew Karnitschnig, "Trump Confirms Europe's Worst Fears". *Politico Europe*, 26 May 2017.

⁹¹ Macron, *Emmanuel Macron warns Europe: NATO is becoming brain-dead*.

independent in its defence and the ensuring of its interests on the world stage, given the distant attitude of the Trump administration was thus widely held among European leadership, particularly in Germany and France.

The beginning of the EU's geopolitical turn can be identified in the publication of the 'European Global Strategy' report (EUGS) by the European External Action Service. This report was released in June 2016, five months after Trump's inauguration in January of that year. This indicates that the EEAS began planning for a new EU strategic doctrine as soon as it was confirmed that an isolationist leader would now be in charge of U.S. foreign policy. This report, subtitled "A Global Strategy for the European Union's Foreign And Security Policy" for the first time formally introduced the idea of 'strategic autonomy' into EU policy. The Strategy describes itself as nurturing "the ambition of strategic autonomy for the European Union", and states that "an appropriate level of ambition and strategic autonomy is important for Europe's ability to foster peace and safeguard security within and beyond its borders".⁹² According to High Representative Borrell, the closest thing to a definition of "strategic autonomy" is the 'capacity to act autonomously when and where necessary and with partners wherever possible'.⁹³

Since its adoption into EU strategy, the concept of strategic autonomy has seen continued support both within member states and the EU institutions, especially through President Macron and the EEAS. While referring to the European Intervention Initiative in 2019, Macron explained that it was not meant as a challenge to NATO, but as complementary to it because it "gives us back room for manoeuvre and strategic autonomy. I believe this military sovereignty is essential".⁹⁴ Borrell expressed the continued importance of the policy in a late 2020 article titled "Why European strategic autonomy matters".⁹⁵ Far from losing relevance since its official adoption in 2016, strategic autonomy has continued to be a widely referenced idea in European policy discussions when advocating for an increased independence of the EU's foreign and security policy.

⁹² European External Action Service, *Shared Vision, Common Action: A Stronger Europe - A Global Strategy For The European Union's Foreign And Security Policy* (Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2016), pp. 4, 19.

⁹³ Josep Borrell, *Why European strategic autonomy matters*. European External Action Service, December 2020.

⁹⁴ Macron, *Ambassadors' conference: Speech*.

⁹⁵ Borrell, *Why European strategic autonomy matters*.

A concept of similar discursive significance, reflecting an ambition for greater EU proactiveness and independence in external action, was introduced by the European Commission of Ursula von der Leyen. During her November 2019 speech to the European Parliament, the President announced that she would lead a “geopolitical Commission” which would “not be afraid to speak the language of confidence”.⁹⁶ The idea of a “Geopolitical Commission” was further emphasized by its inclusion into the mission letters for each of the new Commissioners.⁹⁷ The adoption of this title left no room for doubt as to the EU’s new attitude towards foreign policy.

This new political identity has been reflected in the language used by the representatives of the Commission and EEAS. In an article published in the context of the COVID pandemic in 2020, Commissioner Thierry Breton and High Representative Borrell stated that, for Europe, “virtuous soft power” was no longer sufficient, and needed to be “complemented with a hard power dimension”.⁹⁸ They further proclaimed that “the time has come for Europe to be able to use its levers of influence to enforce its vision of the world and defend its own interests”.⁹⁹ This certainly sounds less like a Union limited to maintaining peace and prosperity through economic cooperation, and instead more like an international actor with ambitions of shaping the world in its own image.

The rhetoric around ‘strategic autonomy’ and the ‘Geopolitical Commission’ taken together show a clear affirmation of the EU’s stated ambition in the EUGS – from the former, a concept intended to guide European foreign and security policy-making towards greater independence, to the latter, a title adopted by the EU executive signalling its intention and willingness to defend its interests and values in the world. In this sense, strategic autonomy is in service of greater EU geopolitical engagement. After all, as Josep Borrell put it: “It is difficult to claim to be a ‘political union’ able to act as a ‘global player’ and as a ‘geopolitical Commission’ without being ‘autonomous’”.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁶ von der Leyen, *Speech by President-elect von der Leyen in the European Parliament Plenary*.

⁹⁷ European Commission, *Mission Letter To The Vice-President For Promoting Our European Way Of Life*, p.2; European Commission, *Mission Letter To The High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy/Vice-President of the European Commission*, p. 2.

⁹⁸ Josep Borrell and Thierry Breton. *For a united, resilient and sovereign Europe (with Thierry Breton)*. European External Action Service, June 2020.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Borrell, *Why European strategic autonomy matters*.

Russia in Ukraine - A Battleground of Civilizational Narratives

The Russian invasion of Ukraine on 24 February has been cited by some, including the High Representative, as a catalyst for the ‘geopolitical awakening’ of the European Union.¹⁰¹ It has driven the EU to unprecedented actions, most notably its first ever delivery of military equipment to a country actively engaged in armed conflict. Borrell refers to this aid as “not just an act of solidarity but also a way of defending our common interests and acting in self-defence against a heavily-armed and ruthless aggressor”.¹⁰² One analyst for CNN summarized these developments with the observation that “in the space of a few days, Brussels went further in its quest to become a geopolitical power in its own right than it had in decades”.¹⁰³ The conflict in Ukraine has significantly accelerated the scope of the EU’s geopolitical action, turning what was previously largely rhetoric into tangible praxis.

While the term ‘battle of narratives’ was coined by High Representative Josep Borrell in reference to the COVID pandemic, it would be difficult to find a conflict this idea applies to more than the close to decade-spanning conflict between Russia and Ukraine.¹⁰⁴ This war, more than any other current global conflict concerning Europe, is subject to conflicting narratives over the “rightful place” of Ukraine. More often than not, these narratives carry a highly civilizational overtone.

This clash of narratives has its origins in the Ukrainian protests of 2013-2014 which overthrew the pro-Russian government of Viktor Yanukovich. This upheaval was sparked by the government’s rejection of an Association Agreement with the European Union, under Russian pressure, in favour of closer ties with Russia’s Eurasian Economic Union. The resulting “Euromaidan Revolution” saw Ukrainian citizens taking to the streets with EU flags during widespread riots in the capital of Kyiv. The resulting change from a pro-Russian to a pro-EU government in Ukraine in February 2014 led to the Russian invasion and annexation of the Crimean Peninsula, as well as the

¹⁰¹ Josep Borrell. *Europe in the Interregnum: our geopolitical awakening after Ukraine*. Le Grand Continent, March 2022.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Luke McGee, "Europe Is Making Once-Unimaginable Decisions To Counter Putin's Aggression", *CNN*, 3 March 2022.

¹⁰⁴ Josep Borrell, *EU HRVP Josep Borrell: The Coronavirus pandemic and the new world it is creating*. European External Action Service, March 2020.

declaration of Russian-backed separatist republics in the eastern Donbas region the following month. This is the background of the Russo-Ukrainian war, which has been ongoing until today and recently reached a new stage with a full-scale Russian invasion of Ukrainian territory. This is being conducted under the guise of a “special military operation” and was preceded by a formal recognition of the separatist so-called Donetsk and Luhansk People’s Republics.

A Narrative Clash

The reason for the clash between the Russian and European narratives surrounding Ukraine is that they are mutually exclusive. Already in the early days of Euromaidan, EU leadership spoke of Ukraine’s long-term future lying with Europe, referring to this outcome as inevitable.¹⁰⁵ This rhetoric has been picked back up in the context of the Russian invasion, with the Trade Commissioner reiterating the assertion of “Ukraine’s European future” and the Commission President stating in April 2018: “My message today is clear: Ukraine belongs in the European family”.¹⁰⁶ The European Union has, rhetorically at least, left no doubt about the fact that it considers Ukraine to ultimately belong into its Western, liberal civilizational space.

In stark contrast to this view, President Vladimir Putin wrote an essay outlining his personal vision of the Russian civilizational narrative regarding to Ukraine, titled “On the Historical Unity of Russians and Ukrainians”. The article, published on July 2021, uses as its basis the close historical and cultural relations of the two countries and a common descent from the ancient Rus peoples. This is consistent with one of the central themes of the Russian civilizational narrative, namely the “unbrokenness” of Russian history.¹⁰⁷ Within the article, Putin draws a clear line between the different iterations of Russian and Ukrainian statehood or analogous entities to argue for the “spiritual, human and civilizational ties” between the two people groups, and how “true sovereignty of Ukraine is possible only in partnership with Russia”.¹⁰⁸ Independent Ukrainian

¹⁰⁵ Andrew Gardner, "Ukraine’s Future ‘Lies With Europe’", *Politico Europe*, 20 December 2013.

¹⁰⁶ Directorate-General for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations, *Statement By President Von Der Leyen With Ukrainian President Zelenskyy At The Occasion Of The President's Visit To Kyiv*, 8 April 2022.

¹⁰⁷ Coker, *The Rise Of The Civilizational State*, p. 113.

¹⁰⁸ Vladimir Putin, *On the Historical Unity of Russians and Ukrainians*. President of Russia, July 2021.

statehood, not to speak of alignment with the West, constitutes for Putin a historical anomaly and a mistake which must be corrected.

The narrative promoted by the Russian state rejects identification with Europe, instead preferring to think of the country as a ‘distinct Eurasian civilization’.¹⁰⁹ In this thinking, the core of the “Russian world” includes the three eastern Slavic states of Russia, Belarus, and Ukraine.¹¹⁰ The broader Russian ‘civilizational space’ meanwhile includes all those countries that were at one point ruled from Moscow - these are referred to as the “Near Abroad”.¹¹¹ However, many of the countries which were once part of the Russian Empire and the USSR are today either members of the European Union or have clearly aligned themselves with it. This includes Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine, each of which first concluded Association Agreements with the European Union and have now applied for EU candidate status shortly after the February invasion. Incidentally, each of these countries also has territories which are currently being occupied by Russia. In early June 2022, Putin gave a speech in which he compared Tsar Peter the Great’s 18th century territorial conquests in the Baltic region, which he referred to as a ‘reclaiming’ of rightful Russian land, with his own incursion into Ukraine.¹¹² Within the same week, the Russian parliament received a proposal to withdraw the Soviet Union’s recognition of Lithuanian independence, submitted by a member of Putin’s United Russia party.¹¹³ The civilizational narrative promoted by Vladimir Putin poses a direct and tangible threat to the security of the European Union, and it is therefore vital for the EU to combat it with a corresponding narrative of its own.

Macron has, to a certain extent, gone along with the civilizational narrative of Russian history. He has recommended caution about referring to Russia’s actions in Ukraine as genocide, as Russia and Ukraine are “brotherly nations”. This statement has been rejected by Western and Ukrainian commentators, and condemned as a promotion of the Russian narrative around the conflict.¹¹⁴ In

¹⁰⁹ Rachman, "China, India And The Rise Of The ‘Civilisation State’"; Acharya, "The Myth Of The “Civilization State”, p. 148.

¹¹⁰ Coker, *The Rise Of The Civilizational State*, p. 122.

¹¹¹ *Ibid*, p. 59.

¹¹² Euronews, "Putin Compares Himself To Peter The Great Over Drive To "Take Back Russian Land"", 8 June 2022.

¹¹³ Lithuanian Radio and Television, "Russia’s Duma Mulls Revoking Recognition Of Lithuanian Independence", 8 June 2022.

¹¹⁴ Peter Dickinson. "Memo To Macron: Putin’s Ukraine Genocide Is Not The Act Of A Brother", *Atlantic Council*, 2022.

this way, the French President's adherence to a civilizational view of international relations can be said to have harmed European interests by alienating Ukrainians and bolstering talking points of the Russian government. Macron's remark is consistent with his views on Russia expressed as in the Ambassador's speech, in which he stated that "pushing Russia away from Europe is a major strategic error".¹¹⁵ It could however be argued that the time has come to re-evaluate this benevolent stance, given Moscow's flagrant disregard of international law and the territorial integrity of its neighbours. Here it can perhaps be said that he who constructs civilizational narratives should be careful lest he start believing the civilizational narratives constructed by others.

"Systemic Rivals" - The EU-China Relationship

A different, but no less significant, type of conflict exists in the European Union's relationship with the People's Republic of China. In its report "EU-China - A strategic outlook" of 2019, the European Commission for the first time referred to the country as a "systemic rival promoting alternative models of governance".¹¹⁶ The very concept of a 'systemic rival', a term which has since the release of the Strategic Outlook been repeatedly used by the EU and member states specifically in reference to China, constitutes a clear delineation of boundaries between the political systems promoted by the two entities. It also suggests a concern that the perceived success of the Chinese political system could cause it to replace the liberal democratic model for countries seeking an alternative to the West. Given its application to China, this label would appear to be reserved for competitors which display economic growth and political stability while promoting a political system which might be emulated as an alternative to that of liberal democracy. Accordingly, it seems highly unlikely that the Russian Federation will be qualified by the EU as a systemic rival at any point in the near future.

The EU-China strategic outlook mentions 'the distortive effects of foreign state ownership and state financing of foreign companies on the EU internal market', the tackling of which is tied to the necessity of maintaining the EU's 'prosperity, values and social model over the long term'.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁵ Macron, *Ambassadors' conference: Speech*.

¹¹⁶ European Commission. *EU-China – A Strategic Outlook*. Strasbourg, 2019, p. 1.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid*, pp. 2, 8.

In Glencross' view, this implies that "the promotion of a European way of life requires a substantial change in EU-China policy".¹¹⁸ He takes the content of this report as implying that a potential civilizational turn by the EU is a threat to Chinese interests in particular, as China was the main beneficiary of the Union's "primarily economic engagement via the liberal global trading regime".¹¹⁹ This mirrors Macron's call, in the article on Renewal, for a "ban in Europe on businesses that compromise our strategic interests and fundamental values".¹²⁰ Given its promotion of an incompatible 'model of governance', the economic rise of China is seen as a threat to both the values and strategic interests of the EU.

While economic policy is a major area of friction between China and the European Union, the largest source of discord between the two parties comes from the country's human rights record. In fact, the ratification of the long-negotiated Comprehensive Agreement on Investment (CAI) between the EU and China, which would have represented a massive step in bilateral relations, was suspended as a result of condemnation by the EU Parliament and member states over the country's use of mass detention and forced labour against the Uyghur population of its Xinjiang region. The issue does not appear to be decreasing in prominence, as the European Parliament on 8 June 2022 adopted a non-binding resolution condemning the systematic oppression of the Uyghur community, and calling for an import ban on goods produced through forced labour. This was intended as a signal that the EU should longer "be complicit with the Chinese totalitarian regime, which has been perpetuating a crime against humanity in the Xinjiang province for five years".¹²¹ According to a June 2022 column in the *Global Times*, a newspaper run by the Chinese Communist party, "China is increasingly concerned that the EU will mix human rights, Hong Kong and Xinjiang affairs with economic and trade issues".¹²² The issue with this statement is that, from an EU perspective, its concern for human rights does not constitute a "mixing" of separate policy areas: the EU's values are a fundamental aspect of all its areas of activity. In particular, Article 21 of the Treaty on European Union lists the "universality and indivisibility of human rights" among the basic principles of the EU's external action. With this in mind, China's rejection of universal

¹¹⁸ Glencross, "The EU And The Temptation To Become A Civilizational State", p. 346.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ Macron, *For European Renewal*.

¹²¹ Lyubov Pronina, "China Deserves New Sanctions Over Xinjiang, EU Lawmakers Say", *Bloomberg*, 9 June 2022.

¹²² Ding Gang, "China-EU Economic Ties On Brink Of An Ideological Confrontation Trap", *Global Times*, 8 June 2022.

values, including human rights, can be criticized as a calculated, self-interested stance which allows it to legitimize and sustain its oppression of minority populations under the guise of unclearly defined “Asian values”.

Separating from “American” Civilization

Finally, the global power least commonly considered a competitor of the EU, but being one nonetheless, is the United States. Since the end of the Second World War, this country has presented itself as the champion of what it called the ‘free world’, a concept greatly overlapping, but not synonymous, with Western civilization. This claim was backed up by its status as by far the foremost military and economic power in the Western hemisphere. The liberal order which ‘birthed and nurtured the EU’ was a result of this dominance and can, according to Glencross, be described from a European perspective as ‘benign U.S. hegemony’.¹²³ The European Union, having found the confidence to act as a geopolitical player in its own right, is now metaphorically attempting to ‘break free’ from the umbrella of U.S. civilization. Rather than being considered a junior partner in a ‘Western world’ in which another sets the agenda, it wishes to establish its own internationally recognized foreign policy identity on the basis of its own values and priorities - or as the von der Leyen Commission’s Political Guidelines put it, a “unique brand of responsible global leadership”.¹²⁴

This ambition for a specifically European foreign policy identity can be traced to geopolitical developments concerning the United States and its relationship to Europe. There has been a clear divergence of interests in certain foreign policy areas, notably in the policy pursued towards Iran. The Iran nuclear deal, or Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), was negotiated between 2003 and 2015, by the permanent members of the Security Council, Germany, Iran, and the European Union. The agreement showed success in reining in Iran’s development of nuclear weapons in exchange for the lifting of sanctions, and stands, in the words of Borrell “as a prime example of what European diplomacy and effective multilateralism can achieve within the rules-

¹²³ Glencross, “The EU And The Temptation To Become A Civilizational State”, p. 332.

¹²⁴ European Commission, *Political Guidelines For The Next European Commission 2019-2024*, p. 17.

based international order”.¹²⁵ Despite the promise the deal showed, the United States unilaterally exited the agreement in May 2018 and reimposed sanctions as part of the Trump administration’s strategy of “maximum pressure” against Iran. Since then, the European Union has acted as the main mediator between the U.S. and Iran, and has gone through great efforts to keep the deal, which it considers “a key security achievement”, alive.¹²⁶ The previous U.S. President was thus willing to discard over a decade of rigorous diplomatic work which worked to ensure stability in the EU’s neighbourhood based on seemingly short-sighted considerations.

Such unilateral setting of policy positions was more tolerable for Europe during the Cold War, when the United States was the undisputed leader of the West and the European Community was almost exclusively focused on economic cooperation. Now that the EU is finding its place as a global actor, it is less desirable and realistic for it to continue adhering to the foreign policy line set by the State Department. While individual Western countries of course disagreed with U.S. foreign policy prior to the EU’s geopolitical turn, even during the Cold War, the difference is that the EU has now emerged as an actor aiming to represent a single geopolitical unit which stands up for its interests in a united manner.

Policy independence is one of the main reasons for the necessity of European strategic autonomy. In this regard, the International Traffic in Arms Regulation (ITAR), the United States’ regulatory framework for the export of its defence and military technologies is a significant example. This law makes the movement of any piece of defence technology which involves intellectual property, components, or technical support originating in the U.S. subject to approval by the State Department. This subjection to U.S. approval for the movement of military equipment greatly hinders the ability of the EU to act autonomously should this be necessary.¹²⁷ While this arrangement may not currently be a source of problems for EU member states, it could become a real liability should Europe and the U.S. ever find themselves in disagreement over the necessity of such hardware being deployed in a crisis situation.

¹²⁵ Josep Borrell, *Saving the Iran Nuclear Deal*. Project Syndicate, July 2020.

¹²⁶ Eleanor Doorley, "Could The War In Ukraine Be A Catalyst For Change In EU-Iran Relations?", *The Parliament Magazine*, 2022.

¹²⁷ Florentin Schlager, "EU-Verteidigung – Idealistische Ziele, Mit Pragmatischen Mitteln, In Einer Realistischen Welt", *Österreichische Militärische Zeitschrift*, 2021.

Europe's 'civilizational' relationship with the United States is another topic on which President Macron outlined his views in his 2019 Ambassador's speech. He explicitly contrasts 'American' and European civilization, stating that while they are both in the same "Western camp", they promote different 'brands of humanism'. While putting "freedom ahead of everything else" is for him a "strong characteristic of American civilization", Europe is more "sensitized to climate issues, to equality, [and] to social equilibrium".¹²⁸ To Macron, these diverging characteristics explain the differences between the US and Europe, even as they remain 'strong allies'.¹²⁹ This view clearly promotes the idea that European and American civilization, while being closely related, are ultimately separate entities. His idea of Europe's future role in the world is that of an unaligned 'balancing power', which "ensure[s] consistency between the great powers", citing the EU role in regard to the JCPOA. In his view, the fulfilment of this role requires Europe to fully embrace independence in "diplomacy and strategic autonomy", as well as requiring the "rethinking in depth [of] our relationship with certain powers".¹³⁰ This is a direct expression of the desire for greater geopolitical independence from the United States, being partially justified on the basis of civilizational rhetoric.

While a continued strong alliance is in the interest of both parties - policymakers never fail to emphasize the complementary nature of EU defence initiatives to NATO - the EU cannot fail to be prepared for another situation in which the United States returns to an isolationist outlook. While the United States is currently leading the defence of European security through its extensive support of Ukraine, it is not guaranteed that a future administration will not again prefer to remain uninvolved from international situations it sees as not directly concerning the United States. Part of the preparation for such an eventuality is the construction of a narrative which paints the European Union as a global actor with its own interests and the hard power to uphold them. Far from being a futile vanity project, the existence of such a narrative has a real impact on perceptions, policymaking, and ultimately international relations. In the words of High Representative Josep Borrell: The ability to shape the narrative "is the real currency of global power".¹³¹

¹²⁸ Macron, *Ambassadors' conference: Speech*.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*

¹³¹ Borrell, *Europe in the Interregnum: our geopolitical awakening after Ukraine*.

Potential future development

Having dealt with the implications of the EU's geopolitical and civilizational turn given the current state of relations with its great power counterparts, it is of interest to look at some potential future developments which could change the parameters for both the EU's external action and the political organisation of the European continent.

In May 2022, at the closing event of the Conference on the Future of Europe, President Macron gave a speech in which he proposed the creation of a 'European political community'.¹³² He envisioned this as a 'new European organisation' that would allow democratic European states subscribing to the EU's 'core values' to more closely cooperate with one another in various areas, ranging from politics and security, to infrastructure and free movement. Membership of this community would "not prejudge future accession to the European Union" nor "be closed to those who have left the EU".¹³³ This can be seen as an attempt to create a broader European 'civilizational' grouping of those European states which wish to align itself with the liberal democratic Europe headed by the EU, given the requirement that these states be democratic and subscribe to European values. While this project could have the potential to strengthen the democratic nature of European identity and create an even stronger bloc of resistance against Russian influence, there have been warnings against creating further 'tiers' of European integration. The concern is that such an entity could be seen as a 'consolation prize' for those countries that have not been able to join the European Union itself, as well as that it would open up the possibility of countries being relegated from one tier to another, should they clash with the rest of the Community.¹³⁴ The proposal has not been seen positively by Ukraine, where Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba stated that the country would not accept any alternatives to EU membership.¹³⁵ While President Macron may think that "the stability and future of our continent

¹³² Emmanuel Macron, *Speech by Emmanuel Macron at the closing ceremony of the Conference on the Future of Europe*. Strasbourg, 9 May 2022.

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ The Economist, "Reheated Plans For A Multi-Tiered Europe Revive Familiar Suspicions", 2022.

¹³⁵ Philippe Ricard, "Ukraine Wary Of Macron's 'European Political Community' Project", *Le Monde*, 13 May 2022.

depends” on this project, it may be a difficult task to convince the rest of democratic Europe of the necessity of such a structure.¹³⁶

The Conference also brought back into the spotlight the ongoing debate regarding a potential amendment of the EU treaties, particularly in order to get rid of unanimity voting in foreign policy. Proponents of such an amendment hold that it could make the EU a stronger international actor, by allowing it to make faster decisions in reaction to developments in the world. The downside of removing the unanimity requirement for foreign policy decisions may outweigh its benefit however, as it could create the image of a fragmented EU which acts against the interests of its less influential member states. In doing so, it would harm one of the greatest arguments in favour of European integration, namely the fact that it amplifies the voice of even the smallest countries to the level of those of the great powers on the international stage.¹³⁷

¹³⁶ Macron, *Speech by Emmanuel Macron at the closing ceremony of the Conference on the Future of Europe*.

¹³⁷ Angelos Chrysogelos, "No Quick Fix: EU Foreign Policy Needs Unanimity Rule", *Politico Europe*, 30 May 2022.

Conclusion

The construction of a civilizational narrative for the European Union, based around its fundamental values, serves the promotion of the EU's foreign policy interests in a changing international environment. This first and foremost accompanies the pursuit of strategic autonomy from the United States, as well as a broader turn towards a more active role in geopolitics. However, it also serves to protect the EU's economic and ethical interests against the rise and transgressions of China, as well as challenging the Russian narrative in regard to its invasion of Ukraine.

In the construction of this narrative, the 'European way of life' acts as the central concept of the internal aspect of EU civilizational identity. It ties together the ideas of security, values, and the rule of law in order to promote the idea of an EU capable of upholding the lifestyle valued by its citizens. Externally, the concepts of strategic autonomy and the geopolitical Commission serve the purpose of asserting the EU's new identity as a confident international player willing to defend its interests. The label of 'systemic rival' has the purpose of creating a clear delineation between the political and value system promoted by the European Union and one considered incompatible with the European Union's vision of international society.

As shown by the text of the Copenhagen Declaration on European Identity, the use of a civilizational justification for European integration is not a new phenomenon. While it was first used to establish the European Community's identity in its foreign policy, it is now being used to assert the willingness of the Union to uphold its interests internationally as more than just an economic actor. Future research might investigate the differences and similarities between the civilizational narratives for Europe promoted by the EU institutions as opposed to member states leadership such as with Emmanuel Macron in France. This might reveal an even more nuanced picture of this new identity being constructed for the European Union, as well a divergence in goals and intentions between the national and supranational levels of the EU.

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PLAGIARISM RULES AWARENESS STATEMENT

Fraud and Plagiarism

Scientific integrity is the foundation of academic life. Utrecht University considers any form of scientific deception to be an extremely serious infraction. Utrecht University therefore expects every student to be aware of, and to abide by, the norms and values regarding scientific integrity.

The most important forms of deception that affect this integrity are fraud and plagiarism. Plagiarism is the copying of another person's work without proper acknowledgement, and it is a form of fraud. The following is a detailed explanation of what is considered to be fraud and plagiarism, with a few concrete examples. Please note that this is not a comprehensive list!

If fraud or plagiarism is detected, the study programme's Examination Committee may decide to impose sanctions. The most serious sanction that the committee can impose is to submit a request to the Executive Board of the University to expel the student from the study programme.

Plagiarism

Plagiarism is the copying of another person's documents, ideas or lines of thought and presenting it as one's own work. You must always accurately indicate from whom you obtained ideas and insights, and you must constantly be aware of the difference between citing, paraphrasing and plagiarising. Students and staff must be very careful in citing sources; this concerns not only printed sources, but also information obtained from the Internet.

The following issues will always be considered to be plagiarism:

- cutting and pasting text from digital sources, such as an encyclopaedia or digital periodicals, without quotation marks and footnotes;
- cutting and pasting text from the Internet without quotation marks and footnotes;
- copying printed materials, such as books, magazines or encyclopaedias, without quotation marks or footnotes;
- including a translation of one of the sources named above without quotation marks or footnotes;
- paraphrasing (parts of) the texts listed above without proper references: paraphrasing must be marked as such, by expressly mentioning the original author in the text or in a footnote, so that you do not give the impression that it is your own idea;
- copying sound, video or test materials from others without references, and presenting it as one's own work;
- submitting work done previously by the student without reference to the original paper, and presenting it as original work done in the context of the course, without the express permission of the course lecturer;
- copying the work of another student and presenting it as one's own work. If this is done with the consent of the other student, then he or she is also complicit in the plagiarism;
- when one of the authors of a group paper commits plagiarism, then the other co-authors are also complicit in plagiarism if they could or should have known that the person was committing plagiarism;
- submitting papers acquired from a commercial institution, such as an Internet site with summaries or papers, that were written by another person, whether or not that other person received payment for the work.

The rules for plagiarism also apply to rough drafts of papers or (parts of) theses sent to a lecturer for feedback, to the extent that submitting rough drafts for feedback is mentioned in the course handbook or the thesis regulations.

The Education and Examination Regulations (Article 5.15) describe the formal procedure in case of suspicion of fraud and/or plagiarism, and the sanctions that can be imposed.

Ignorance of these rules is not an excuse. Each individual is responsible for their own behaviour. Utrecht University assumes that each student or staff member knows what fraud and plagiarism



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entail. For its part, Utrecht University works to ensure that students are informed of the principles of scientific practice, which are taught as early as possible in the curriculum, and that students are informed of the institution's criteria for fraud and plagiarism, so that every student knows which norms they must abide by.

I hereby declare that I have read and understood the above.

Name:

Felipe Serpa Arango

Student number:

7377738

Date and signature:

08.06.2022, Felipe Serpa

Submit this form to your supervisor when you begin writing your Bachelor's final paper or your Master's thesis.

Failure to submit or sign this form does not mean that no sanctions can be imposed if it appears that plagiarism has been committed in the paper.