



**Figure 1:** European Union External Action (EEAS), "European Union Military Staff; Concepts and Capabilities Directorate," last modified Mar. 27, 2023, [https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/european-union-military-staff-concepts-and-capabilities-directorate\\_en](https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/european-union-military-staff-concepts-and-capabilities-directorate_en), accessed on Dec. 29, 2023.

# In(ter)dependence or Reliance?

## The Problems of EU Military Strategic Autonomy since 2013

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# Abstract

This thesis analyses the European Union's development of military strategic autonomy since 2013. The Arab Spring, the Russian Annexation of Crimea, the election of Donald Trump as President of the United States and the Russian invasion of Ukraine, among others, have changed the international arena for the EU. The Union realises that it needs to decrease its reliance on third parties, especially the US, and increase its capabilities for autonomous action. However, this road has not come without problems. This thesis will analyse official EU documents supported by secondary literature to answer the following research question: 'What problems in the development of military strategic autonomy has the EU encountered with its push for more military power since 2013?' Interestingly, the EU has not reduced its reliance on the US, in contrary it has become increasingly reliant. US troops and weaponry are flooding the European continent to the despair of France and delight of other EU member states. These internal disagreements about the meaning of military strategic autonomy and how it should be pursued have hampered the Unions ability to increase it. In addition, some academics have highlighted that a normative power like the EU will be unable to develop military power without damaging its position in the international system. This thesis argues that there is no reason to conclude this, but more research is needed.

# Table of Contents

Abstract.....	2
List of Abbreviations.....	4
Introduction.....	5
<b>Historiography</b> .....	6
<b>Methodology and Structure</b> .....	8
<b>I. The Complexity of Power in IR and the EU</b> .....	11
<i>Power in International Relations</i> .....	11
<i>Civilian power – Military Power Debate</i> .....	12
<b>Civilian Power</b> .....	13
<b>Military Power</b> .....	15
<b>The Complexity of Power</b> .....	17
<i>The Power of the European Union before 2013</i> .....	18
<b>The Debate: The Ideal Civilian Power?</b> .....	18
<b>Conclusion</b> .....	21
<b>II. EU Military Strategic Autonomy</b> .....	23
<i>The Fragmentation of Member States</i> .....	23
<i>The EU's Idea of Military Strategic Autonomy</i> .....	24
<b>Security and Defence only – 2013 to 2016</b> .....	25
<b>The Addition of Geopolitics – 2017 to 2019</b> .....	27
<b>Open Strategic Autonomy – 2020 onwards</b> .....	30
<b>Conclusion</b> .....	32
<b>III. The Problems of EU Military Strategic Autonomy</b> .....	33
<i>Past and Present Problems: European Defence Community, 1950-1954</i> .....	33
<i>Rising Tensions: The Need for In(ter)dependent Defence</i> .....	34
<i>Internal Disagreement: Strategic Autonomy?</i> .....	36
<i>A Possible Mismatch: The Debate of Normative Military Power</i> .....	37
<b>The Problems of Normative Military Power</b> .....	38
<b>Conclusion</b> .....	41
<b>Conclusion</b> .....	43
<b>Bibliography</b> .....	46
<b>Sources</b> .....	46
<b>Literature</b> .....	48

# List of Abbreviations

<b>Abbreviation</b>	<b>Meaning</b>	<b>Page</b>
BRICS	Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa	23
CFSP	Common Foreign and Security Policy	24
CSDP	Common Security and Defence Policy	8
EC	European Community	7
EDC	European Defence Community	33
EDTIB	European Union's Defence Technological and Industrial Base	25
EU	European Union	5
EUFOR	European Union Force	20
HR/VP	High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy	5
IMF	International Monetary Fund	19
IR	International Relations	7
JCPOA	Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action	24
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organisation	5
SIPRI	The Stockholm International Peace Research Institute	28
UK	United Kingdom	20
UN	United Nations	13
US	United States	5

# Introduction

In 2018 President Donald Trump (2016-2020) was asked what the biggest foe of the United States (US) was on a global level. His answer was unexpected, but apt for his presidency:

Well, I think we have a lot of foes. I think the European Union is a foe, what they do to us in trade. Now, you wouldn't think of the European Union, but they're a foe<sup>1</sup>

Trump's approach to international politics, where Europe is not the centre of gravity in US strategic thinking, is one of the main reasons why the European Union (EU) has been increasingly realising the need for a more autonomous Union.<sup>2</sup> The EU is a big player in the international arena, especially on an economic and political level, but lacks a considerable military apparatus. It is militarily reliant on the US; therefore, this quote could have considerable repercussions. But presidents before Trump have also shown their discontent with the EU. For example, President Barack Obama (2008-2016) withdrew the last US tank on European soil in 2013.<sup>3</sup> This reliance has been continuous since the end of the Second World War in 1945, but it is facing pressure.<sup>4</sup>

However, the American change of posture was not the only motivation for a more autonomous Union. The EU has increasingly faced the drawbacks of lacking military power. Josep Borrell, the current High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy (HR/VP), has written in a blog that the EU was excluded from the solution of conflicts in the neighbourhood of Europe.

In conflicts like Nagorno-Karabakh, Libya and Syria, we are witnessing an exclusion of Europe from the settlement of conflicts in favour of Russia and Turkey.<sup>5</sup>

He emphasised that the solution no longer lies with the US or the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO), the EU needs strategic autonomy.<sup>6</sup> In addition, the Russian invasion of

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<sup>1</sup> Cat Contigulia, "Trump: EU is one of United States' biggest foes," last modified July 15, 2018, <https://www.politico.eu/article/donald-trump-putin-russia-europe-one-of-united-states-biggest-foes/>, accessed on Dec. 20, 2023.

<sup>2</sup> Daniel Fiott, *Strategic autonomy: towards 'European sovereignty' in defence?*, Paris: European Institute for Security Studies (EUISS), 2018, 7.

<sup>3</sup> Josep Borrell, "Why European strategic autonomy matters", last modified Dec. 3, 2020, [https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/why-european-strategic-autonomy-matters\\_en](https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/why-european-strategic-autonomy-matters_en), accessed on Dec. 20, 2023.

<sup>4</sup> Stanley R. Sloan, *The United States and European Defence*, Paris: Institute for Security Studies of Western European Union, 2000, 1.

<sup>5</sup> Borrell, "Why European strategic autonomy matters."

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

Ukraine has further increased the hostility in the region.<sup>7</sup> The uncertainty about the support of the US, the increasingly hostile neighbourhood and the realisation of the EU make this topic more relevant than ever.

Therefore, strategic autonomy, which in a broad sense means the ability of an actor to take decisions without outside interference, has been an important topic for the EU during the last decade.<sup>8</sup> There is no prominent turning point that caused the introduction of this concept. Over time, developments in the international arena made the position of the EU increasingly uncertain, which triggered an awareness of its vulnerability to outside influence. Some of these developments will be addressed later in this thesis. 2013 is the first year where this concept was mentioned in official EU documents and since then it has been one of the core developing principles of the EU.<sup>9</sup> The Union decided that it needed to become more self-reliant and; therefore, less dependent on its biggest allies. This thesis will explicitly focus on the military side of strategic autonomy, coined as military strategic autonomy, and specifically what problems the EU has encountered in its quest towards more autonomy.

## Historiography

Both strategic autonomy and power have been concepts academics have conducted many studies into. However, those rarely focussed on the problems that the EU has encountered in its push for military strategic autonomy. Firstly, power and European Cooperation has been an important topic for a long time. Authors focussed on identifying what kind of power the EU and its predecessors are. Power is mostly divided in two types: military power and civilian power. A military power believes in the Hobbesian war of all against all theory. A civilian power on the other hand is subscribed to the Kantian theory, with a focus 'on "soft", civilian means.'<sup>10</sup> However, the past few decades have seen the introduction of normative power, which focusses on ideas and persuasion. The international system has been constructed by the actors in it.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> European Parliament, European Parliamentary Research Service, Strategic Foresight and Capabilities Unit, PE 733.589, Briefing dated July 8, 2022, EU strategic autonomy 2013-2023: from concept to capacity, 6.

<sup>8</sup> European Parliament, European Parliamentary Research Service, Strategic Foresight and Capabilities Unit, PE 733.589, Briefing dated July 8, 2022, EU strategic autonomy 2013-2023: from concept to capacity.

<sup>9</sup> European Council, 2009-2014, EUCO 217/13, Conclusions dated Dec. 19/20, 2013; Borrell, "Why European strategic autonomy matters."

<sup>10</sup> Helene Sjurson, "The EU as a 'normative' power: how can this be?," *Journal of European Public Policy* 13 (2006): 2, 237.

<sup>11</sup> Alexander Wendt, "Anarchy is what states make of it: the social construction of power politics," *International Organization*, 46 (1992): 1, 399.

Regarding the EU, prominent international relations (IR) theorist Hedley Bull has already criticised the European Community (EC), a predecessor of the EU, for its focus on civilian power in 1982. He argued that this approach was ineffective and that the lack of self-sufficiency regarding the military was a big problem.<sup>12</sup> Authors like Manners and the EU itself also perceive the Union as a strictly civilian power with a focus on normative power.<sup>13</sup> However, a less popular position is that the EU is not a civilian power. Karen Smith argues that recent developments of military power cause that the EU can no longer be seen as a civilian power. As a result, Smith introduces the Spectrum of Power, which will be used in the analysis.<sup>14</sup> This thesis will position itself in the debate by analysing the power of the EU, but it will not adhere to the general approach to identify the Union as one power or the other. It is complex concept and should be studied as such. This civilian/military power discussion as well as the classification of the EU will be explained in more detail in the first chapter of this thesis.

Secondly, strategic autonomy has also been studied by many. But those studies have mostly been policy briefs with a focus on what it is, why it is important and how the EU should take steps towards more autonomy. For example, Christine Nissen and Jessica Larsen argued that the Union should approach strategic autonomy in a broad, all encompassing sense like the Scandinavian nations and the Netherlands.<sup>15</sup> Margriet Drent on the other hand focussed on the misgivings of the concept and what it should take to become autonomous.<sup>16</sup> These policy briefs give the impression of determinism, only the success of strategic autonomy was an option.<sup>17</sup> This negatively influences the objectivity of the research.

Interestingly, academic authors take a similar approach. They also focussed on what strategic autonomy is and how it has developed. Niklas Helwig and Ville Sinkkonen concluded that there is no unilateral answer to the question what this concept even means. They touch upon problems that EU has encountered, but these are mentioned in passing.<sup>18</sup> However, the

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<sup>12</sup> Hedley Bull, "Civilian Power Europe: A Contradiction in Terms?," *Journal of Common Market Studies* 21 (1982): 2, 149-170.

<sup>13</sup> Ian Manners, "Normative Power Europe: A Contradiction in Terms?\*" *Journal of Common Market Studies* 40 (2002): 2, 237; EUR-lex, Official Journal of the European Union, OJ C 191, July 29, 1992, Treaty on European Union.

<sup>14</sup> Karen E. Smith, "Beyond the civilian power EU debate," *Politique Européenne*, 17 (2005): 3, 76.

<sup>15</sup> Christine Nissen and Jessica Larsen, *Strategic Autonomy: From Misconceived to Useful Concept*, Copenhagen: Danish Institute for International Studies, 2021.

<sup>16</sup> Margriet Drent, *European strategic autonomy: going it alone?*, The Hague: Clingendael Institute, 2018.

<sup>17</sup> Thomas Müller and Tomasz Placek, "Defening Determinism," *The British Journal for the Philosophy of Science* 69 (2018): 1, 219.

<sup>18</sup> Niklas Helwig and Ville Sinkkonen, "Strategic Autonomy and the EU as a Global Actor: The Evolution, Debate and Theory of a Contested Term," *European Foreign Affairs Review* 27 (2022): 1, 3-4; Fiott, "Strategic

identification of these problems should be the main priority. Elina Libek is an exception, she has delved into one of these problems: the lack of a common understanding of strategic autonomy.<sup>19</sup> However, this disregards the connectivity of problems.

Thirdly, many of these authors do not focus on military power and military strategic autonomy. They address the full spectrum of strategic autonomy and include other policy areas. However, this leads to a generalisation of the conclusions, especially because the EU itself has identified 22 policy areas.<sup>20</sup> Addressing all of these makes the research unfocussed and sometimes vague. This thesis will focus on only a part of the foreign and security policy area, namely the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP), to prevent becoming unfocussed.<sup>21</sup> These gaps in the literature have led to the following research question: ‘What problems in the development of military strategic autonomy has the EU encountered with its push for more military power since 2013?’

## Methodology and Structure

The focus on civilian, military, and normative power in addition with military strategic autonomy results in the thesis being focussed on the strategic level of military power. This is defined in the Dutch Defence Doctrine as

the coordinated, systematic development and use of the military power resources of a state, alliance or coalition, if possible integrated with other power resources, to achieve political-strategic level objectives.<sup>22</sup>

Thus, this thesis will focus on the (supra)national, political level rather than the operational and tactical levels that deal with the deployment of military personnel.

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Autonomy.”, 7-8; Ville Sinkkonen, *A Comparative Appraisal of Normative Power: The European Union, the United States and the January 25th, 2011 Revolution in Egypt* (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 45-46.

<sup>19</sup> Elina Libek, “The European Union’s Quest for Strategic Autonomy: Divergence of Understandings Across Member States and Its Implications for Cooperation” (MA thesis, Tartu Ülikool, 2019).

<sup>20</sup> European Commission, “Common foreign and security policy,” last modified unknown, [https://fpi.ec.europa.eu/what-we-do/common-foreign-and-security-policy\\_en](https://fpi.ec.europa.eu/what-we-do/common-foreign-and-security-policy_en), accessed on Dec. 27, 2023.

<sup>21</sup> European Union, “Actions by topic,” last modified unknown, [https://european-union.europa.eu/priorities-and-actions/actions-topic\\_en](https://european-union.europa.eu/priorities-and-actions/actions-topic_en), accessed on Dec. 27, 2023.

<sup>22</sup> Ministerie van Defensie (Dutch Ministry of Defence), “Nederlandse Defensie Doctrine,” last modified June 19, 2019, <https://www.defensie.nl/downloads/publicaties/2019/06/19/herziene-nederlandse-defensie-doctrine-ndd-2019>, accessed on Dec. 28, 2023, 28. (my translation).

However, this does not mean that the operational level will completely be neglected. Both the Dutch Ministry of Defence and its US counterpart emphasise that the different levels are increasingly overlapping.<sup>23</sup> This is also seen by political scientist Andrew S. Harvey who approaches these levels as levels of analysis. Actions taken by the operational level can be on the strategic level. This means that such a decision should be analysed as a strategic level action for a thesis while the military would consider it one an operational level.<sup>24</sup> Besides, Carl von Clausewitz, one of the most influential military theorists, has once called war ‘a mere continuation of policy by other means [...] war is not merely a political act, but also a real political instrument’.<sup>25</sup> Military means and politics are connected. Therefore, this thesis will also analyse actions taken by the operational level if these have clear strategic level implications.

This analysis will be conducted with the use of the literature mentioned earlier and other literature regarding the topic of this thesis to answer the research question. In addition, sources like official EU document published in the various archives it runs will be used. Examples of those sources are the various versions of *Treaty on the European Union* and the *Implementation Plan on Security and Defence 2016*.<sup>26</sup> These documents will be analysed for the mentions of strategic autonomy or a synonym in combination with plans for defence related subjects.

This thesis is divided into three chapters, that act as steppingstones towards answering the research question. The first chapter will answer two sub-questions, the first one being ‘What is power in International Relations?’ The answer to this question will form the foundation by showing the theory behind the theme that every concept and topic in this thesis relates to: power. Therefore, this chapter will explain what the main schools of IR think about power and the different powers that arise from these: civilian, military, and normative power. Hereafter this knowledge will be used to answer the second question, ‘What kind of power is the European Union before 2013?’ This is to explain the case of the EU and show the focus on the complexity of power mentioned in the historiography.

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<sup>23</sup> Ministerie van Defensie, “Nederlandse Defensie Doctrine,” 32; USAF College of Aerospace Doctrine Research and Education (CADRE), “Three Levels of War,” in *Air and Space Power Mentoring Guide*, Vol. 1 (Maxwell AFB: Air University Press, 1997).

<sup>24</sup> Andrew S. Harvey, “The Levels of War as Levels of Analysis,” *Military Review* 99 (2021) 6, 75-81.

<sup>25</sup> Carl von Clausewitz, *On War: Volume I*, trans. J. J. (COL.) Graham (The Floating Press: Auckland, 2010), 70.

<sup>26</sup> Council of the European Union, European External Action Service (EEAS), 14392/16, dated November 12, 2016, Implementation Plan on Security and Defence.

The second chapter will take the next step by answering the sub-question ‘What is military strategic autonomy and how did it develop since 2013?’ It will look at why military strategic autonomy became important and how it changed from 2013 onwards. September 2023 is chosen as the end of the research period because this was the starting point of the study. In addition, this chapter will delve into the background of the changes and will already mention certain problems that have arisen for the EU. The third chapter will take the last step and answer the research question that has been posed in the historiography by highlighting and explaining the problems that the EU has encountered. Hereafter, this thesis will engage with an ongoing academic debate about the possible incompatibility of normative power and military power.<sup>27</sup> The thesis will be wrapped up with a conclusion with an answer to the research question and a reflection upon the conducted research.

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<sup>27</sup> Sinkkonen, *A Comparative Appraisal of Normative Power*, 45-46

# I. The Complexity of Power in IR and the EU

When addressing international relations, it is inevitable to deal with the concept of power. Within the field of IR there is a lot of debate about what power entails.<sup>28</sup> This first part of this chapter will be used to briefly explain this debate and important concepts regarding the topic of power in international relations. This will start with the perspectives of the three most prominent IR theories: realism, liberalism, and constructivism. Hereafter this chapter will focus on the two traditional powers, civilian and military power, and on a more recent addition, normative power. Lastly, the power of the European Union will be analysed with the insights of this chapter.

## *Power in International Relations*

The major schools, realism, liberalism and constructivism, use different interpretations of power. It is important to know that these theories are not as clear cut as explained below. There is also debate within these schools about what power means and how it should be measured. Therefore, this thesis will focus on the general notions of these theories. Realists see power as “the ability of states to use material resources to get others to do what they otherwise would not.”<sup>29</sup> Thus, this form of power strictly focusses on the active pursuit with the use of resources to force others to take decisions they otherwise would not. Michael Barnett argues that liberalists and constructivists have distanced themselves from the power discussion. These schools are attempting to prove their salience by concluding that power ‘variables’ and empirical outcomes do not have a causal connection. However, they still have some general ideas about power. Liberalists have emphasised the importance of international organisations and how they can tame state power. However, they

stress that many important international outcomes cannot be adequately explained with reference to power, but instead are better understood by the salutary presence of democracy,

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<sup>28</sup> David A. Baldwin, “Power and international relations,” in *Handbook of International Relations*, ed. Walter Carlsnaes, Thomas Risse and Beth A. Simmons (London: Sage Publications, 2013), 273.

<sup>29</sup> Michael Barnett and Raymond Duvall, “Power in international politics,” *International Organization* 59 (2005): 1, 40; Baldwin, “Power and international relations,” 286-288.

particular configurations of domestic interests, liberal values, economic interdependence, or international institutions.<sup>30</sup>

Constructivists have a similar position. In their eyes “normative structures and processes of learning and persuasion” explain most processes and outcomes in the international arena’s.<sup>31</sup> The approach to power of these two schools are much more focussed on power in a broader sense, which includes ideas such as democracy and values. In sum, realists view power as determined by resources which is concrete and measurable. On the other hand, liberalists and especially constructivists view power as determined by ideas which is more abstract.<sup>32</sup>

Barnett argues that the latter approach contains a major weakness, it “limits the ability of international relations scholars to understand how global outcomes are produced”.<sup>33</sup> Realists also have a major flaw in their theoretical approach of power. They completely disregard the importance of everything outside of ‘material resources’. This is where the other two theories have the edge over realism.<sup>34</sup> This is in essence the difference between these theories, but there are a lot more nuances to this discussion which are explained by David A. Baldwin in his chapter “Power and International Relations”. However, this thesis will not delve into all these nuances because it is used as foundation and not as the primary analysis tool. But it is important to know that power is widely contested concept both within and between schools of theories.<sup>35</sup>

### ***Civilian power – Military Power Debate***

The last part showed that none of these schools have a complete approach to power, the most important concept within the world of IR, which causes tunnel vision on just one aspect of power. This thesis proposes to move away from this stereotypical thinking and to focus on the complexity of power. This thesis will explain the two forms of power that can be distinguished.

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<sup>30</sup> Barnett, “Power in international politics,” 40-41.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid, 41.

<sup>32</sup> Baldwin, “Power and international relations,” 287.

<sup>33</sup> Barnett, “Power in international politics,” 41.

<sup>34</sup> Baldwin, “Power and international relations,” 287-288.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

## Civilian Power

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Traditionally there have been two kinds of power: military power and civilian power. Hanns W. Maull gives a classic definition of what civilian power is. His definition has three dimensions:

- a) the acceptance of the necessity of cooperation with others in the pursuit of international objectives;
- b) the concentration on non-military, primarily economic, means to secure national goals, with military power left as a residual instrument serving essentially to safeguard other means of international interaction;
- and c) a willingness to develop supranational structures to address critical issues of international management.<sup>36</sup>

Succinctly, civilian power means that an actor emphasises cooperation and the use of non-military means. This consequently causes a focus on persuasion instead of coercion as the primary tool to secure national interests. Maull does include some form of military power in his definition, this is a debated aspect of civilian power. A concrete example of this is whether United Nations (UN) peacekeeping forces without weapons should also be considered civilian means. Karen E. Smith argues that while these people are unarmed, they are still troops from a military apparatus, which makes them military means. This thesis agrees with this notion, civilian power is without military involvement.

But then, what can be considered civilian means? The answer is straightforward, all non-military measures that states or organisations can take to influence the decision-making process elsewhere, this includes economic, diplomatic, and cultural policy instruments. The difference between military and civilian power should not be confused with the difference between hard and soft power. Hard power is the capacity to coerce others to take actions they otherwise would not. This consists out of military intervention, but also coercive diplomacy and economic sanctions. These latter hard power measures can be deployed by a civilian power. In contrast, soft power focuses on persuasion and attraction rather than coercion.<sup>37</sup> Therefore, whether states or organisations are a civilian power has to do with what type of measures, military or civilian, it deploys and not the perceived aggressiveness of the measure. However, as mentioned earlier civilian powers would prefer the use of soft power.

Smith does see a problem with Maull's approach. She states that *exercising* civilian power, as described by Maull, is different from *being* a civilian power. *Being* a civilian power

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<sup>36</sup> Hanns W. Maull, "Germany and Japan: The new civilian power," *Foreign Affairs* 69 (1990): 5, 92-93.

<sup>37</sup> Ernest J. Wilson III, "Hard power, soft power, smart power," *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 118 (2008): 1, 114.

consists of being able to exercise civilian power, but it more importantly includes the ends that it pursues, the way those means are used and the process by which foreign policy is made. The latter entails that there must be civilian control over foreign and defence policy.<sup>38</sup> Thus, *exercising* civilian power is not exclusively for civilian powers, other military powers are also able to use civilian means even if they lack civilian ends.

### *Normative power*

Normative power is a theory newer than the two traditional types of power and was popularised by Ian Manners during the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.<sup>39</sup> The concept is closely related to civilian power and can be explained as a more passive form of it. Therefore, this thesis considers normative power as an aspect of civilian power. The normative power theory comes from the constructivist school. Alexander Wendt, one of the founders of this school, describes that institutions are codified by formal rules and norms ‘constructed’ by the actors within the international system.<sup>40</sup> Ideas are central to this school of IR theorists. It can largely be summarised as leading by example.

However, this does not fully explain the concept. It is more passive than ‘normal’ civilian power, but it does require active behaviour. Martha Finnemore and Kathryn Sikkink have written the most prominent article about the workings of a normative power. They explain the spread of norms as “an active process of international socialisation intended to induce norm breakers to become norm followers.”<sup>41</sup> Thus, states actively pursue the spread of the norms they deem important. Normative powers have great power. They can influence how the international system operates and can when successful change the system to their benefit. Rikard Bengtson and Ole Engström add that having a leadership position is essential to be considered a normative power. Without it there are no followers and consequential no spread of norms.<sup>42</sup>

Manners adds another important factor to this form of power. He states, “that the EU acts to change norms in the international system; and a normative quality to it – that the EU

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<sup>38</sup> Smith, “Beyond the civilian power EU debate,” 65.

<sup>39</sup> Manners, “Normative Power Europe.”

<sup>40</sup> Wendt, “Anarchy is what states make of it,” 399.

<sup>41</sup> Martha Finnemore and Kathryn Sikkink, “Norm dynamics and political change,” *International Organization* 52 (1998): 4, 902.

<sup>42</sup> Rikard Bengtson and Ole Elgström, “Conflicting Role Conceptions? The European Union in Global Politics,” *Foreign Policy Analysis* 8 (2012): 1, 96-97.

should act to extend its norms into the international system.”<sup>43</sup> The organisation is not only actively pursuing the change of norms, but this also forces them to live by those norms. Therefore, it damages the reputation, its leadership position, and consequential its normative and civilian power when it does not comply with their own norms and values. *Being* a normative power grants international power and prestige, but it also creates a strict frame in which the organisation or state must operate.

## **Military Power**

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The counterpart of civilian power is military power. Military power seems like the most straightforward one of the two, but there are nuances that play an important role. The definition of military power is close to realists definition for power, namely the ability of states to use military means to get others to do what they otherwise would not. This specifies the broader definition of the realists to it being focussed strictly on military means. Important is that this form of power focusses on coercion, hard power. Military power includes the actual use of force, but there is another important, academically neglected usage of this power: military diplomacy. This importance is emphasised by US Army Major James E. Willard who concluded that military diplomacy plays an essential role in American foreign policy.<sup>44</sup> This concept entails the political use of military capabilities, which is divided in two kinds, defensive and offensive military diplomacy.

### *Defensive Military Diplomacy*

Defensive military diplomacy is a synonym of deterrence. Nuclear deterrence is the first thing that comes to mind when addressing deterrence, but there is much more to it. Deterrence can be defined as discouraging or restraining an actor in world politics from taking unwanted actions. This definition was formulated by combining different definitions from various authors.<sup>45</sup> James J. Wirtz adds an important point, capabilities are the starting point of the strategy. Bluffing is a possibility, but credibility is crucial.

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<sup>43</sup> Manners, “Normative Power Europe,” 252.

<sup>44</sup> MAJ James E. Edward, *Military Diplomacy: An Essential Tool of Foreign Policy at the Theater Strategic level* (Kansas: School of Advanced Military Studies Fort Leavenworth, 2006).

<sup>45</sup> Michael J. Mazarr, “Understanding Deterrence,” in *NL ARMS Netherlands Annual Review of Military Studies 2020: Deterrence in the 21st Century – Insights from Theory and Practice*, ed. Frans Osinga and Tim Sweijs (Breda: Springer, 2020), 15; Stephen L. Quackenbush, “Deterrence theory: where do we stand?,” *Review of*

One has to possess the military forces needed to execute threats if deterrence fails. For that matter, the likelihood of deterrence success increases if the opponent is aware that the party making a deterrent threat actually possesses the military capability needed to execute that threat.<sup>46</sup>

Matthew C. Waxman adds a connecting process, believability. The perception of the deterrence threat will determine whether this strategy becomes a success. This strategy is worthless if the threatened party is not convinced, even if the military capabilities are able to back up this threat. Having these capabilities is subordinate to this believability. In fact, deterrence is a paradoxical military mean, which signifies that the use of the capabilities is only necessary when this strategy fails.<sup>47</sup> Therefore, successful deployment of this strategy is dependent on both the credibility and believability of the deterrence.<sup>48</sup> Deterrence is a complex military strategy, but it is one of the most effective measures in an actors toolbox when used successfully.

### *Offensive Military Diplomacy*

The other side of military diplomacy is the offensive form. Robert Mandel relates this to the concept of status quo. This strategy's disposition is to change the status quo, while deterrence tries to preserve it.<sup>49</sup> Offensive military diplomacy is explained by Waxman as: "communications of the will and capability to use military force that are employed as a means to induce other actors to change behavior—whether to do something or to not do something."<sup>50</sup> The last part provides that military diplomacy can also be used to pressure other countries into making decisions they otherwise would not. These authors have not specified which actors are targeted with this strategy, but they imply hostile nations. However, offensive military diplomacy can also be used against allies. For example, Trump has threatened European NATO members with the removal of military assistance to influence their military budgets and

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*International Studies* 31 (2011): 2, 741; Frans-Paul van der Putten, Minke Meijnders and Jan Rood, *Deterrence as a security concept against non-traditional threats: in-depth study Clingendael Monitor 2015*, The Hague: Clingendael Institute, 2015.

<sup>46</sup> James J. Wirtz, "How does nuclear deterrence differ from conventional deterrence," *Strategic Studies Quarterly* 12 (2018): 4, 59.

<sup>47</sup> Matthew C. Waxman, "The Power to Threaten War," *The Yale Law Journal* 123 (2014): 6, 1631.

<sup>48</sup> Wirtz, "How does nuclear deterrence differ from conventional deterrence," 59.

<sup>49</sup> Robert Mandel, "The Effectiveness of Gunboat Diplomacy," *International Studies Quarterly* 30 (1986): 1, 60.

<sup>50</sup> Waxman, "The Power to Threaten War," 1631.

contributions to the alliance.<sup>51</sup> Therefore, military diplomacy can also be used to influence other states or organisations beyond deterrence. Political military power in IR is much more than a tool to prevent war, it can influence the political trajectory of the actor in question. Thus, a military power can bend the world to its will through coercion and threats.

## The Complexity of Power

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As stated before, power should be studied as a complex concept. The division between civilian and military power is not as clear cut as it would seem. Smith has created a model to delve into this complexity. She states that there is no ideal civilian or military power. If a state or organisation has some form of military capability it does not meet the requirements for it to be an ideal civilian power. The same can be said the other way around. If a state organisation has some form of civilian means, it does not meet the requirements to be an ideal military power. All actors are somewhere located on the spectrum of power provided below.<sup>52</sup>

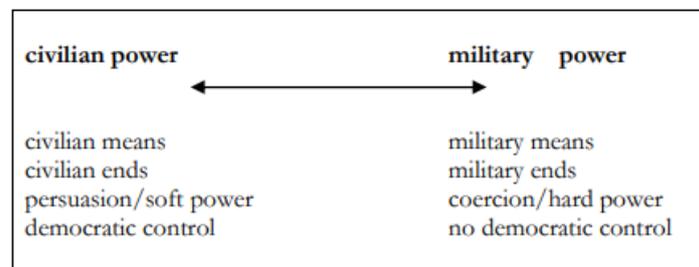


Figure 2: Spectrum of Power  
Smith, "Beyond the civilian power EU debate," 69.

Almost all international entities are located somewhere on this spectrum, some leaning towards the left and others to the right. Academics should be careful with branding actors in the international arena. There should always be more thorough research into both aspects of power, it is never as black and white as it seems. One footnote that needs to be placed at the spectrum above is that she links soft and hard power to respectively civilian power and military power. These are only relevant when she is talking about *being* a certain power and not about *exercising* it. This is an important distinction that will come back later in this thesis.

<sup>51</sup> Reuters, "Trump says U.S. to pull some troops from Germany over NATO spending feud," last modified June 16, 2020, <https://www.reuters.com/article/idUSKBN23M2VD/>, accessed on Jan. 3, 2024.

<sup>52</sup> Smith, "Beyond the civilian power EU debate," 69.

Besides, civilian and military power are in many cases used to support each other. For example, article 97 of the Dutch constitution includes the necessity of military power for the protection of civilian ends and means.

For the purpose of defence and protection of the interests of the Kingdom, as well as for the preservation and promotion of the international legal order, there shall be an armed force.<sup>53</sup>

This article establishes why there is an armed force. The first part about the interest of the Kingdom includes the protection of democracy and the second part is focusses on the protection of the complete international legal system. Thus, the armed forces are founded to protect the civilian order and established out of civilian ends. This further underscores the complexity of civilian and military power.

### ***The Power of the European Union before 2013***

The European Union is a complex institution that has steadily expanded its policy areas since its inception in 1993. The power that the EU has at its disposal is dependent on what policy area or case the scholar is focussing on. However, most academics agree that the EU can be perceived as a civilian power. Recently the involvement of normative power has shed a new light on this topic.

### **The Debate: The Ideal Civilian Power?**

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Determining what the power of the EU is, just like the general civilian – military power debate, a complex and debated topic. The EU is labelled mostly as a civilian power, specifically a normative power, in both public and academical circles.<sup>54</sup> The EU also sees itself as a normative power according to Anna Michalski and Niklas Nilsson.<sup>55</sup> An analysis of the preamble of the Treaty on the European Union confirms this. It calls for the “attachment to the principles of liberty, democracy and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms and rule of law”,

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<sup>53</sup> Montesquieu Instituut, “Artikel 97: Krijgsmacht,” last modified 2000, [https://www.denederlandsegrondwet.nl/id/via0hb5l96zq/artikel\\_97\\_krijgsmacht](https://www.denederlandsegrondwet.nl/id/via0hb5l96zq/artikel_97_krijgsmacht), accessed on Nov. 30, 2023. (my translation).

<sup>54</sup> Manners, “Normative Power Europe,” 238-239; Bengtson, “Conflicting Role Conceptions?,” 94; Anna Michalski and Niklas Nilsson, “Resistant to Change? The EU as a Normative Power and Its Troubled Relations with Russia and China,” *Foreign Policy Analysis* 15 (2019): 3, 434-437.

<sup>55</sup> Michalski, “Resistant to Change?,” 434.

“to enhance further democratic and efficient functioning of the institutions”. And the most important one to normative power: the signatory nations are

RESOLVED to implement a common foreign and security policy including the eventual framing of a common defence policy, [...] reinforcing the European identity and its independence in order to promote peace, security and progress in Europe and in the world,<sup>56</sup>

The security and the possibility of a defence policy were orientated towards the reinforcement of normative values as peace and progress, for both the world and the Union itself.

Especially progress is a subjective term. What is progress and when can a certain development be regarded as such? Progress has a different meaning to the EU than it has to other nations around the world. An example of a development like this is free trade and the open market, developments towards this will be viewed by the Union as progress.<sup>57</sup> A country like China would not always agree. They prioritise domestic consumption according to the International Monetary Fund (IMF). Free trade is considered the second priority. Consequential, developments towards it that threaten the domestic consumption will be considered as regression.<sup>58</sup> Therefore, this focus on values and ideas, and the urge to spread and promote those, show that the EU should be considered as primarily a normative power.

However, as mentioned earlier, Manners concluded that a normative power also has the obligation to adhere to its own norms and values according to be perceived as a normative power by others. This is where it becomes complex, as the EU does not always follow its own principle of free trade. It for example has used a protectionist trade policy in the agricultural sector.<sup>59</sup> This disrupts free trade, a norm that the EU considers as one of the core principles of the Union. This touches upon the most important aspects of a normative power. One can consider itself a normative power, but it must be considered by others as such to be one. Persuasion can only happen when the other actor is open to it; this cannot happen with force.<sup>60</sup> In addition, at its inception it could have been reasonable to identify the EU as the ‘ideal civilian

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<sup>56</sup> EUR-lex, Official Journal of the European Union, OJ C 191, July 29, 1992, Treaty on European Union, 1.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> Pinelopi K. Goldberg and Tristan Reed (International Monetary Fund (IMF)), “Growing Threats to Global Trade,” last modified June 6, 2023, <https://www.imf.org/en/Publications/fandd/issues/2023/06/growing-threats-to-global-trade-goldberg-reed>, accessed on Dec. 5, 2023.

<sup>59</sup> Bengtson, “Conflicting Role Conceptions?,” 106.

<sup>60</sup> Michalski, “Resistant to Change?,” 443.

power' or close to it. The Treaty of Maastricht only iterated the ambition for military cooperation, but there were no concrete steps taken in this regard.<sup>61</sup>

However, this changed and developments in the late 1990s and early in the 2000s already started to move the Union right on the Spectrum of Power. In 1999 the 15 EU member states created and strengthened the European Security and Defence Policy after the blessing of France and the United Kingdom (UK). The approval was officialised in the Franco-British St. Malo Declaration in 1998.<sup>62</sup> France and the UK decided that the EU should be able to act autonomous, with the backing of a credible military force.<sup>63</sup> This is already a reference to the concept of military strategic autonomy that would become one of the most important topics in debate about the EU. At the Helsinki European Council Meeting in 1998, a rapid response force was labelled as vital to crisis management. This led to the first EU-led military operation: Operation Artemis. That operation was conducted by the European Union Force (EUFOR) in 2003. This inspired the creation of the EU Battlegroup concept, which reached its full operational capability in 2007.<sup>64</sup> The EU had created its first military capability and has given itself a military power tool to *exercise* in global affairs.

However, the creation of military capabilities has not resulted in the EU becoming a military power. These EU battlegroups will be used in the framework of the Union, which is based on civilian ends with democratic control. Articles 42 and 43 specify the use for peacekeeping, conflict prevention, strengthening international security, humanitarian and rescue tasks, and joint disarmament tasks. These should always be in accordance with the charter of the UN. The EU had no offensive military capabilities. Besides, the European Council must decide unanimously regarding the Common Security and Defence Policy under which these articles fall.<sup>65</sup> Therefore, the claim that the EU is a heavily leaning towards *being a* civilian, normative power on the spectrum of power is correct, but it can *exercise* military power.

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<sup>61</sup> EUR-lex, Official Journal of the European Union, OJ C 191, July 29, 1992, Treaty on European Union, 1, 4, 59 and 105.

<sup>62</sup> European Parliament, "Cologne European Council, Conclusions of the Presidency, Annex III," last modified June 4, 1999, [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/summits/kol2\\_en.htm](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/summits/kol2_en.htm), accessed on Dec. 5, 2023.

<sup>63</sup> The Centre virtuel de la connaissance sur l'Europe (CVCE), "Franco-British St. Malo Declaration," last modified Dec. 4, 1998, [https://www.cvce.eu/obj/franco\\_british\\_st\\_malo\\_declaration\\_4\\_december\\_1998-en-f3cd16fb-fc37-4d52-936f-c8e9bc80f24f.html](https://www.cvce.eu/obj/franco_british_st_malo_declaration_4_december_1998-en-f3cd16fb-fc37-4d52-936f-c8e9bc80f24f.html), accessed on Dec. 5, 2023.

<sup>64</sup> European Council, European Union External Action (EEAS), April 2013, Common Security and Defence Policy: EU Battlegroups.

<sup>65</sup> EUR-lex, Official Journal of the European Union, OJ C 326, Oct. 26, 2012, Treaty on European Union, 38-39.

## ***Conclusion***

Realism, liberalism, and constructivism, all have other ideas about power. Realists focus on the coercion of other actors with material resources, mostly military power. The other two schools are anxious to engage in this debate and conclude that there is no causal connection between power variables and empirical outcomes. Liberalists focus on cooperation, international organisations, and liberal values as democracy and how those can tame power. Constructivists have a likeminded approach, but they focus on ideas and the process of learning and persuasion. These determine the outcomes in the international arena. These schools have important and relevant ideas that complement each other.

This discussion between schools has resulted in the civilian – military power debate. Civilian powers focus on the use of non-military means. This includes measures of persuasion, but also hard power such as economic sanctions. A more recent addition to civilian power is normative power, which focusses on codification of the international system by rules and norms. A normative power can influence these norms through socialisation and persuasion to change the system, but it limits its capabilities because it is forced to adhere to these norms. Non-compliance could lead to the loss of the leadership role, resulting in the loss of the foundation of its normative power.

Military power is the ability of states to use military means to get other actors to do what they otherwise would not. This includes the violent use of the military apparatus. However, there is a non-violent way to use this power: military diplomacy. Defensive military diplomacy, deterrence, is used to discourage another actor by making the actions outcome unfavourable and hereby unwanted. The power to threaten war on the other hand is an offensive tactic of military diplomacy. A military power can prevent certain actions and decisions by threatening another actor with military intervention or the withdrawal of military assets in case of an allied nation. Therefore, military power relies on coercion rather than persuasion.

Power is a complex concept; civilian powers can use military power tools and the other way around. Therefore, it is important to make the distinction between *being* and *exercising* a certain power. This insight has led to the creation of the Spectrum of Power. A state or organisation is somewhere along this spectrum, some leaning towards civilian power and others to military power. It is not as black and white as it is sometimes presented by scholars. Power is complex and should be treated as such.

Consequently, power in the EU is also a complicated topic. The founding treaty has a focus on peace in Europe, human rights, democracy, and progress. Especially the last term points heavily towards normative power, the subjectivity reveals the importance of norms and values that should be protected and spread. However, the EU created military capabilities with the EU battlegroups and even led a military operation in 2003. Therefore, the application of these insights on the European Union leads to the conclusion that before 2013 the EU is leaning towards *being* a civilian, normative power with the capability to *exercise* a limited amount of military power.

## II. EU Military Strategic Autonomy

Military strategic autonomy, the ability of an actor to take decisions regarding defence without outside interference, is a topic that has been relevant to the EU since 2013. It has increasingly become important because of numerous crises and events in the past decade. The Union had realised that relying on normative power had become difficult. The invasion of Iraq in 2003 damaged the West's position, because it implied that the values of the liberal world only applied when the West saw fit. Furthermore, the economic crisis of 2008 damaged the core of the EU's principles, the West's economic system. Besides, the rise of the BRICS organisation, a cooperation of big emerging economies, has been challenging the West's domination and leadership of the international system, which made normative power increasingly difficult.<sup>66</sup>

These developments were indicators that something needed to change. 2013 was the year that the EU started to act on this changing world, which has become known as strategic autonomy. However, aligning 27, before Brexit 28, member states has made it difficult to take decisions. This chapter will look at the development of strategic autonomy, with a focus on the military aspect of this concept, military strategic autonomy. This includes the different positions of different nations within the Union and the reasons of these developments. This chapter will start with an introduction of military strategic autonomy and the EU. It will be followed by a chronological development of this concept and the difficulties it has presented.

### *The Fragmentation of Member States*

The European Union consists of 27 member states since Brexit in 2020. These countries have different interests and opinions on all matters within the Union. Aspects such as geographical location, history, and culture all contribute to the position that countries take regarding various subjects. Not all 27 member states will be analysed, but the focus will lie on general tendencies of groups within the Union that have a similar position herein. This analysis will focus on what these groups perceive as important topics and how they interpret what military strategic autonomy should be for the EU. First, however, it is important to look at why this fragmentation of opinions makes it especially difficult for the Union to act.

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<sup>66</sup> Michalski, "Resistant to Change," 435.

The difficulty regarding defence decisions in the EU lies with the decision-making process. Decisions regarding the CSDP and Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) are taken in The Council of the European Union (from here onwards the Council), with a requirement of unanimity. Unanimity was required for all decisions in the EU up until the Treaty of Lisbon which came into force in 2009. It was decided that a qualified majority, “55% of the members of the Council comprising at least fifteen and representing Member States comprising at least 65 % of the population of the Union”, would be enough for most policy areas.<sup>67</sup> However, the CFSP and CSDP were considered too sensitive, which meant that the requirement of unanimity remained.<sup>68</sup> Nonetheless, it confirmed the EU’s commitment to *being* a civilian power. The control over policy regarding military means continued to lie with a democratic institution, the Council.

### ***The EU’s Idea of Military Strategic Autonomy***

Strategic autonomy is a contested term among member states. Therefore, the EU needed to find a common ground between these states which has led to key developments in the past decade. Helwig and Sinkkonen have identified four waves in the EU strategic autonomy debate. The first wave, the collapse of the Soviet Union in the beginning of the 1990s caused the EU to ask itself whether it was prepared for a possible US retreat from its territory. The next wave started to gain momentum with the wars in Syria and Libya (2010-2012) as well as the annexation of Crimea (2014). The third was caused by the election of Donald Trump as US president in 2016. Under his leadership he questioned US commitment to the security of the European continent. He also used economical pressure to influence the EU position towards the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), known as the Iran nuclear deal. Trump wanted the EU to leave this deal and impose sanctions on Iran. However, the EU decided to continue to work with Iran despite the sanctions imposed by the US on the Union.<sup>69</sup> The last wave took place during the Covid-19 pandemic that started in 2020. During this time the EU, US and China were competing on numerous fronts, without the involvement of military power.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> EUR-lex, Official Journal of the European Union, OJ C 202, June 7, 2016, Treaty on European Union, page 26, article 16.4.

<sup>68</sup> EUR-Lex, ‘Unanimity’, last modified June 9, 2021, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/EN/legal-content/glossary/unanimity.html>, accessed on Dec. 7, 2023.

<sup>69</sup> Luigi Scazzieri, “Trump’s Iran Policy leaves the EU few options,” last modified Dec. 11, 2018, <https://www.cer.eu/insights/trumps-iran-policy-leaves-eu-few-options>, accessed on Dec. 11, 2023.

<sup>70</sup> Helwig, “Strategic Autonomy and the EU as a Global Actor,” 3-4.

Helwig and Sinkkonen have given us a great insight into the strategic autonomy debate and its dimensions, but the last three waves can more accurately be interpreted as a continued development with an increasing understanding of what strategic autonomy means for the EU as a supranational organisation. Which is how the EU has qualified these three moments. From 2013 to 2016 the focus lied on security and defence matters. The next period, 2017 to 2019, it shifted to geopolitical concerns, the EU needed to defend Europe's interests in an increasingly hostile world. The covid pandemic of 2020 made reducing economic dependency on foreign countries the focal point. The European Parliamentary Research Service concluded that since 2021 strategic autonomy "has been winded to virtually all EU policy areas".<sup>71</sup> This development in combination with official EU documents will be used to identify the Union's understanding of (military) strategic autonomy.

### **Security and Defence only – 2013 to 2016**

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From the onset this concept was connected to the security and defence policy of the Union. In official documents in the period 2013 to 2016 of EU strategic autonomy the focus was on the European defence industry, which limited the concept to military strategic autonomy. The Council stated in December 2013 that the EU's Defence Technological and Industrial Base (EDTIB) needed to be more integrated, sustainable, innovative, and competitive. On the one hand it should ensure the "operational effectiveness and security of supply", but it must also remain "globally competitive".<sup>72</sup> This would enhance the EU's military strategic autonomy and become less dependent on others regarding defence capabilities. In this same document the Council also emphasised that the defence policy of the Union would "continue to develop in full complementarity with NATO [...] in compliance with the decision-making autonomy and procedures of each."<sup>73</sup>

In 2016 the Council formulated an official definition of strategic autonomy:

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<sup>71</sup> European Parliament, European Parliamentary Research Service, Strategic Foresight and Capabilities Unit, PE 733.589, Briefing dated July 8, 2022, EU strategic autonomy 2013-2023: from concept to capacity, 1-7.

<sup>72</sup> European Council, 2009-2014. EUCO 217/13, Conclusions dated Dec. 19/20, 2013, 7.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid, 2.

Europe's strategic autonomy entails the ability to act and cooperate with international and regional partners wherever possible, while being able to operate autonomously when and where necessary.<sup>74</sup>

For the EU, strategic autonomy meant working together with partners while also being able to act autonomously. This definition also showed that strategic autonomy was more to the EU than military matters alone. However, the focus still lied on the defence aspect, especially a good functioning EDTIB.<sup>75</sup> This is a logical approach for a Union divided on the topic of defence cooperation. The EU showed that economics, one of the core principles, remained pivotal to all aspects of EU policy, including defence. It pulled the loaded discussion about defence into the economic domain and hereby made it easier to discuss. Other proof for this notion was the statement that strengthening the EDTIB would also strengthen the United Nations and NATO. This took away the fear of some nations that creating an autonomous EU will damage the transatlantic partnership with the US.<sup>76</sup>

The division between the member states about this topic can be seen in numerous articles written about this topic. Elina Libek, advisor to the chancellery of the Estonian Parliament, has identified two major camps in this discussion. One led by the French with a focus on exclusivity and one headed by the Netherlands focused on inclusivity. The French wanted a Europe, not specifically EU, "with the capability to act alone when necessary" and "without the involvement of third parties."<sup>77</sup> The Union should decrease its dependency on third parties, which means a focus on exclusivity. In addition, this also entailed becoming a global geopolitical actor, which goes much further than being able to act without outside influence.<sup>78</sup> What the French proposed was a military strategic autonomy plus, independent, and present, with the capability to act as a geopolitical power.

Another position was taken by the Netherlands, Germany, Italy, and Finland. They preferred to call it strategic responsibility, which could be seen as a military strategic autonomy

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<sup>74</sup> Council of the European Union, European External Action Service (EEAS), 14392/16, dated November 12, 2016. Implementation Plan on Security and Defence, 4.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

<sup>77</sup> Libek, "The European Union's Quest for Strategic Autonomy.": Elina Libek, "European Strategic Autonomy: A Cacophony of Political Visions," last modified Dec. 19, 2019, <https://icds.ee/en/european-strategic-autonomy-a-cacophony-of-political-visions/>, accessed on Dec. 7, 2023.

<sup>78</sup> Dick Zandee et al., *European strategic autonomy in security and defence: Now the going gets tough, it's time to get going*, The Hague: Clingendael institute, 2020, 37.

minus.<sup>79</sup> This focussed on the contribution to regional security and preparedness to be a strong ally, especially to the transatlantic allies. Consequently, EU defence policy should be focussed on cooperation with NATO and the involvement of other third parties.<sup>80</sup> The Netherlands and with them countries like Italy and Germany saw strengthening the EU as a way to strengthen the European pillar within NATO. To them military strategic autonomy should be about burden sharing. Both Italy and Germany saw NATO focussing on the eastern flank while the EU focussed on the Southern region.<sup>81</sup> Therefore, there was no consensus about what strategic autonomy entails.

During this stage the whole debate around reducing dependency and increasing military strategic autonomy was focussed on civilian ends. The EU set out three priorities: responding to external conflicts and crises, capacity building for partners, and protecting the Union and its citizens. It emphasised the importance of rule based international law, its protection, and the promotion of compliance to it, these are all civilian ends. This shows that the EU was taking these steps toward more military means with civilian ends in mind. In addition, all these decisions were made by a democratic institution, the Council.<sup>82</sup> Therefore, the EU is still underlining its commitment to *being* a civilian power.

### **The Addition of Geopolitics – 2017 to 2019**

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Geopolitics became an important part of the strategic autonomy equation after the election of Donald Trump as president in 2016 of the US. During this stage the concept would stay limited to military strategic autonomy. His election had major implications for the relation between the EU and the US. Trump's 'America First' policy caused an increase in realisation that relying on others, especially the US, could lead to problems for the Union. According to Helwig and Sinkkonen this reignited the EU's defence ambitions, which were spurred by Trump's demand for more investment by European nations into NATO.<sup>83</sup> The US spent almost 643 billion US dollars in 2017 while the EU members of NATO only spent 231 billion, which included more

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<sup>79</sup> Elina Libek, "The European Union's Quest for Strategic Autonomy," 35-54; Zandee, "European strategic autonomy in security and defence," 37-38.

<sup>80</sup> Elina Libek, "The European Union's Quest for Strategic Autonomy," 35-54.

<sup>81</sup> Zandee, "European strategic autonomy in security and defence," 37-38.

<sup>82</sup> Council of the European Union, European External Action Service (EEAS), 14392/16, dated November 12, 2016. Implementation Plan on Security and Defence.

<sup>83</sup> Helwig, "Strategic Autonomy and the EU as a Global Actor," 4.

than 55 billion of the UK. These were respectively 3,31% and 1,46% of the GDP.<sup>84</sup> Trump's critique was not new, his predecessors also insisted on the 2% that was committed to in 2006 by all NATO members. However, he was more vocal about it which made it more urgent.<sup>85</sup>

Notable is that this political push from the US did not entail support for a more autonomous Europe. The US had an economic interest in preventing a militarily autonomous Union, this could namely lead to an exclusion of US defence contractors from the European market.<sup>86</sup> A report from the Armament Industry European Research Group (ARES) has identified that many EU defence contractors cooperate with their US counterparts. Germany, Sweden, and Italy have focussed on both cooperation with European countries and the US. However, France had limited its reliance on the US military industry.<sup>87</sup> Thus, the positions mentioned above can also be seen in the approach to cooperation between Defence industry companies.

In addition, the military industry of the US has an increasing interest in the European market. The Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) has identified that 11% of all arms exports in the period from 2013-2017 had gone to Europe, not the EU.<sup>88</sup> This does not seem much, but in 2017 this would have meant roughly 4.6 billion US dollars.<sup>89</sup> Besides, this number would continue to rise in the coming years. This assumption is based on available numbers after 2018 and existing programmes and agreements made for arms imports in the future.<sup>90</sup> While it is difficult to divide these numbers between EU and non-EU members it is clear that most exports from the US go to NATO members. 22 out of 27 of these members are also EU member states. Only five EU members are not NATO members. This 11% can be used

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<sup>84</sup> North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (hereafter NATO), *Defence Expenditure of NATO Countries (2014-2022)*, Brussels: NATO, 2023, 7-8.

<sup>85</sup> David Welna, "FACT CHECK: Trump's Claims On NATO Spending," last modified July, 11, 2018, <https://www.npr.org/2018/07/11/628137185/fact-check-trumps-claims-on-nato-spending>, accessed on Dec. 9, 2023; NATO, "Press Briefing: by NATO Spokesman, James Appathurai after the meeting of the North Atlantic Council at the level of Defence Ministers," last modified Oct. 30, 2006, <https://www.nato.int/docu/speech/2006/s060608m.htm>, accessed on Jan. 11, 2024.

<sup>86</sup> SWP Research Paper, "European Strategic Autonomy in a Multipolar World Order," in *European Strategic Autonomy: Actors, Issues, Conflicts or Interests*, 27-31, ed. Barbara Lippert, Nicolai von Ondarza, and Volker Perthes, (Berlin: Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik, 2019), 27.

<sup>87</sup> Jean Belin et al., *Defence Industrial Links Between the EU and the US*, Paris: The French Institute for International and Strategic Affairs, 2017.

<sup>88</sup> Pieter D. Wezeman et al., *Trend in International Arms Transfers, 2017*, Stockholm: Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (hereafter SIPRI), 2018, 3.

<sup>89</sup> Christina L. Arabia, Nathan J. Lucas and Michael J. Vassalotti, *Transfer of Defense Articles: Sale and Export of U.S.-Made Arms to Foreign Entities*, Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 2023, 2.

<sup>90</sup> Pieter D. Wezeman, Justine Gadon and Siemon T. Wezeman, *Trend in International Arms Transfers, 2022*, Stockholm: SIPRI, 2023, 11

as an indicator for EU imports. Therefore, the US has no interest in the EU becoming autonomous especially when it comes to the EDTIB.

On a political level there was a stark push for more defence expenditure from the EU, but academics were critical of the American approach. Garret Martin, NATO scholar and lecturer at America University's School of International Service, stated that the difference in expenditure is logical because of the difference in scope for the military:

U.S. defense needs vastly surpass those of its European allies [...] "The United States is a global military power with global military commitments. NATO and the trans-Atlantic geographical area is only a part of what the United States military does. That's not necessarily true for most of the European members of the alliance."<sup>91</sup>

The EU did not require military means and hard power as the US had. These are interesting claims seeing that this touches upon the debate within the Union about military strategic autonomy. The French wanted an EU that was a global geographical power which entails a defence expenditure closer to the US than it currently was. The question for the EU member states was: should the focus lie on reaching that 2% and being complementary to the US military power, or should the Union transcend this 'sidekick' persona and become an important military player itself?

In addition, 2016 was the year that the Brexit referendum took place which resulted in the UK deciding to leave the EU.<sup>92</sup> According to Jamie Shea this meant that the EU would lose 20% of its critical capabilities when Brexit would become a reality. He concluded that this would result in the devaluation of the Union as a military actor and with that the goal of military strategic autonomy becomes less convincing.<sup>93</sup> This would make the EU become even more reliant on the US in a period where this relation was being questioned on both sides.

However, it has also given the EU an opportunity to further its own military strategic autonomy. The EU would lose 20% of its critical capabilities, but it would also lose one of the biggest critics of EU defence cooperation.<sup>94</sup> For example, military strategic autonomy, the CSDP, and the EDTIB were becoming more important for the Union in 2015, but the "National Security Strategy and Strategic Defence and Security Review 2015" did not mention the UK's

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<sup>91</sup> Welna, "FACT CHECK."

<sup>92</sup> European Parliament, European Parliamentary Research Service, Strategic Foresight and Capabilities Unit, PE 733.589, Briefing dated July 8, 2022, EU strategic autonomy 2013-2023: from concept to capacity, 2.

<sup>93</sup> Jamie Shea, "European Defence After Brexit: A Plus or Minus?," *European View* 19 (2020) 1, 88-94, there 89.

<sup>94</sup> Shea, "European Defence After Brexit," 89.

role in it. The EU was only mentioned as complementary to NATO, the organisation that relies on US support.<sup>95</sup> Besides, the UK had a military industry that was strongly intertwined with that of the US.<sup>96</sup> Thus, Brexit resulted in the EU losing one of its largest hinderances regarding a common defence policy.

But the EU remained divided on what military strategic autonomy should look like. Giovanni Grevi argues that nationalism and populism played an important role in the EU, even when national leaders did not endorse a nationalist agenda. Leaders were increasingly weighing European decisions based on cost-benefit analyses while looking through a national lens.<sup>97</sup> This sketched a bleak future for the strategic autonomy ambitions of the Union. Cooperation and unanimity were still of vital concern for success. IR theory would suggest that the liberalist foundations of the EU was being plagued by an increasingly present realist worldview. One based on the zero-sum game instead of cooperation for a better world. However, the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic would change this dynamic.

### **Open Strategic Autonomy – 2020 onwards**

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The Covid-19 pandemic showed yet another problem of dependency on others. This was initially felt with a shortage in face masks, but it expanded to other products like semi-conductors (computer chips) and raw materials. Supply chains were shaken up by the effect that the pandemic and the measures against it had on the global economy. This realisation took the strategic autonomy debate to a wider, less one-dimensional debate about defence cooperation. Strategic autonomy became increasingly focussed on civilian ends and means. This was something that some northern countries in the EU - Denmark, Sweden, Germany, and the Netherlands - had been advocating for. The Northern outlook, as Christine Nissen and Jessica Larsen call it, pleaded for a broad approach to the scope of strategic autonomy. It should “reflect today’s complex threat pattern.”<sup>98</sup> This entailed that the EU should focus on where NATO could not, namely non-military areas like trade, technology, and critical infrastructure. This was

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<sup>95</sup> UK Government, ‘National Security Strategy and Strategic Defence and Security Review 2015’, Policy Paper (23 November 2015); Irina Tsertsvadze, “Britain and the Common Security and Defence Policy of the European Union,” *Connections* 16 (2017): 3, 84; Shea, “European Defence After Brexit,” 89.

<sup>96</sup> Belin, *Defence Industrial Links Between the EU and the US*, 24-32 and 39.

<sup>97</sup> Giovanni Grevi, “Strategic autonomy for European choices: The key to Europe’s Shaping Power,” *Europe in the World Programme*, (Brussels: European Policy Centre, 2019) 9.

<sup>98</sup> Christine Nissen and Jessica Larsen, *Strategic Autonomy: From Misconceived to Useful Concept*, Copenhagen: Danish Institute for International Studies, 2021, 5.

according to the northern nations the strength of the Union; it has a broad range of foreign policy tools to its disposal to face threats outside the traditional military spectrum.

These northern countries argued that the most important aspect of the EU should be protected: the open market. This led to the creation of a new term, open strategic autonomy, which includes the open market into the equation. The importance of the open economy was emphasised in a non-paper published in 2021 by Spain and the Netherlands.<sup>99</sup> It should not be about independence like France proposed, it should be about increasing resilience and interdependence, built on the “principles of multilateralism, cooperation and rules-based free trade”.<sup>100</sup> Besides, these nations identified the same development as Grevi, the rise of populism and nationalism in the Union, to which they considered multilateralism as the only answer.

However, this did not mean that military strategic autonomy had completely disappeared, it had just become one of the aspects of strategic autonomy. Regarding the CSDP Spain and the Netherlands focussed in their non-paper on acting autonomously when necessary and working together with partners when possible.<sup>101</sup> Relationships with the “geographical neighbourhood, like-minded countries” should be consolidated and the transatlantic relationship with the US should be strengthened.<sup>102</sup> Thus, acting autonomous should be perceived as one of the last resorts. Working together with partners, especially allies like NATO, should always be considered more important.

In short, strategic autonomy had been expanded to most policy areas, but it remained a contested term as can be seen by the many terminologies. For example, Northern states were advocating for a more inclusive and broader approach to open strategic autonomy. This virtually meant the same thing, but the connotation was different. Strategic autonomy was mostly connected to the CSDP and the French vision of strategic autonomy whereas open strategic autonomy was connected to the Dutch, inclusive approach. However, most countries agree that the EU needed to become less dependent on third parties. But how that should be accomplished was still without a consensus, and that while it was a topic in need of one.<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> Rijksoverheid (Government of the Netherlands), non-paper dated Mar. 25, 2021, Spain-Netherlands non-paper on strategic autonomy while preserving an open economy, 1.

<sup>100</sup> Rijksoverheid, Spain-Netherlands non-paper, 1-2.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid, 6-7.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid, 7.

<sup>103</sup> European Parliament, European Parliamentary Research Service, Strategic Foresight and Capabilities Unit, PE 733.589, Briefing dated July 8, 2022, EU strategic autonomy 2013-2023: from concept to capacity, 8-10.

## ***Conclusion***

Developments before and during the discussions about strategic autonomy in the EU have shown the Union and its member states that something needed to happen. The scope of this discussion had grown significantly since its start in 2013. It started with a focus on security and defence, which focussed mostly on the EDTIB. It needed to become a bigger player. The election of Trump as President and with that a growing uncertainty of the US' commitment to European defence, caused the scope to grow to include geopolitics. The EDTIB and EU's dependence on the US remained a main topic, but defence expenditure, especially contributions to NATO, also became important. However, the Covid-19 pandemic had broadened the scope of this debate to virtually all EU policy areas. This pandemic had shown dependencies on a much wider scale than only defence, which resulted in security and defence becoming an aspect of strategic autonomy rather than the main topic.

All EU member states realised that the Union needed to become less reliant, but they were divided on the path towards this. France wanted the EU to become a geopolitical powerhouse just like the US was. This meant complete independence and no dependences on third parties. The group headed by the Netherlands saw this as a threat to the relationship with the US. They wanted a focus on the EU taking on a larger burden by strengthening the European pillar in NATO. The EU was supposed to be complementary to NATO rather than replace it. This discussion became increasingly difficult with the emergence of nationalism and populism in the Union. Governments were, even when they rejected nationalism, taking decisions based on cost-benefit calculations emanated from national interests.

These developments barely influenced the answer to the second sub-question of chapter 1. The choice to develop more military means and to become less dependent for them of the US were all taken with civilian ends. The move for strategic autonomy for the EU was not about creating a military superpower; it was about becoming less reliant to protect its interest more autonomously in a more hostile and uncertain world. In addition, the decisions regarding military means stayed in democratic hands through the Council. However, the increase of military means did result in the Union moving right on the Spectrum of Power, but it stayed on the left side leaning towards civilian power. Therefore, the EU was still leaning towards *being* a civilian, normative power with an increasing capability to *exercise* a certain degree of military power.

### **III. The Problems of EU Military Strategic Autonomy**

The first two chapters provided the theoretical and historical context necessary to answer the research question: ‘What problems in the development of military strategic autonomy has the EU encountered with its push for more military power since 2013?’ The step for more military cooperation had been taken before. The creation of military power had always been a controversial topic for the Union. The first time European countries tried military cooperation was a failure. The problem they encountered in 1950 is relevant up until now and will be used in the analysis. This chapter will deepen the understanding of the problems uncovered by the previous chapter, reliance and internal disagreement. Hereafter, this thesis will engage in a debate that some academics have set forth regarding a possible mismatch of normative and military power. Lastly, the chapter will be rounded up with a conclusion.

#### ***Past and Present Problems: European Defence Community, 1950-1954***

The first attempt to create a common military power was made in 1950 when the French proposed a European army. France, the Federal Republic of Germany (West-Germany), Italy, Belgium, the Netherlands, and Luxembourg started a four-year process. Two years of thorough negotiations followed, but it ultimately was to no avail. The Treaty of Paris that would establish the European Defence Community (EDC) was drawn up and signed by all parties, but ironically the French blocked the treaty from going into effect. The French National Assembly voted against the ratification of the treaty. It thereby ended the idea of European military cooperation at the time.<sup>104</sup> However, the EU would take another shot at European military power over 60 years later. There are some similarities between the EDC and the EU’s ambition for military strategic autonomy.

The whole process to create the EDC was set in motion by the French after the US demanded the rearmament of West-Germany. This would increase the Western European nations contribution to the security of Western Europe. However, the French were anxious to take this step after it had been invaded multiple times in the recent past by the Germans, namely

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<sup>104</sup> Renata Dwan, “Jean Monet and the European Defence Community, 1950-54,” *Cold War History* 1 (2000): 1, 141.

during the Franco-Prussian War of 1870 and both the World Wars of 1914 and 1939.<sup>105</sup> This situation resembles the situation that the EU encountered 60 years later. As shown in chapter 2, the US also pressured the EU to increase its contribution to the defence of the European continent. Thus, in both cases the pressure from the US was a primary reason for increased European initiative regarding defence.

This pressure is the result of an underlying problem, namely reliance. Both the EU in the 2010s and the EDC in the 1950s were vulnerable for this pressure because of their reliance on the US. Losing the US as protector was a looming consequence of neglecting US demands. This would have left the nations in question vulnerable to outside threats, respectively Russia and the Soviet-Union. Therefore, the problem that the European nations in 1950 and the EU share is the reliance on the US for its defence. This dependency gave the US leverage to influence European decisions. This was the Union's biggest hinderance to making decisions without outside influence.

On the other hand, the failure of the EDC is also an example in favour of strategic autonomy. It may seem contradictory, but the formation of a stronger, collective European defence would not have been a decision without outside influence. It would probably have led to more military strategic autonomy in the long run. However, the decision itself was the complete opposite. The American Secretary of State held a speech to NATO in 1953 in which he increased the pressure by questioning US commitment to Europe should the EDC treaty not be ratified.<sup>106</sup> The French did not cave in on this pressure. The loss of Indochina had led to a reduced dependency on the US and with that room for the French to consider its own grievances. The nation ultimately decided against the formation of the EDC.<sup>107</sup> Therefore, the failure of the EDC can also be interpreted as a success for initiator France and to a lesser extent European strategic autonomy.

### ***Rising Tensions: The Need for In(ter)dependent Defence***

The past decade has seen an increase in geopolitical and military threats towards the EU. Russia's invasion of Ukraine is the most recent example of this development. As discussed in

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<sup>105</sup> Jae-Seung Lee, "The French Road to European Community: From the ECSC to the EEC (1945-1957)," *Journal of International and Area Studies* 11 (2004): 2, 113-116.

<sup>106</sup> Department of State (United States of America), Foreign Relations of the United States, 1952-1954, Western European Security, Volume V, Part 1 CFM files lot M 88, box 166, document 238, Statement by the Secretary of State to the North Atlantic Council.

<sup>107</sup> Lee, "The French Road to European Community," 115-116.

chapter 2, the Union has because of this emphasised the need for more military power and clout. It on the other hand also stressed the need to enhance military strategic autonomy by reducing dependence on the US for military capabilities. However, the numbers tell the opposite and show an increase of direct dependency. For example, the US has increased its troop presence by 20.000 service members to more than 100.000 active troops across Europe in 2022. Most of those are stationed in EU member states like Poland, Germany, the Baltic States and Romania. This is only a fraction of the increase of American presence since February 2022.<sup>108</sup>

In addition, this dependency was not only direct, but also indirect. As shown in chapter 2, only 11% of US made military products were exported to Europe in the 2013-2017 period. This number had increased to 23% in the 2018-2022 period and will keep increasing. Europe and the EU are not the same. For example, the UK and Ukraine, big importers of the US, are also part of this statistic. Notwithstanding that fact, this number can be used to identify an increasing trend in EU imports from the US. Especially when including that 65% of all arms imports by European NATO states, 22 of which are also part of the EU, were from the US. The EU has increased and, according to deals and existing programmes for arms imports, will continue to increase this dependency.<sup>109</sup>

Another problem that arose was the necessity for American approval to export or gift military equipment to third parties, which is established in the US Code of Federal Regulations.<sup>110</sup> An example of such a case was the proposed delivery of F-16 fighter jets by Denmark and the Netherlands to Ukraine. These nations needed the approval of the US government to deliver these American weapon systems.<sup>111</sup> The use of third-party military equipment has restricted the EU to decide what to do with this equipment. Consequently, it hindered military strategic autonomy. Therefore, the EU has not made itself more autonomous

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<sup>108</sup> US Department of Defence, "FACT SHEET – U.S. Defense Contributions to Europe," last modified June 29, 2022, <https://www.defense.gov/News/Releases/Release/Article/3078056/fact-sheet-us-defense-contributions-to-europe/>, accessed on Nov. 23, 2023.

<sup>109</sup> Wezeman, *Trend in International Arms Transfers*, 2022, 4-5 and 11.

<sup>110</sup> National Archives (United States), "International Traffic in Arms Regulations, Code of Federal Regulations," last modified Feb. 27, 2023, <https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-22/chapter-I/subchapter-M/part-120>, accessed on Dec. 15, 2023.

<sup>111</sup> Dutch Ministry of Defence, "Zelensky krijgt in Nederland toezegging voor F-16's en voortdurende steun (video)," last modified Aug, 20, 2023, <https://www.defensie.nl/onderwerpen/oostflank-navo-gebied/nieuws/2023/08/20/zelensky-krijgt-in-nederland-toezegging-voor-f-16s-en-voortdurende-steun>, accessed on Dec. 15, 2023; Reuters, "US approves sending F-16s to Ukraine from Denmark and Netherlands," last modified Aug. 18, 2023, <https://www.reuters.com/world/us-approves-sending-f-16s-ukraine-denmark-netherlands-2023-08-17/>, accessed on Jan. 5, 2024.

the past decade. The tensions had paradoxically led to both an increased awareness to decrease dependency on the US while at the same time increasing this dependency.

### ***Internal Disagreement: Strategic Autonomy?***

Another important question that rises from the analysis of chapter 2 is: can the development of EU military strategic autonomy even be regarded as strategic autonomy? Strategic autonomy is the ability to take decisions regarding the own interests without outside interference. By staying (partly) reliant or as some EU members call it ‘interdependent’ on third parties this can seemingly not be achieved. However, this is determined by how strictly the concept of strategic autonomy is used in the analysis. It can be interpreted as an absolute concept, which entails that any outside influence makes strategic autonomy impossible. But it can also be defined as a relative concept, which is more complex. A move to acquire American military equipment can, with this definition, be interpreted as an increase of military strategic autonomy of the EU regarding hostile countries like Russia. Its defensive military diplomacy towards them would be strengthened, making outside interference on EU decisions less likely. However, at the same time this would undermine the military strategic autonomy regarding the US, more reliance equals more outside influence.<sup>112</sup>

This was the underlying discussion that EU member states have been conducting the past decade. The French saw military strategic autonomy as an absolute concept, the EU needed to be completely independent. On the other side there were members like the Netherlands, Germany, and Italy that saw military strategic autonomy as relative. The dependence on others should be reduced, but interdependence with allies like the US was not necessarily a bad situation. The problem that the EU encountered: there was no consensus about what military strategic autonomy should be. This made it nearly impossible to implement this idea in the policy of the EU. Thus, the discussion about military strategic autonomy was and will remain both academically and politically a contested discussion. But a consensus to the political discussion is a condition that needs to be met before the Union can take further steps.

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<sup>112</sup> Zandee, “Conceptualising European Strategic Autonomy,” 10.

### ***A Possible Mismatch: The Debate of Normative Military Power***

In chapter 1, this thesis has identified the EU as a normative power with military means. The coherence between these two powers is debated: are military power and normative power compatible with each other? The short answer to this question is yes. The EU, a normative power, has military means in the form of EU battlegroups, but the debate is more on a theoretical level. Some academics argue that the EU or normative powers in general cannot be compatible with military power. For example, Karen E. Smith has claimed that “civilian power EU is definitively dead.”<sup>113</sup> Helene Sjursen has argued that acquiring military means leads to a greater propensity to use coercive measures while simultaneously limiting the need for cooperation and deliberation with other actors.<sup>114</sup> Especially the latter argument would be disastrous for a normative power, given that this is precisely what it draws its power from.

Other authors consider this approach too black and white. Hanns Maull for example focussed on how military power is used. He emphasises that the EU will remain a civilian power if it uses military means for civilian or normative ends.<sup>115</sup> Ville Sinkkonen even defines this incompatibility as a construct and points out that normative power is much more than persuading others to follow certain norms, it has a material base.<sup>116</sup>

An actor wishing to endorse its norms needs instruments to disseminate those norms into the international arena, and such resources, including distribution channels and the communication media, are often based upon the hard forms of economic and military power.<sup>117</sup>

Thus, a normative power like the EU needs its material base. According to Sinkkonen military power is part of this equation and should not be considered incompatible with normative power.<sup>118</sup>

This thesis agrees with the positions of Maull and Sinkkonen. However, the underlying point of Sjursen and Smith remains important. The use of military power for other ends than civilian ones undermine the image of *being* a normative power. As argued in chapter one, power is a spectrum and should be approached as a complex concept. The same goes for the combination of normative power and military means, some aspects of military power can be

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<sup>113</sup> Smith, “Beyond the civilian power EU debate,” 76.

<sup>114</sup> Sinkkonen, *A Comparative Appraisal of Normative Power*, 45.

<sup>115</sup> Hans W. Maull, “Europe and the New Balance of Global Order,” *International Affairs (Royal Institute of International Affairs 1944-)* 81 (2005): 4, 781.

<sup>116</sup> Sinkkonen, *A Comparative Appraisal of Normative Power*, 45.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid*, 46.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid*, 47.

compatible while others cannot. This is based on whether the use of certain military capabilities is in compliance with international rules, and if it is pursuing civilian ends. The following part will explain the position this thesis takes in the debate about the compatibility of normative and military power more concrete.

### **The Problems of Normative Military Power**

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Two concrete forms of military power will be analysed, namely defensive and offensive military diplomacy. First, however, it is important to deepen the understanding of the concept of civilian ends, that has shortly been covered in chapter 1. This decides whether the use of military means is normative or not. Arnold Wolfers has explained civilian ends in the spirit of normative power before this concept was constructed. He distinguishes two types of ‘ends’ in his book *Discord and Collaboration Essays on International Politics*, namely possession goals and milieu goals. The former focusses on national interests, which are things a nation can possess such as “territory, membership in the Security Council of the United Nations, or tariff preferences.”<sup>119</sup> Milieu goals are the opposite. These are things that cannot be a possession of a nation like, peace, the promotion of international law, and the establishment of international organisations. These goals all require the involvement of many nations and aim at shaping the international system beyond national boundaries. It is focused on ideas rather than material things, just like normative power is. However, Wolfers makes an important side note. Milieu goals are also used as a means to possession goals, but this only part of the equation. Most nations are concerned about both possession and milieu goals at the same time.<sup>120</sup>

However, Wolfers theory has a flaw. The strict adherence to his theory would force us to interpret defensive military diplomacy as a possession goal. The state namely defends its own national interests, territory, and its state apparatus. Consequently, it would seem that a normative power could in no form use military power to preserve the own milieu. Complexity is still a main theme in this thesis and defensive military diplomacy is about more than the defence of possession. It also defends its citizens from either attacks or outside interference. Besides, chapter 1 showed that the military power is used to protect its civilian institutions, the national milieu. Therefore, Wolfers notions should not be limited to the international arena. It

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<sup>119</sup> Arnold Wolfers, *Discord and Collaboration: Essays on International Politics* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1962), 74.

<sup>120</sup> Wolfers, *Discord and Collaboration*, 74.

should also include the complexity of the national dimension, or in the case of this thesis the supranational dimension. Thus, defensive military diplomacy is compatible with *being* a normative power.

### *Geopolitics, the Need for Offensive Military Capabilities, and Its Problems*

Offensive military diplomacy, the use of threat to change the behaviour of another actor to its liking, is important for the French vision of military strategic autonomy. This vision emphasised that the EU should be a geopolitical power, which entailed that the EU should control and compete for territory.<sup>121</sup> Markowitz and Fariss come forth with an interesting theory that explains the coherence between geopolitics and military power. The first part emphasises the importance of the economy. The increasing size of an economy leads to more geographically expansive economic interests. However, this does not explain why states decided to invest in power projection capabilities. Power projection is the deployment of military force beyond a state's possessions and the requirements to be able to.<sup>122</sup> Power projection is roughly the same as offensive military diplomacy, the only difference is the basis. Power projection is based on capabilities, while offensive military diplomacy focusses on politics.

The second and most useful part of Markowitz and Farriss' theory focusses on geopolitical competition. More competition leads to a bigger incentive to invest in power projection capabilities. This is determined by three aspects. Firstly, more economic power results in a higher ability to invest in military capabilities. Secondly, geographic proximity determines how concerned actors are about the power of another actors: closer means more concern and farther the contrary. Thirdly, interest compatibility also influences concern. Compatible interests are subjective, but it is clear that democracies are less threatened by each other because their interests mostly align. However, autocracies are mostly focused on exclusionary foreign policies, and these are threatening to all other actors.<sup>123</sup>

Markowitz and Fariss' theory shows the importance of offensive military capabilities for the French vision of the EU. According to the French, the European Union needed to be able to control and compete for territory in an increasingly hostile geographic proximity, which

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<sup>121</sup> Colin Flint, *Introduction to geopolitics* (London: Routledge, 2006), 13.

<sup>122</sup> Jonathan Markowitz and Christopher Fariss, "Power, proximity, and democracy: Geopolitical competition in the international system," *Journal of Peace Research* 55 (2018): 1, 79.

<sup>123</sup> Markowitz "Power, proximity, and democracy," 81-83.

meant capabilities that transcend the defensive military diplomacy approach. The French wanted an approach that was about both preventing outside influence and the possibility to influence others. In addition, the theory also shows that the interests of the Union are under pressure, which explains the incentive to invest in military capabilities. Therefore, *being* a and *exercising* geopolitical power is directly opposed to what a normative power is.

In addition, offensive military diplomacy is illegal according to article 2, lid 4 of the Charter of the United Nations:

All Members shall refrain in their international relations from the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any state, or in any other manner inconsistent with the Purposes of the United Nations.<sup>124</sup>

The Charter, one of the main foundations of the international rule-based order, explicitly bans the use of threat to influence political decisions within another state. This makes it an inherently controversial military tactic on its own, but a normative power will destroy its leadership position with an action of this kind resulting in the loss of its normative power. Besides, this tactic is only focused on progressing possessional goals while undermining the milieu goals.

Nonetheless, this rule-based order does not ban having or using military power. It only forbids certain uses of military means in the international arena. Chapter VII of the UN charter even establishes that the security council is permitted to use military means when it has concluded that peace is threatened. This same chapter grants 'individual or collective self-defence if an armed attack occurs against a Member of the United Nations'.<sup>125</sup> Thus, having the means to use offensive military diplomacy is not illegal according to international rules. However, using them for this purpose is. These capabilities can make defensive military diplomacy stronger and more credible. The actor is not only able to deny the attacker, but also attack and punish. This will reduce the risk of an outside attack.<sup>126</sup> Therefore, having and using of military means is not necessarily incompatible with a normative power like the EU, but safeguarding the appearance and respect of a normative power while having and *exercising*

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<sup>124</sup> United Nations, "Charter of the United Nations," last modified June 26, 1945, <https://www.un.org/en/about-us/un-charter/chapter-1>, accessed on Dec. 12, 2023, Chapter I: Purposes and Principles (articles 1-2).

<sup>125</sup> United Nations, "Charter of the United Nations," last modified June 26, 1945, <https://www.un.org/en/about-us/un-charter/chapter-7>, accessed on Dec. 12, 2023, Chapter VII: Action with Respect to Threats to the Peace, Breaches of the Peace, and Acts of Aggression (Articles 39-51).

<sup>126</sup> Mazarr, "Understanding Deterrence," 15.

military power, is a fine line to walk. One misstep can remove the leadership role which, as shown in chapter 2, is crucial for *being* a normative power.

### ***Conclusion***

The EU encountered two problems and one possible problem in its push for military strategic autonomy. Firstly, the direct and indirect military reliance of the EU on third parties, especially the US. Having this reliance on the US made the EU prone to outside influence, which undermined the military strategic autonomy ambitions. Reducing this has therefore been one of the core principles of the EU's approach to this concept. However, the numbers tell a different story. The amount of service members in Europe had grown to 100.000 and the EU had increased its imports of American made weapons systems. Therefore, the goal of becoming less dependent had not been achieved. The opposite had happened: military strategic autonomy had reduced since 2013.

Secondly, the other problem that the EU had encountered was related. There was internal disagreement about whether this reliance was a bad thing. The group of nations headed by the Netherlands argued that it was not. These nations saw the necessity of becoming less reliant, but they focussed on interdependence rather than independence. The EU should ease the burden of the US by strengthening the European pillar withing NATO. These nations wanted a focus on working together with third parties as opposed to the French. They wanted the EU to be a geopolitical power which transcends the notion of military strategic autonomy. It entailed complete independence from every actor with the capabilities to compete for territory. This internal disagreement about what military strategic autonomy meant, made it nearly impossible for the Union to implement it.

Thirdly, acquiring military power for a normative power like the EU is according to some academics problematic. This would lead to the worsening of the international position of the EU, which would result in the loss of its international leadership and thereby its normative power. However, international rules and norms do not prohibit the existence of military power, it only prohibits the offensive use of it. In addition, normative powers need a material base to function which includes military power. Besides, military power can be used to protect the normative 'milieu' both internationally and domestically. Furthermore, the geopolitical ambition of France, which includes possession goals, is incompatible given that it creates the necessity and use of offensive military capabilities. Therefore, having military power is not

problematic for a normative power like the EU. How the Union *exercises* it determines whether it will damage the international position.

# Conclusion

By analysing power in international relations and EU military strategic autonomy, this thesis has shown the problems that the Union encountered since 2013 with the development of its military power. The most visible problem was its reliance on the United States. The US has defended the European continent both directly by deploying troops and indirectly by providing weaponry. This has kept the nations autonomous after the Second World War, but ironically enough it is now hindering the development of this autonomy. The increasing threat of Russia and the instability in the neighbourhood of the Union which have led to the push for more autonomy, have also caused the need for more military support. As a result, both the US troop presence and EU investment in American weaponry have increased in the past decade, which has increased reliance and thereby US influence on the EU.

However, a counterargument could be made. While the EU became more prone to influence from the US, which reduced military strategic autonomy, it has arguably simultaneously led to the opposite. The first chapter explained the importance of military diplomacy and its believability. The support of US troops has made EU defensive military diplomacy more credible and consequently, more believable. Russia and other threats in the neighbourhood will be less inclined to try and influence the Union with offensive military diplomacy or other means. Therefore, the EU has arguably both increased and decreased its military strategic autonomy in the past decade. This further shows that these concepts are complex to interpret and use.

Whether the EU could interpret this development as something positive is dependent on how military strategic autonomy is perceived. Thus, research into the first problem has revealed a connecting second problem: internal disagreement. The EU did not have a clear idea what the concept entailed, but some member states had outspoken opinions. The French argued that military strategic autonomy should mean the complete independence from third parties, this includes allies like the US. Other EU member states like the Netherlands, Germany and Italy did not see relying on allies as a big hinderance. They argued that military strategic autonomy should be focussed on being a strong ally to the US and interdependence. To make it more concrete, the French argued that buying weapons from the US has decreased the Union's military strategic autonomy. Whereas the Netherlands, Germany and Italy emphasises that acquiring new weaponry increased the EU's ability to support the US as a strong ally. The EU

cannot further its military strategic autonomy without having a solid understanding of the concept. Therefore, this was and still is the most pressing issue for the development of EU military power and autonomy.

However, this thesis has encountered problems with analysing these positions of EU member states. The study has relied on English and Dutch primary sources for documents of nations where their position is specified. Secondary literature was used for nations with other languages. This has not led to big problems; it was adequate to show the existence of internal disagreement in a general manner. However, more thorough research into this topic would pose a bigger challenge. The EU has 27 members with almost all of them having their own language. Studying the position of all these different nations would be impossible without accessing the various national archives, which makes knowledge of these languages crucial. To better understand the division of the EU on this topic, future research should address the positions of the member states in a less generalised manner with more focus on the different nuances.

This research illustrates that the EU was trying to increase its military strategic autonomy, but it also raises the question if a normative power like the Union is even able to develop military power without worsening its position in the international arena. The importance of leadership for normative powers makes this international standing crucial to its status of *being* normative power. This thesis argues two important things. Firstly, power is complex and should be studied as such. No power is strictly a civilian, military, or normative power, it is somewhere along the Spectrum of Power, which means that nations can *exercise* all kinds of power. The intention behind the usage of certain power resources determines what power it *is*. Secondly, there is no clear reason why normative and military power would be incompatible. There should be no issues, provided that a normative power adheres to its own norms and the rules of the international system. Most academic pieces have addressed this issue as a part of a broader research, including this thesis. However, this topic should be subjected to a study of its own to explore the possible incompatibility that has been suggested by some academics in more detail.

To sum up, it became apparent that the academic literature had spent limited time on the problems that the EU has encountered in its push for military strategic autonomy. These problems were always regarded as a side note to larger research about the development of strategic autonomy or policy advice for how the EU should approach it. This thesis addressed this gap in the literature and identified two major problems: reliance and internal disagreement. In addition, it has identified a possible problem: the incompatibility of normative and military

power. Only the future will show if and how the EU will overcome these problems. The only thing academics can do is keep studying this development and expanding research into military strategic autonomy.

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